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Measuring Well-Being for Public Policy; Doing without Theory

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Philosophy

by

Gil Hersch

Committee in charge:

Professor Nancy Cartwright, Chair
Professor Saba Bazargan
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2016

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The dissertation of Gil Hersch is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2016

DEDICATION

To my daughter Mili, who's birth has increased my well-being by any
measure.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Measuring Well-Being for Public Policy; Doing without Theory

by

Gil Hersch

Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

University of California, San Diego, 2016

Professor Nancy Cartwright, Chair

Policy-makers implement policies aimed at promoting individual well-being and are now turning to social scientists who develop measures of it for guidance on how to understand their citizen's well-being. I examine the relationship between philosophical theories of well-being, the variety of well-being measures available in the social sciences, and the implications this relationship can have for public policy. I argue that while agreement on what measures represent well-being *simpliciter* might be unattainable, some agreement can be reached when treating well-being measurement as a practical problem for guiding public policy.

Chapter 0

Introduction

Well-being is a particularly complex concept, and attempts to measure it in recent years have sparked a growing philosophical literature on well-being measures. Two vital questions: what is well-being? and how does one measure it? are often dealt with by scholars with different disciplinary and philosophical backgrounds. As a consequence, confusion and misunderstandings sometimes arise.

Nevertheless, in recent years policy-makers have shown increasing interest in implementing policies aimed at promoting individual well-being (e.g. the Stiglitz Report (Stiglitz et al., 2009), the O'Donnell Report (O'Donnell et al., 2014) and the Stone Report (Stone and Mackie, 2014)). This interest appears to have been sparked, on the one hand, by disillusion with the relevance of current economic measures to the measurement of well-being, perhaps due to the economic downturn of 2008. On the other hand, significant conceptual and methodological advances in recent years in alternative measures of well-being have made these measures easier to use in practice for public policy. In order to arrive at a well-informed decision on how to promote well-being, policy-makers need to know how different policies affect well-being. To this end, policy-makers implement policies aimed at promoting individual well-being and are now turning to social scientists

who develop measures of it for guidance on how to understand their citizen's well-being.

This move from empirical academic research to value-laden policy planning highlights the importance of discussing the philosophical implications of well-being measurement and policy. Yet the move from positive academic research to normative policy planning highlights a need for the scholarly community of philosophy of social sciences to engage with the broader scholarly community and the policy-makers who rely on their work. For all the emphasis that social scientists who presume to measure well-being place on rigorous measurement, internal and external validity, and standardization, there has been little attention in the social sciences to the philosophical underpinnings of the concept of well-being. How to approach questions regarding the measurement of well-being is one place where the humanities can legitimately inform both social sciences and public policy. Since philosophers have devoted much attention to well-being, they are well positioned to engage and contribute to the ongoing measurement and policy debate. It is important to discuss the philosophical implications of well-being measurement and policy at the current time because governments and statistics bureaus are already purporting to measure well-being, and the sooner conceptual misunderstandings are rectified the more likely that there will be change for the better.

This dissertation revolves around two key terms: well-being and measure. Well-being, sometimes also referred to as welfare, flourishing or happiness, harks back to Greek philosophy focusing on questions of eudimonia, or the good life. How we ought to understand well-being is still highly contested in contemporary value theory, and what position one takes on the question of well-being can determine what views she holds within ethical debates as well. For example, committing to a view that well-being is constituted by a list of several goods (e.g., happiness, health, relationships) makes a consequentialist view of ethics, according to which the right thing to do is maximizing the good, less plausible because there are multiple incommensurable goods that cannot

be jointly maximized. In contemporary economics, welfare is traditionally understood as related to the concept of utility, which represents the extent to which the individual's preferences are fulfilled. Yet some economists are beginning to engage more with work in psychology, and to explore alternative ways of understanding well-being, such as viewing well-being as constituted by positive experiences (Kahneman, 2000). Nevertheless, views of well-being in psychology also do not necessarily engage with philosophical theories of well-being, despite the nuance and complexity such theories sometimes add.

What it means to measure well-being for public policy depends on how one understands the relationship between certain numerical representations of a quantity and well-being as a concept. When social scientists and statistical agencies provide policy-makers with measures of well-being, such as Subjective Well-Being (SWB) measures (Dolan and White, 2007), well-being indices (Hagerty et al., 2001) or Objective Happiness measures (Kahneman and Krueger, 2006), and tell the policy-makers that well-being rose or fell, they are using a numerical quantity to represent well-being. However, what justifies such a claim and how we can legitimately go about constructing measures is far from clear. While questions regarding measurement pertain to the natural sciences as well, the potential pitfalls are exacerbated in the social sciences, which are steeped in value-judgments. For example, measuring "poverty" can be skewed by what one views as basic necessities and whether one views inequality as necessary or noxious.

This project connects questions from value theory about what constitutes well-being together with questions from the philosophy of science that look at actual scientific practice, but it does so in a particular context—public policy. The public policy context opens up new ways of addressing and overcoming problems that might not be obvious in other contexts. For example, recognizing that the bar of adequacy for public action is lower than the bar of philosophical truth, makes it easier to focus on the similarities, rather than the differences, among theories of well-being. Similarly, a concern with

justifying political action, rather than knowledge, about well-being opens the way for political agreement to drive our choices of measures.

In this dissertation I examine the relationship between philosophical theories of well-being and the variety of well-being measures available in the social sciences and the implications this relationship can have for public policy. I argue that while agreement on what measures represent well-being *simpliciter* might be unattainable, some agreement can be reached when treating well-being measurement as a practical problem for guiding public policy.

I begin by presenting (Ch. I) a common view in the distributive justice literature—that while we as a society are obligated to help those who are less fortunate through no fault of their own, we are less strongly (if at all) obligated to help those who are less fortunate because they deliberately chose to take risks that turned out badly for them (Dworkin (1981)). Dworkin's account might be viewed as providing ammunition for those opposed to implementing public policies aimed at promoting well-being, since if society has no obligations towards those who suffer low well-being due to option luck, it need not implement policies aimed at improving the well-being of the population as a whole. However, I argue that there are few, if any, cases in life in deliberately chosen risks are not intertwined with unavoidable risk in a way that makes it possible for society to absolve itself from its obligations towards those members who suffer from low levels of well-being. Because we usually cannot neatly separate the effects of different types of risk, this attack on the moral permissibility of improving well-being through public policy fails.

If well-being public policy is permissible, the most obvious way to determine how to measure well-being in order to guide public policy aimed at promoting well-being is first to determine how to characterize well-being. To explore this option I discuss (Ch. II) the central philosophical theories of well-being currently debated in the literature and

the different ways to classify the theories. I focus on a particular theme of argument against the different theories, along an axis ranging from relationship with the world to relationship with our minds. I argue that while justifying one's choice of well-being measure by appealing to a philosophical theory of well-being is methodologically sound, this commits the policy-maker to a contested theory of well-being and entrenches her in a philosophical debate that has yet to be settled.

Even if we could commit to a particular way of characterizing well-being, I argue (Ch. III) that we still face a difficulty of determining which measure we ought to use as the best operationalization of well-being characterized that particular way. Because social scientists often conflate the characterization of a concept with how that characterization is represented, they often do not provide a clear account of why their chosen measure is a good operationalization of the well-being concept they have in mind. However, having such accounts are important because how a characterization of well-being is operationalized by a measure determines how well the measure corresponds to the characterization of the well-being concept. If we want to adjudicate between the measures to decide which measure to use to guide well-being policy, a defense of how the operationalization fits the concept as characterized is required. I focus on two particular cases as models for an account of why a particular way of operationalizing well-being is appropriate: Arthur Pigou's and Daniel Kahneman's.

I present (Ch. IV) Richard Easterlin's findings that the correlation between happiness and income breaks down in different countries and in different times (Easterlin, 1974), in order to demonstrate how questions about characterization and questions about operationalization are important for how we understand the relevance of empirical findings to well-being public policy. I argue that there are several ways of avoiding the conclusion that policies should be made based on happiness measures rather than income measures. Economists have tried to avoid the conclusion by denying Easterlin's

empirical findings. However, distinguishing between how well-being is characterized and how that characterization is measured introduces unexplored ways of denying that the Easterlin paradox leads to the conclusion that policies should be made based on happiness measures.

The most promising way to avoid the pitfalls of committing to a specific theory of well-being is Daniel Hausman's evidential account of preferences. According to Hausman (2012), as long as some reasonable assumptions hold, we can treat preference-based measures as evidence for what is conducive to well-being, while remaining agnostic regarding the correct theory of well-being. I argue (Ch. V) that Hausman's account fails as an alternative because it does not uniquely justify any single well-being measure for public policy. Hausman's account can justify several measures as evidence for what is conducive to well-being, yet it cannot provide a way of choosing between them. When well-being measures point in different directions, the evidential account leaves policy-makers at a loss as to what policies to pursue.

To mitigate these difficulties I begin by arguing (Ch. VI) that the bar of adequacy is lower for a normatively adequate policy directed account of well-being than for a descriptively adequate philosophical account of well-being. I then turn to propose a policy-directed intermediate account of well-being, which borrows elements from the different theories of well-being. I argue that while this intermediate account cannot be viewed as an adequate philosophical account of well-being, an account of well-being for public policy need not meet such a demanding adequacy requirement. The intermediate account can sufficiently justify the use of a specific measure to guide well-being public policy because it captures the agreement of the various theories of well-being in many of the normal policy cases.

Chapter 1

Rebutting the option-luck objection to the obligation to promote well-being through public policy

1.1 Introduction

In the distributive justice literature, a common view is that while we as a society are obligated to help those who are less fortunate through no fault of their own, we are less strongly (if at all) obligated to help those who are less fortunate because they deliberately chose to take risks that turned out badly for them. This intuition is cashed out by Ronald Dworkin (1981) by distinguishing between option luck and brute luck, the former being a matter of deliberate voluntary gambles, while the latter being the result of involuntary exposure to risk. On Dworkin's account, society is, broadly speaking, obligated to compensate a person for circumstances that result from bad brute luck but not for those that are due to bad option luck. Dworkin does, however, view insurance as a tool that can often reduce brute luck into option luck, and thus reduce (though not

eliminate) the obligation society has towards those suffering from bad brute luck.

Dworkin's account might be viewed as providing ammunition for those opposed to implementing public policies aimed at promoting well-being.¹ If society has no obligations towards those who suffer low well-being due to option luck, it need not implement policies aimed at improving the well-being of the population as a whole. At most, society is required to provide insurance options, or barring that, to compensate those suffering from bad brute luck. It would follow that implementing policies aimed at improving well-being in general is not an obligation society (or the policy-makers that are charged with the task of governing) has. Implementing general well-being policies would be permissible at best. However, allocating resources to improving well-being involves opportunity costs to society, either in the form of higher taxes or lower government investment in other domains. If general well-being policy, which is not a societal obligation, requires imposing obligations on society (e.g. restricting citizens' freedom of choice by taxing them), then it is impermissible. Or so the story can go.

For the sake of argument I grant that as a society we have no moral obligations to help those who suffer low levels of well-being as the result of bad option luck. Nevertheless, I argue that there are few, if any, cases in life in which option luck is not intertwined with brute luck in a way that makes it possible for society to absolve itself from its obligations towards those members who suffer from low levels of well-being. Because we usually cannot neatly separate the effects of option luck from the effects of brute luck, attacking the moral permissibility of improving well-being through public policy by appealing to option luck fails.

I begin §2 by arguing for the need of society to compensate members who suffer from (pure) bad brute luck and allow for the possibility that society is not obligated to compensate those who suffer from (pure) bad option luck. In §3 I propose a hypothetical

¹There are a variety of arguments against promoting well-being through public policy (e.g. Wren-lewis (2013)). In this chapter I merely take on one interesting way of arguing against well-being public policy.

case in which introducing brute luck causes an individual to take on more risk, and present ways to understand his behavior as rational. in §4 I argue that the inseparability of option luck and brute luck make it unclear whether societal obligations to compensate individuals suffering from bad luck in such cases. §5 address a counterargument that the first case is not pure option luck. I conclude in §6.

1.2 Does society need to compensate someone for bad option luck?

There are various accounts of distributive justice in the literature. On some accounts, such as strict egalitarianism or Rawls' difference principle, one's responsibility for her circumstances does not necessarily impact what the just distribution is. However, for accounts that are either resource-based or desert-based, personal responsibility can be perceived as relevant to the way we ought to distribute whatever it is that the theory claims is important to distribute. In this paper I focus on accounts that link just distribution to personal responsibility, and more specifically on Dworkin-style resource-based accounts.

Dworkin (1981) begins by assuming, for simplicity's sake, that the concern of equality of resources is equality of privately owned resources and so is not concerned with things like equality of political power. Dworkin begins by aiming at creating an initial just distribution of resources. While the goal is that the resources devoted to each person's life should be equal, in order to determine what distribution of resources can be counted as equal a metric is required. According to Dworkin, the metric provided by the market measures the importance each person places on a resource relative to its importance to others. In such a way the resources are distributed equally based on how much they are valued by all the individuals (p. 289). A fair allocation of resources is achieved if the redistribution withstands what he calls the 'envy test': "No division of

resources is an equal division if, once the division is complete, any immigrant would prefer someone else's bundle of resources to his own bundle" (p. 285). Additionally, Dworkin introduces the requirement that the decisions people make about the sort of life they want for themselves are made independently from what they know about how such decisions will affect the ability of others to have what they want—a kind of self-interest requirement. Combining the requirement to withstand the envy test with the self-interest requirement will result, according to Dworkin, in a just distribution of resources (p. 288).

While the market can be used as an apparatus through which a just distribution of resources is attained, it is not obvious that such a system can withstand the 'envy test' (pp. 292-3). In order to examine the potential problems of market-based distribution for his principle of equality of resources, Dworkin introduces his distinction between brute luck and option luck. Dworkin defines option luck as "a matter of how deliberate and calculated gambles turn out—whether someone gains or loses through accepting an isolated risk he or she should have anticipated and might have declined", while brute luck is "a matter of how risks fall out that are not in that sense deliberate gambles" (p. 293). For example, if a person knowingly builds her house on the San Andreas Fault and as a result of an earthquake her house collapses, this is a matter of option luck. If, by contrast, a baby is born with Spina bifida, she suffers from bad brute luck since this was obviously not a deliberate gamble on part of the baby.² Dworkin argues that his theory of equality of resources is consistent with there being a better-off and worse-off person as a result of one of them deciding to take a gamble that the other declines, which is the domain of option luck. Similarly, his theory is consistent with there being a winner and a loser of a gamble that two people decided to take. Dworkin does, however, clearly explain that if a person never receives the opportunity to take a gamble another person has the opportunity to take, this would fail the envy test.

²The baby's parents did take a deliberate gamble when they decided to have a baby, and so for them this can be considered a matter of option luck.

Dworkin uses insurance as a way to minimize the domain of instances that would require compensation, and argues that “[i]nsurance, so far as it is available, provides a link between brute and option luck, because the decision to buy or reject catastrophe insurance is a calculated gamble” (p. 293). This does not mean that cases of brute luck cease to be such, but rather that the difference between two people suffering from bad brute luck when one of them bought insurance and the other did not, is one of option luck. Insofar as insurance compensates the bad brute luck, a person who buys insurance is not worse off, while the person who does not buy insurance *de facto* decided to gamble and is worse off because of it. It follows that as long as insurance is available, whether or not an undesired event occurs, its consequences are no longer a matter of brute luck, but rather a matter of option luck (pp. 292-7).

According to Dworkin’s account, for isolated choices to exist in the sense relevant to the option luck / brute luck distinction two conditions need to exist: an initial just distribution and an insurance market. Since the first almost never exists, Dworkin would not think the distinction can play the same role in the real world it can in his hypothetical island case. Nevertheless, Dworkin concludes that if everyone is equally exposed to a risk, knows the extent of the risk and has an opportunity to insure himself against the risk, then within the framework of equality of resources insurance would suffice to convert such brute luck into option luck.³ But, if we cannot always count on insurance because of things like differing levels of risk or overly expensive insurance costs, we will not be able to avoid the need to compensate those who suffer from bad brute luck when insurance is not available. When it comes to actual real-world policy, a follower of Dworkin might hope that the cases in which compensation is necessary are few and the required compensation is low.

We might hold, along with Dworkin, that an individual can be held accountable

³Dworkin does, however, acknowledge that such cases are rare (Dworkin, 1981, p. 297).

for her circumstance when it is the result of option luck, yet not when it is the result of brute luck. Consequently, as a society we are obligated to help those who are worse off through no fault of their own, while we are not obligated to compensate individuals who chose to take a risk. Yet why must this be the case? Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen (2001) claims that many egalitarians view the consequences of differential option luck as unobjectionable because it simply reflects one's responsibility for her actions. In the "Accountability Sense of Responsibility" a person is responsible for being worse off only if she can be held accountable for her situation (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2001, p. 572). When specifically discussing Dworkin's resource-based account, Lippert-Rasmussen explains that "[t]wo persons have exercised their responsibility equivalently to each other if, and only if, there is no reason from the point of view of responsibility why they should not be equally well off." (p. 549) This, however, does not mean that if two people do not exercise their responsibility equivalently they should be, or it is permissible that they are, unequally well off. Moreover, according to Lippert-Rasmussen, being worse off due to option luck does not fall under this category (unlike cases in which one is worse off due to idealism, expensive tastes, or culpable imprudence). He argues that this is because from the point of view of equality there is no crucial moral distinction between differential option luck and differential brute luck (p. 549).

But even if we grant that the option luck / brute luck distinction is morally significant, when we try to apply it as a guide to assigning responsibility and subsequently a demand for compensating in real world cases we find it loses its appeal. The way Dworkin distinguishes between an individual's luck being brute luck or option luck depends on whether he or she gains or loses "through accepting an isolated risk he or she *should have anticipated* and might have declined" [emphasis added]. This raises ambiguity for all cases except those in which the individual's bad luck is the result of something that occurred prior to her being an agent. Suppose, for example, that someone

is driving and comes to an intersection in the middle of the desert with great visibility in all directions. She does not perceive any risk of collision with cross traffic in the intersection and does not slow down.⁴ It is not clear whether in these circumstances being hit by a car is a matter of option luck or brute luck. Should have the driver anticipated this risk? What if she had a green light? What if the other car had a stop sign? What if she had a stop sign that was partially hidden by a tree? Getting into a car is already a decision to bear some risk, but so is deciding to walk to one's destination. No matter how much we try to reduce the risk of harm to ourselves, we will be subject some risk that we could have anticipated and might have declined. There are always more precaution measures available to us, and since some ways of mitigating one set of risks will increase others (e.g. staying indoors to avoid the sun exposes us to more potentially lethal indoor air pollutants).

Under what conditions we *should* anticipate the risks that we *could* anticipate is a question that Dworkin does not sufficiently expand on to help us gauge where to draw the line between option luck and brute luck. 'Should have anticipated' admits of degrees.⁵ But if this is true, then the difference between brute luck and option luck is a difference in degree rather than kind. The more an individual should have anticipated the harm the more towards the option luck side of the scale the case is on, and the more the individual could not be expected to have anticipated the harm, the more towards the brute luck side of the scale the case is on.⁶ In hypothetical thought experiments it is possible to conceive of 'clean' situations in which a risk is stipulated to be isolated and either be a

⁴I thank Richard Arneson for providing this example.

⁵Perhaps more worrisome, though not something I tackle here, is that there seems to be some deservingness or reasonable conduct elements built into the brute luck / option luck distinction. This would make the argument circular, since the distinction is meant as a criterion by which to distinguish between cases in which people are deserving of compensation for bad luck.

⁶As I discussed earlier, Dworkin introduces insurance as a way to transform brute luck to option luck. However, as Dworkin notes, not every case of bad brute luck can be compensated by insurance. If, in the example, the driver dies when hit by a car, insurance cannot compensate her (though it might compensate her family).

matter wholly of option luck or wholly of brute luck. But in real world cases this is not so easy. The environment an individual is exposed to before they become an agent who accepts a risk they should have anticipated probably has a significant effect on how that individual later chooses to accept or reject risks.⁷

While it might be nearly impossible to isolate a choice for an isolated risk in real-world conditions, deeming the option luck / brute luck distinction unhelpful as a guide, in the next section I present a hypothetical case in which both option luck and brute luck are clearly distinguished, yet when they are jointly in play it becomes impossible to untangle them. This is meant to show that even when the risks can be isolated, the choices might not be.

1.3 The scenarios

Case 1: tigers or honey (based upon the Sen (2004) example)

A poor Indian villager has the options of staying in his village or going into the jungle to collect honey. If he stays in his village, he will remain very poor, and if he manages to collect honey he will be (relatively) well off. Leaving his village, however, is dangerous because there might be Bengal tigers prowling about. These tigers might either be nearby or not. If they are nearby and the villager is outside of his village, then he will be eaten.

The villager can either go collect honey, in which case he will subject himself to risk of being eaten, or stay in the village and remain poor.

In this case, let us assume that the villager judges the danger to be too great for him to leave his home and he chooses to stay and remain poor.

⁷When an individual becomes an agent might be debated, but does not matter for my purposes. For convenience I will stipulate that this occurs at age 13.

Table 1.1: villager scenario 1

	Tigers near	Tigers far
Stay in village	Poverty	Poverty
Collect honey	Death	Affluence

Case 2: flooding

Consider now a case in which there is the potential danger of flooding in the area where the villager lives. If the village is flooded, it will destroy the villager's home and leave him homeless. In other words, there is a risk, regardless of whether or not the villager decides to collect honey, that he will become homeless. Being exposed to the possibility that he will become homeless is a case of brute luck for the villager because due to various aspects of his life he has no *real* option of, for instance, moving to a village on higher ground and avoiding the danger of flooding.⁸

One way to put this in a decision table:

Table 1.2: villager scenario 2

	Tigers near + flood	Tigers near + no flood	Tigers far + flood	Tigers far + no flood
Stay in village	Poverty + homelessness	Poverty + ¬homelessness	Poverty + homelessness	Poverty + ¬homelessness
Collect honey	Death + home- lessness	Death + ¬homelessness	Affluence + homelessness	Affluence + ¬homelessness

As a consequence of the additional danger of homelessness, assume that the villager in this scenario decides to risk his life and attempt to collect honey. Furthermore, assume the villager is acting rationally in both cases.⁹ In the first case the villager maximizing his expected utility by choosing the riskless option of a life of poverty. The

⁸While some might claim that the villager has a choice, it is plausible to say that poverty, culture and geographical circumstance all contribute to make moving an unfeasible option for him.

⁹I take 'acting rationally' to mean following the usual dictates of rationality used in the literature. See (Weber, 1998)

villager chooses the certainty of living in poverty to the risk to his life he must take in order to possibly secure (relative) affluence. While not a wonderful life, it is *a* life. Since the table is constructed using no utilities and probabilities, it may be the case that presented with the same information a different villager, equally rational, faced with the same decision problem might maximize his expected utility by choosing to risk his life. Thus, as long as utilities and probabilities are not assigned to the table it is not possible to come up with a definitive single rational solution of an action that maximizes the expected utility. Nonetheless, let us assume that in our case the action that indeed maximizes expected utility is the one our villager takes. To back this up with numbers let us assume the following table:

Table 1.3: villager scenario 1 with payoffs

	Tigers near (0.5)	Tigers far (0.5)
Stay in village	1	1
Collect honey	-10	8

Thus the expected utility of staying in the village is 1, which is greater than that of collecting honey (-1). It would (with such numerical values) be rational to choose to stay in the village.

In the second case the additional risk of homelessness makes it more appealing to attempt the honey collection, which also makes things more complicated. If our villager is rational, he must be consistent in his choices. It might appear that to be consistent, if he chose to stay in the village in the first scenario, he would need to choose to stay in the village in the second scenario as well. This requirement of consistency is reminiscent of that which arises in the Allais paradox when consistency is violated. On the one hand many people prefer to receive 1 million dollars for certain over the option of an 89% chance of receiving 1 million, 1% chance of receiving 0 and 10% chance of receiving 5 million. On the other hand the same people prefer a 10% chance to receive 5 million

and a 90% chance to receive 0 over the option of an 11% chance of receiving 1 million and an 89% chance of receiving nothing (Allais, 1953, p. 527). There are several ways to explain away this inconsistency. Weber (1998) discusses (and rejects) two solutions: disappointment and regret. The first solution Weber attributes to Loomes and Sugden (1986) - one might be disappointed because given the choice she made it would have been better if an alternative state of affairs were realized. The second solution is that a person might experience regret because given the state of affairs realized things would have been better if she had chosen differently. Other ways of dealing with the Allais paradox are available, such as dismissing the Savage axioms with their sure thing principle and turning to Jeffrey with his averaging axiom, which has a similar motivation as the sure-thing principle, but is much weaker and as such is not susceptible to the Allais paradox (Bradley, 2011).

Some of the same suggestions made in responses to the Allais paradox are, in fact, relevant to explaining how the villager can be consistent even if he chooses to stay in the village in the first scenario and he chooses to collect honey in the second scenario. I propose three ways in which we can get a consistent result: placing a limit on dis-utility, disappointment and regret.

1.3.1 Limited dis-utility

If we accept that there is no fate worse than death, then being eaten by the tiger, regardless of whether one's home is destroyed, will have the worse consequence. It might be claimed that the villager prefers in this case to collect honey because on the one hand homelessness makes poverty even worse, yet has no additional negative consequences for death. On the other hand, if affluence is attained, it can mitigate homelessness, because the effects of homelessness on an affluent person might only be temporary (until he builds or buys a new home), while for someone financially unable to finance a new home the

effects can be much worse. So while the consequence of this added risk are worse than without it, no matter what the villager chooses, the change for the worse is greater when he decides to stay in his village than when he decides to collect honey. It follows that given the right utilities it is possible for the villager to consistently prefer hunting for honey in the second case while preferring to stay in the village in the first case.

Table 1.4: villager scenario 2 with payoffs

	Tigers near + flood (0.25)	Tigers near + no flood (0.25)	Tigers far + flood (0.25)	Tigers far + no flood (0.25)
Stay in village	-8	1	-8	1
Collect honey	-10	-10	0	8

Now the expected value of collecting honey is -3 which is greater than the expected value of staying at home, which is now -3.5.

1.3.2 Disappointment

In the first scenario, if the villager chose to collect honey he would be very disappointed if he ends up being eaten rather than affluent (maybe the last thought to cross his mind before death takes him) when, for example, the odds are even (50%), and so he decides to play it safe and stay in the village. In the second scenario, knowing that given that he collects honey the chances that things will end well with a flood looming and tigers prowling about are low (only a 25% chance that he will be affluent and have a home), he would be less disappointed when he gets the short end of the stick, so might decide to attempt collecting honey. Of course, it matters what the probabilities are and what the villager's disappointment threshold is, and in my original description of the scenarios I said nothing of either. Yet we can construct the probabilities and disappointment threshold to be such that the villager will be disappointed if eaten by a tiger in the first scenario but less disappointed if this happens in the second scenario.

What happens in this case is that the villager does not view the payoffs as independent. This means that how the villager evaluates each consequence depends on what the alternative consequences were. The better the alternative consequences are, given his action, the more disappointed he will be with the actual outcome. Dying from tigers when the alternative is that he would live an affluent life is substantially worse than dying from a tiger when the alternative also includes the possibility of homelessness. Thus it makes sense in the first case to stay in the village and in the second to collect honey.

1.3.3 Regret

In the first scenario, if it turns out that there are no tigers nearby and he would have been safe collecting honey, then the villager does not regret staying in the village. For one thing, if he stays in the village he does not know what outcome actually occurred. But even if he did know, at least he is alive and so his situation is not that bad. In the second scenario, however, if there are no tigers prowling nearby, then if no flood hits he could have both retained his home and become affluent, or with a flood at least he could have been well-off enough to build a new house. Knowing that it turns out that there are no tigers nearby, yet he chose to stay in the village, would have made the villager regret his cautious ways and wish that he had chosen to collect honey. Knowing this, he does in fact choose to collect honey.

In the first scenario the villager has a guaranteed baseline of staying in the village and staying alive, from which a departure is risky and thus undesirable. This has to do with what Kahneman and Tversky (1979) call the “certainty effect” according to which people overweigh outcomes that are considered certain. But when the all actions lead to uncertain outcomes, with almost all being negative, the villager no longer views a baseline, a departure from which he would consider to be a mistake. In this case the

villager prefers to collect honey.

1.3.4 Consistent choices

The various ways in which it can be made consistent for the villager to choose the less risky action in the first scenario, and the more risky action in the second scenario, make clear the possibility that such a choice may indeed be seen as rational. Indeed, the fact that there are several ways to cash out these choices as rational exhibit the robustness of such choices being consistent. The rationality of the villager's choice allows us to view it as resulting from the fact that when the risk of an unavoidable harm (flooding) is present, the villager will maximize his expected utility by rationally choosing to take on additional risk of harm he would not take when the risk of the unavoidable harm is not present.

That such choices can be consistent and that the villager making them can be rational, shows that these choices are not just artifacts of deficient rationality, incomplete information, or other types of problems that cause the villager to choose to accept more risk in a way that reduces his expected utility. If these deficiencies were at play, we might not want to hold the villager accountable for choosing to accept more risk and thus we might want to compensate him even when he does suffer bad option luck. By presenting a case in which it is clear that the choice to take on more risk once subject to some degree of brute luck is rational, I bracket arguments for compensation being owed by society to the villager because he is not responsible, or less responsible, for his choice due to a lack of rationality. We might not want to hold a person responsible even, or especially, when a decision is not a rational one or the choice is due to impaired reasoning. There seems to actually be less motivation for holding a person responsible if we understand her to be acting irrationally, because we might think that she did not properly understand the circumstances or is incapable of clear minded deliberation. The way we do not assign

responsibility to children or some cases of mental illness illustrates this. But here we do not have such a case.

1.4 Responsibility revisited

Since it was stipulated earlier, it is straightforwardly the case that the villager cannot do anything to prevent his house from being destroyed in a flood and becoming homeless. While Dworkin's account is situated in a just initial distribution, if we apply his definitions in this case, it follows that because insurance is not available to the villager (it's cost is prohibitively high for him) whether the villager becomes homeless is a matter of brute luck. As a result, it is clear that if the villager becomes homeless due to flooding, he should be compensated.

Similarly, in the first scenario, with no danger of flooding, the villager's decision to try to collect honey is an isolated risk he anticipated and might have declined, and so whether he gets eaten by a tiger is a matter of option luck. As a result, according to Dworkin's framework we are not required to compensate him (or, since he is dead, his family). Nevertheless, the claim that the decision to collect honey is an isolated risk requires more discussion.

Since I discuss in the scenario a poor Indian villager, it is reasonable to argue that the risk of collecting honey is not an isolated one, even prior to introducing the risk of a flood. The villager's life prospects are so dire that he is faced with a choice set that is already unjust. The risk of getting eaten by a tiger that the villager accepts by collecting honey is not isolated from his life circumstances, which we might reasonably think already require that society compensate him. If we consider the relevant society as including people in the wealthy West, then clearly the initial distribution is unjust and the decision to collect honey is not simply option luck. However, for the sake of the example

we can conceive the relevant society that the villager might be thought of as being a member of, and the society which owes the villager compensation for bad luck as his village, or a group of villages, all suffering from the same poor conditions. If this is the society in question, it might be distributing whatever scant resources it has justly. Despite having little resources (as compared to affluent western societies), in such a society not everyone would suffer from bad option luck, such as being eaten by a tiger (some would manage to collect honey and some will stay in the village), and not everyone would suffer bad brute luck, such as becoming homeless due to a flood (maybe not the entire village is flooded or other villages in the area are not flooded). Thus, whether the initial distribution is just depends on what the relevant society that ought to compensate those suffering from bad brute luck is.¹⁰

Assuming that the choice to collect honey is a choice to take on an isolated risk, and so a matter of option luck, introducing the flood risk, which clearly is a matter of brute luck, brings on some complications. In the second scenario, in which there is a danger of flooding and the villager faces the choice of whether or not to leave the village, it might seem that we can view it to be a matter of option luck whether he gets eaten by the tigers (death) or collects honey (affluence), and a matter of brute luck whether or not he loses his home in a flood. Yet these are only partial descriptions of the second scenario. The full description of the possible consequences of deciding to collect honey are: death + homelessness, death + \neg homelessness, affluence + homelessness, affluence + \neg homelessness. One might wish, in order to assign responsibility, to be able to separate each consequence into those factors that are a matter of brute luck - whether or not the

¹⁰The district of Jamui in Bihar state in India, for example, is one of the poorest districts in India. Of course, there might still be individuals who are relatively wealthy compared to our villager, and so the initial distribution there is already greatly skewed. Nevertheless the differences are smaller than when compared with Bihar state in general, India as a whole, or the world at large. If we wish to situate the discussion in a more real life setting, from which we might extract some implications for public policy, we need to recognize that realistically there are no entirely just initial distributions. In the next section I will discuss such a case.

villager becomes homeless, and those that are a matter of option luck - whether the villager dies or becomes affluent. After separating the factors, it would then be easy to compensate him for his bad brute luck and refuse to compensate him for his bad option luck.

However, because of the ways in which being exposed to the risk of homelessness influences the villager's decision regarding the collection of honey, the two risks cannot be separated. Without the danger of homelessness present, there are three possible outcomes of the villager's decision to either stay in the village or collect honey—poverty, (relative) affluence, and death. With such outcomes and probabilities, the villager would decide to stay in the village. Once homelessness becomes relevant, however, the outcomes of his decision to stay in the village or collect honey are no longer the same. Now the villager faces a different set of possible outcomes— poverty, poverty + homelessness, affluence, affluence + homelessness, and death. In the second scenario the decision to collect honey is not made independently of the risk of homelessness and as such is influenced by an issue of brute luck. If we try to separate the two risks, we must change the set of stipulated outcomes in a way that re-describes the scenario. But doing so would lose the effect the risk of homelessness has on the villager's decision to take on the risk of death. Since this is the case, we cannot separate the outcomes the villager might face into a neat division of brute and option luck, compensating him for the former but not the later. Thus, there can be cases in which brute luck and option luck are inseparable.

In the villager's case it is clear that when faced with a pure option luck case he chose the less risky action—staying in the village, yet when faced with a situation in which option luck and brute luck were mixed together he chose a riskier action—collecting honey. It follows that the addition of the brute luck influenced the villager to take the riskier action that could have bad consequences. It would seem then that brute luck really did matter for the villager's decision to collect honey and so the consequences,

when bad, are influenced from bad brute luck. This is a case in which option luck and brute luck are inseparable. As a result, whether the person can be help responsible for his choices is not clear. If we think that the fact that option luck is involved is what really matters and as a result decide to assign responsibility to the person and forgo compensation. If, on the other hand, we think that the presence or absence of brute luck is the determining factor, then in the flood case society is responsible to compensate the villager for his bad outcomes. We might also consider things along a continuum with pure option luck requiring no compensation, pure brute option luck requiring full compensation and mixtures of the two requiring some compensation to varying degrees.¹¹

1.5 The gambling Philadelphian

As mentioned earlier, some problems pertaining to option luck do not arise when the initial distribution is fair and when there is a complete insurance market. Under such ideal conditions, any instance of brute luck is transformed into an instance of option luck, since the choice of getting insurance to protect against bad brute luck is open to the individual. If the individual makes the deliberate choice not to purchase insurance when she suffers from bad luck, it is a matter deliberate choice and therefore choice luck, rather than brute luck. Under such ideal conditions the problem I raised never occurs.

Dworkin is aware of the fact that insurance cannot, as a practical matter, be used to compensate all bad brute luck. According to Dworkin, for insurance to serve as a perfect converter of brute luck to option luck, several conditions must be met:

So if the condition just stated were met-if everyone had an equal risk of suffering some catastrophe that would leave him or her handicapped, and everyone knew roughly what the odds were and had ample opportunity

¹¹How we would judge degrees of responsibility is an interesting question that requires some way of assigning weights for the role option luck and brute luck play in the decision to either stay home or collect honey. Even if it is possible to do so, it complicates Dworkin's initial picture immensely. Because of the brute / option luck distinction's appeal is its simplicity, this would be an unwelcomed modification.

to insure-then handicaps would pose no special problem for equality of resources. But of course that condition is not met.

Dworkin goes on to discuss types of cases in which insurance is unhelpful:

Some people are born with handicaps, or develop them before they have either sufficient knowledge or funds to insure on their own behalf. They cannot buy insurance after the event. Even handicaps that develop later in life, against which people do have the opportunity to insure, are not randomly distributed through the population, but follow genetic tracks, so that sophisticated insurers would charge some people higher premiums for the same coverage before the event. (p. 297)

The villager scenarios are meant to present a case in which insurance is impossible. However, in the scenarios described the initial distribution seems unjust, since it is unjust that the choices available to the villager are between bad options. Yet, as previously discussed, it matters what the relevant society is, and if we focus on a society as poorly off as the villager, the relative initial distribution does not seem unjust. But we can overcome this apparent unjustness in initial distribution by turning to what I call the gambling Philadelphian case.

Consider a case with a similar structure to the villager story, but involving a middle-class American who lives in Philadelphia. Of course the distribution in the US is nowhere near just. It is my hope, however, that it will be less difficult to imagine such a person as enjoying enough privileges so that he is currently at least as well-off as he would be under a just distribution (maybe he is male, white, college educated, supportive parents, decent health, etc.). For such an individual it will seem more plausible that his choices can more easily be thought of as isolated from his life situation.

Imagine that Philadelphian faces the choices of assuming an isolated risk of visiting Atlantic City to gamble all his savings, or staying home in his suburban Philadelphia home. If the Philadelphian stays home, he continues his middle-class life as usual, but if he goes to AC he either becomes very rich or bankrupted. This scenario is meant to

mirror the decision choice the villager has, albeit without suffering from an unjust initial distribution.

Table 1.5: Philadelphian scenario 1

	Lucky #'s Lose	Lucky #'s Win
Stay in Suburb	same ole'	same ole'
Gamble in AC	debt	affluence

Now, assume that the Philadelphian develops a handicap, but lacks either sufficient knowledge or funds to insure on his own behalf, which Dworkin takes to be a reason insurance cannot do the work it is supposed to. To flesh out the example, imagine that the handicap is a disease that causes loss of limbs, and is unknown to the medical profession, let alone the Philadelphian. There is no insurance market to cover this disease. The money the Philadelphian could win gambling would be exactly the sum needed to compensate the Philadelphian for this disease by allowing him to purchase a prosthetic.

Table 1.6: Philadelphian scenario 2

	Lucky #'s Lose + Leg Loss	Lucky #'s Lose + No Disease	Lucky #'s Win + Leg Loss	Lucky #'s Win + No Disease
Stay in Suburb	leg loss	same ole'	leg loss	same ole'
Gamble in AC	debt + leg loss	debt	same ole'	prosthetic

In this case the Philadelphian suffers from uninsurable bad brute luck, and as a result chooses, like the villager, to take a risk. The difference is that in the Philadelphian's case one cannot claim that the initial distribution of resources was unjust from the point of view of the Philadelphian. Thus, as long as insurance markets are not perfect, cases in which bad brute luck effects the choices individuals make, and as a result make it impossible to treat them as isolated choices to assume risk, the usefulness of the brute luck / option luck distinction breaks down.

Since perhaps no real-life choice can be seen as isolated from an individual's life circumstances in the way that Dworkin needs for the brute luck / option luck distinction to be useful, it seems that this distinction is only useful in hypothetical cases.

1.6 Conclusion

In this paper I presented one schematic case in which the idea of brute luck is inseparably mixed in with the idea of option luck. In such a case brute luck will play a role regardless of what the person decides to do. I offered three ways a person can be consistent if she chooses a riskier situation when faced with unavoidable risk than she would choose when the unavoidable risk is not present. This opens up the possibility that there can be many instances in which the rational thing to do would be to deliberately choose a risky situation. While this might appear to be a case of option luck because of the choice involved, I explained why the presence of an unavoidable risk means the scenario is mixed together with brute luck and can be attributed to the latter. This, in turn, means that on Dworkin's account the person cannot be held responsible for the consequences of her actions and society must compensate her when the outcome is negative.

However, it is important to stress that we might not want to hold a person responsible even, or especially, when a decision is not a rational one or the choice is due to impaired reasoning. There seems to actually be less motivation for holding a person responsible if we understand her to be acting irrationally, because we might think that she did not properly understand the circumstances or is incapable of clear minded deliberation. The way we do not assign responsibility to children or some cases of mental illness illustrates this.

The idea presented in this paper might have implications for policy in general.

First, regardless of one's theory of distributive justice, we must acknowledge that cases in which we would like to hold people responsible for their circumstances may not be as simple as they first appear. Such a result will have an impact on any theory of justice which takes a lack of responsibility for one's negative circumstance as a necessary requirement for compensation.

This result might be relevant for various practical cases, whether or not we have an articulated theory of justice, in which we might want to assign desert based on responsibility for the circumstances people find themselves in. This can occur in sentencing a person for her responsibility in a negligence case, in claiming that a politician is responsible for the death of soldiers in a war or even for denying one's son any desert because he was responsible for breaking the window. In the various situations in which people make decisions under risk one is required to look deeper into what decision matrix people are facing and prior to assigning responsibility make sure that their choice was not influenced by the existence of a risk they could not have avoided.

The argument in this chapter is meant as a rebuttal to a particular line of argument according to which well-being public policy is only obligatory when people need to be compensated for bad brute luck, and actually prohibited when aimed at improving the well-being of those suffering from bad option luck. When it comes to well-being public policy, there are cases in which it can be impossible to disentangle option luck from brute luck. If the two kinds of luck are inseparable, then it is not possible to make policy decisions based on distinguishing between cases with respect to whether they are cases of brute luck or option luck.

There are other ways of arguing against implementing well-being public policy, but I do not address them in this dissertation. In this chapter I merely rebutted one line of argument against the permissibility of well-being public policy, and have not by any means argued conclusively for the permissibility of well-being public policy. The goal

of this dissertation is to explore ways of defending the use of particular measures to guide well-being policy choices, not to establish the permissibility of well-being public policy. Thus, the permissibility of well-being public policy must be assumed to get my project off the ground. In the next chapter I discuss some of the current available measures of well-being and argue that defending using a particular measure by appealing to a particular philosophical theory of well-being will not work due to disagreement on what the correct theory of well-being is.

Chapter 2

The characterization problem

2.1 Introduction

In recent years, policy-makers have shown increasing interest in implementing policies aimed at promoting individual well-being (e.g. Stiglitz et al. (2009); OECD (2013a); Stone and Mackie (2014); O'Donnell et al. (2014)). This interest appears to have been sparked, on the one hand, by disillusion with the relevance of current economic measures to the measurement of well-being, perhaps due to the economic downturn of 2008. On the other hand, significant conceptual and methodological advances in recent years in alternative measures of well-being have made using these measures for public policy easier in practice.

Indeed, prominent policy-makers like David Cameron, the prime minister of the UK, or Ben Bernanke, the former chairman of the US Federal Reserve, have expressed their interest in measures of well-being:

But here we are, and today the government is asking the Office of National Statistics to devise a new way of measuring wellbeing in Britain. . . This information will help government work out, with evidence, the best ways of trying to help to improve people's wellbeing. (David Cameron, 2010)

The ultimate purpose of economics, of course, is to understand and promote the enhancement of well-being. Economic measurement accordingly must encompass measures of well-being and its determinants.” (Ben Bernanke, former chairman of the Federal Reserve, 2012)

In this dissertation I assume that interest in measures of well-being stems from an interest in using such measures to guide public policy aimed at promoting well-being, and that such aims are legitimate. Other possible motivations might exist, such as tapping into a currently trendy buzzword, or an interest in finding measures by which an already chosen policy ranks high. Nevertheless, I assume, perhaps naively, that policy-makers are at least partially interested in figuring out how to best promote well-being, and believe that to do so they need to rely on measures from the social sciences. Several measures have been proposed as measures of well-being in recent years, though none has been adopted widely as *the* measure of well-being.

How should policy-makers choose the measure they use to guide their policy choices? In cases in which the measures all rank some policy as superior, the choice of measure problem is a moot point. If, for example, economic measures, subjective well-being measures and objective measures, as well as common sense, all agree that allocating an additional ten million dollars to combat the spread of measles is more conducive to overall well-being than allocating that money to building a really neat statue of a giraffe at the entrance to Capitol hill, the choice is obvious (or it should be). Insofar as policy-makers are interested in promoting well-being and the different measures agree on which policy is best, it does not matter which measure they use.

Yet when the measures disagree and policies get ranked differently by different measures, a choice needs to be made as to which measure to use to guide policy-making. One seemingly reasonable first step in deciding which measure to use is to figure out how to characterize what it is that ought to be measured—to settle on a well defined characterization of well-being. While this is a reasonable approach, there currently exists

significant disagreement on how well-being ought to be characterized.

In this chapter I argue that trying to decide which measure to use by first settling on a specific characterization of well-being will not work because there is too much disagreement on how to characterize well-being. In §2 I discuss some measures that are sometimes considered to be measures of well-being. In §3 I discuss the competing theories of well-being, how they are classified and some reasons to doubt their correctness. In §4 I argue that much of the disagreement on how to characterize well-being derives from it being a *Ballung* concept. If we seek to justifiably use a measure as a measure of well-being for public policy, a different approach is needed.

2.2 Competing measures of well-being

The different measures that policy-makers have available to them to guide well-being public policy is an embarrassment of riches. While a variety of potential measures of well-being have been around for a while (life satisfaction surveys have existed for several decades, see (Cantril, 1966)), until recently economic measures such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita has been standardly used by policy-makers as the dominant measures of well-being for policy purposes.

2.2.1 Economic measures

GDP per capita has been in use for a while (Gross National Product (GNP), the predecessor of GDP, was first used in the US in 1942 (Coyle, 2014)), and has often been used as a proxy for utility, which standard economic theory assumes is what the individual seeks to maximize.¹ In economics, utility is a technical term for the numerical representation of the way individuals order their preferences between different available

¹ Although as Nordhaus and Tobin (1972) argue, GDP can be, and usually is, measured for other reasons than seeking to measure utility or well-being.

options.² Since preferences and utility are not directly observable, economists use several techniques to elicit preferences.

Standardly, economists rely on revealed preference, which are thought of as preferences revealed through choices that individuals make between consumption bundles. Since not all preferences are revealed through the choices that individuals actually make and can be easily observed, economists often treat money or income as proxies for utility. The reasoning is that the greater an individual's resources, the greater her ability to obtain a more preferred consumption bundle and so increase her utility. Insofar as one views well-being as positively correlated with utility (as economists use it), economic measures can be thought of as measures of well-being.

Alternatively, economists have begun to rely more on stated preference surveys in order to ascertain a good's contingent valuation (CV). By asking individuals to rank different things, like consumption bundles, but also things like social outcomes or policies, economists can elicit individuals' preferences.³ Once the CV of goods is known, it is possible to derive an individual's utility from summing the CV of goods she has. If utility is correlated with well-being, then it is possible to measure well-being.

The use of GDP per capita as a measure of well-being has often been done implicitly, merely by focusing on GDP per capita growth as a central aim of public policy. One, implicit, way of reasoning for caring about GDP per capita is that it is a measure of well-being. There are also alternative reasons to care about GDP per capita growth: we might think that economic growth is an end in itself. We might think that economic growth entails greater military might, and therefore a better assurance of the nation's survival. We might simply want to express our competitive spirit at the national level

²There is no intrinsic need for the economic theory to make any connection between preferences or utility and well-being, and it is important to avoid equivocating between the way utility is used as a technical term in economics and the way it is sometimes used as something of value.

³There are well known objections to such methods, such as the potential misrepresentation by individuals of their preferences and the consequent lack of reliability of surveys. For criticisms of CVs see for example Diamond and Hausman (1994).

and generate a measure by which to compare ourselves with other nations. Another option is that in democratic countries voters care deeply about GDP per capita (for whatever reason), and policy-makers believe that they must increase it to get re-elected. None of these reasons strike me as very convincing, but perhaps there are better ways of articulating them or there might be other, better, reasons to care about GDP per capita. Nevertheless, thinking that GDP per capita tracks well-being, which seems like something most of us care about, would be a good reason to care about GDP per capita.

2.2.2 Subjective Well-Being measures

In recent years the hegemony of GDP per capita is waning, and policy-makers have begun to look at alternative measures as potential measures of well-being. Subjective Well-Being (SWB) measures have gained popularity in recent years among both psychologists and economists and are often thought to be useful for guiding policy decisions (Diener, 2000; Diener and Seligman, 2004; Kahneman et al., 2004).

In the OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-Being (OECD, 2013b, p. 29) SWB is defined as: “Good mental states, including all of the various evaluations, positive and negative, that people make of their lives, and the affective reactions of people to their experiences.” This definition is intentionally broad in order to include the different ways in which SWB is defined by different researchers. The OECD finds a common distinction in the literature between life evaluation, affect and *eudaimonia*. Similarly, the Panel on Measuring Subjective Well-Being in a Policy-Relevant Framework headed by Arthur Stone and Christopher Mackie for the National Academies (Stone and Mackie, 2014) divides SWB into three dimensions that sometimes overlap: Evaluative well-being (EvWB) refers to judgments about satisfaction with life, experienced well-being (ExWB) refers to peoples emotional states and eudaimonic well-being refers to a

person's meaningfulness or sense of purpose in life.⁴

Life evaluation, or evaluated subjective well-being, pertains to subjective 'life-as-a-whole' evaluations, that is to a persons subjective evaluation of how well her life is going for her. This gets cashed out through life-satisfaction surveys, which ask questions such as "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?" (World Values Survey). These surveys are widespread and have been in use in different wordings since at least the 1960's (Cantril, 1966). The evaluative aspect pertains to the fact that in answering questions about life satisfaction individuals cognitively express their evaluation of how well their life is going for them. Reporting life satisfaction is an evaluative exercise in which, as Pavot et al. (1991) describe, the individual judges her life against some constructed standard she perceives as appropriate for herself.

Experienced subjective well-being, sometimes also referred to as affect or hedonic well-being, pertains to a persons positive and negative emotional states. ExSWB is usually measured by a persons self-report, either in real-time or shortly after (Stone and Mackie, 2014, p. 18). Affective measures are meant to capture "the way people feel about experiences in real-time," rather than "the way they remember their experiences after they are over (Kahneman and Krueger, 2006, p. 5). Measuring ExSWB is complicated by the fact that positive and negative emotions, or affects, are not the inverse of one another and so cannot be successfully captured by a single measure (Diener et al., 1999; Kahneman, 2003). Moreover, neither are positive and negative affects a unitary quantity in themselves. Positive affects include pleasure, joy, contentment, or happiness, and negative affects include suffering, distress, sadness, stress, anxiety, anger, fear or worry. Breaking these down and measuring individual affects can often reveal a complex picture, for example, of a person who is very worried yet nevertheless is experiencing a high

⁴Notice that the way Stone and Mackie (2014) name these dimensions drops the 'subjective part. In order to make clear that these are dimensions of SWB I will rename them as EvSWB evaluative *subjective* well-being, ExSWB experienced *subjective* well-being, and EuSWB Eudaimonic *subjective* well-being.

level of pleasure. While some argue that a multi-dimensional measurement approach is necessary, Kahneman (2003) argues that people are capable of evaluating their overall affective states on a good-bad axis at any given moment.

Measuring affects by relying on self-reports is notoriously difficult. Currently the most rigorous approach, which is deemed the 'gold standard,' involves ecological momentary assessments such as the experience sampling method (ESM), in which participants are prompted to report current affective states during different times throughout the day. While rigorous, such methods are also difficult to implement on any large scale as they are both expensive to run and burdensome for participants. Less invasive, but also more open to recall bias, are end of day measures. These can be part of a continuous study over several days, such as the Day Reconstruction Method (DRM), which ask subjects to summarize and catalog events of the preceding day and report intensity of feelings along 9 categories (Kahneman and Krueger, 2006). The DRM is less burdensome for participants than ESM because it only requires one period during the day to actively participate in the experiment. Lastly, there are single day studies conducted through surveys asking people to assess their hedonic experience of the previous day.⁵ While such single day surveys might capture someone who had an unusually good or bad day, as long as they are conducted over some extended period they will avoid a biased report of the entire group who might have had an anomalous day (perhaps the previous day was a holiday or perhaps a terrorist attack occurred).

Lastly, eudaimonic SWB aims to assess the degree to which a person has a sense of meaning and purpose in life. This dimension of SWB is the least well fleshed out, but is receiving some attention (e.g. Huppert (2009)). Whether current measures succeed in capturing this dimension of SWB well, it does point to an aspect of SWB that might need to be highlighted as different and independent from an affective or life

⁵These are often put in terms of happiness.

satisfaction measure. Such differences might come up if we consider an NGO worker doing some good for very low pay in adverse conditions, who forgoes what she conceives as important to enjoying a good life, while nevertheless having a clear sense of purpose in her life. She might be stressed and feeling dissatisfied with how well her life is going for her, yet nevertheless reluctant to give up her sense of purpose.

What all these methods have in common is a reliance on the reports made by the individual about her affective state. Some economists challenge the validity of self-reporting in general and with respect to SWB in particular (see Schwarz and Strack (1989) for a discussion of some criticisms). Nevertheless, the use of SWB measures of different kinds has gained traction in policy circles. For example, the Commission on Wellbeing and Policy (O'Donnell et al., 2014), sponsored by the Legatum Institute, suggests using SWB measures to assess the success of policies: “One solution is to use measures of subjective wellbeing (sometimes expressed as SWB) by which we mean the answers to questions about people’s happiness and satisfaction with their lives. This approach fits with a utilitarian view of the world where governments try to maximize the sum of everybody’s happiness (or utility or hedonic experience)” (p. 10).

2.2.3 Objective measures and indices

There are also many objective measures that can be viewed as relevant to well-being, such as life expectancy, levels of caloric intake, literacy rates, crime rates, urban green spaces, etc. Different measures can be viewed as measures of well-being (as a whole) when combined in an index such as the Human Development Index or the Better Life Initiative (more on these indices below).⁶

In the public policy domain, different organizations purport to measure well-being using indices. These include national statistical agencies such as in the UK and

⁶For a review of indices, see Hagerty et al. (2001).

Israel, supra-national organizations such as the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and non-governmental organizations like Measure of America (MOA) and Gallup Polls.⁷

Human Development Index (HDI)

The Human Development Index (HDI) was developed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) lead by Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen in 1990. It is a geometrical mean of three normalized indices: health, education and income ($HDI = (I_{Health} \cdot I_{Education} \cdot I_{Income})^{1/3}$). These three dimensions are seen as the central dimensions of human development (Khalid, 2014, p. 2), and, according to the UNDP, “[t]he choice of weights is based on the normative judgement that all three dimensions are equally important.” UNDP (UNDP)

The UNDP views the HDI as useful for addressing national policy choices: “The HDI was created to emphasize that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth alone.” However, it is not seen as encompassing all areas of human well-being, as it does not, for example, reflect political participation or gender inequalities. According to the UNDP, “[a] fuller picture of a country’s level of human development requires analysis of other indicators and information presented in the statistical annex of the report.” UNDP (UNDP) Thus, the HDI is not viewed as a complete measure of well-being.

American Human Development Index (AHDI)

Less complex than the HDI, though based on it, is the American Human Development Index (AHDI), which was introduced by Measure of America (MOA) in 2008,

⁷All the agencies discussed here, which are ones that focus on indices, justify their index by appealing to the capabilities approach, which can be classified (at least on Parfit’s classification) as an objective-list theory of well-being and will be discussed later in the chapter.

and now in its third edition (Lewis and Burd-Sharps, 2014b). Unlike the HDI and the BLI (discussed later), which are compiled by supra-national entities—the UNDP and the OECD respectively—the AHDI is compiled by MOA, an American non-profit. MOA takes it mission to be to “highlight and make sense of data points like these and use them to tell the story of how American people—not just the American economy— are doing” (p. 3).

Like the HDI, all three dimensions of the AHDI are weighted equally (Lewis and Burd-Sharps, 2014a), and the AHDI also appeals to the capabilities approach framework.⁸ While the AHDI focuses on the same areas as the HDI, the AHDI uses different indicators, has different goal posts and aggregates the indicators differently (arithmetic rather than geometric mean). Nevertheless, similarly to the HDI, the AHDI is not viewed as capable of completely capturing well-being:

The human development concept is broad: it encompasses the economic, social, legal, psychological, cultural, environmental, and political processes that define the range of options available to us. In contrast, the Human Development Index measures just three fundamental human development dimensions: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge, and a decent standard of living. (pp. 8-9)

Better Life Initiative (BLI)

Currently, the most complex and sophisticated index meant to be used as a well-being index belongs to the the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The OECD, through its Better Life Initiative (BLI) (OECD, 2013a), has developed over more than a decade a well-being index that is meant to assess people’s well-being in OECD countries. The index is prepared by the Well-Being and Progress Unit of the OECD Statistics Directorate, and covers eleven dimensions of well-being and is based on a broad set of indicators.

⁸“Human development is about what people *can do and be*; it is the process of improving peoples well-being and *expanding their freedoms and opportunities*” (p. 3, emphasis added).

The BLI's eleven dimensions are: income and wealth, jobs and earnings, housing, health status, work-life balance, education and skills, social connections, civic engagement and governance, environmental quality, personal security, and subjective well-being. These are seen as fitting into two broad domains; the first three regard material living conditions, and the latter eight regard quality of life (p. 21). While the OECD considers the eleven dimensions as relevant to people living in all societies, it considers the relative importance of each dimension as varying among individuals and countries (p. 23).

The BLI was developed with the aim of presenting an alternative to traditional economic measures by developing a new framework for measuring well-being that “puts people at the centre” (p. 11). The BLI is viewed as conceptually similar to the HDI, yet it has a broader scope by adding additional dimensions to be measured (p. 22). Unlike the HDI, which provides a single composite that weights each of its three components equally, the BLI presents its information through a set of indicators, allowing for the users of the index to weight the different components as they see fit. The BLI has, according to its authors, “a profound influence on the way well-being is measured across the world and on the public debate on what matters to citizens (p. 11). Yet the BLI is not merely meant to be an alternative measurement framework. It is meant to:

[O]pen new horizons in traditional policy areas by providing a new type of information, such as how people behave and feel about their lives, as well as in a range of new domains that may until now have been beyond the radar screen of policy makers, perhaps simply because the relevant information in these areas was not available. (p. 12)

The “How’s Life? 2013” report, in which the BLI is published, claims that measuring well-being has become an important goal of many statistical offices. The authors of the report take this prominence of well-being measurement as reflecting a recognition that “well-being statistics are critical for informing policy making on a regular and systematic basis on a range of aspects that matter to the life of ordinary people” (p. 19).

The report is explicit in its reliance on an objective-list account of well-being:

From a normative perspective, the OECD well-being framework builds on the capabilities approach proposed by Sen, 1985 (see also Alkire and Sarwar, 2009; Anand et al., 2009; Anand et al., 2011). This approach is based on a multidimensional definition of well-being where both what people do, such as having a good job or expressing their political voice (their functioning) and peoples freedom to choose that functioning (their capabilities) matter. (p. 22)

The report continues to explain that:

The OECD framework attempts to operationalize the capabilities approach and to make it measurable through indicators that can be collected and used by policy-makers and National Statistical Offices to monitor well-being conditions in the population and their evolution over time. Operationalizing the framework means first, selecting a list of basic and universal functionings and capabilities; and, second, identifying the specific indicators measuring each of them. (p. 22)

2.2.4 Competing measures of well-being

What are policy-makers who are interested in using measures to guide their well-being policy to do when faced with several measures? One option might be to consult with all the different measures when deciding on policy aimed to promote well-being. This might boost confidence in a policy when all measures are in agreement. However, the different measures are not always in agreement, and in the face of a lack of unanimity, looking at all the measures will not help determine the best policy to pursue.⁹

Because something is at stake when policy-makers choose a measure to rely on, they need a way to decide between the measures. If there is no unanimity among the different measures, another approach is to rely on a certain way of characterizing well-being and pick the measure that best represents that characterization.

⁹One such well known case has to do with the correlation between measures of income and measures of self-reported happiness, known as the Easterlin paradox (Easterlin, 1974). The Easterlin Paradox and it's repercussions to public policy will be discussed in detail in chapter 5.

In “A Theory of Measurement” Cartwright and Bradburn (2012) discuss the relation between measurement and theory, and argue that in order to properly measure a quantity or category we need to “1) identify the quantity or category to be measured (characterization); 2) define the properties of the measurement scheme (representation); and 3) formulate rules for applying the scheme (procedures)” (p. 2). The division into three levels is not meant to be a clear delimitation of totally distinct levels. The different levels will often blend into each other. Rather, it is meant as a conceptual framework through which to consider the different moments at which issues may arise.

Cartwright and Bradburn’s framework makes explicit the distinction between characterization and operationalization that is used throughout this dissertation.¹⁰ What theory of well-being one appeals to is a question of characterization, whereas what measure one uses is a question of operationalization.¹¹ Whether one characterizes well-being one way or another, it is a separate (albeit related) question as to how one ought to operationalize that characterization with a given measure. For example, we might debate how to characterize well-being, either as constituted by preference-satisfaction or as constituted by subjective mental-states. Even if we do not agree on the issue of characterization, we can still debate how to operationalize some way of characterizing well-being, e.g. as constituted by preference-satisfaction—should we use economic measures or should we use subjective well-being measures to operationalize that way of characterizing well-being? As I use the terms here, meaningful debates about how to operationalize well-being require an agreed on characterization of well-being (even if such agreement is just for the sake of argument).¹²

In the remainder of this chapter I turn to discuss theories of well-being and argue

¹⁰To avoid confusing the issues I discuss in chapter 3 with the myriad of ways in which the term ‘representation’ is used, I focus on operationalization, i.e. a method by which to define the measurement of a phenomenon or concept.

¹¹How to apply the measurement procedure is a third question, though not one I discuss in this dissertation.

¹²I discuss the operationalization problem in detail in chapter 3.

that trying to decide which measure to use by first settling on a specific characterization of well-being will not work because there is too much disagreement on how to characterize well-being.

2.3 Classifying theories of well-being

Policy-makers aim to assess the effects different policies might have on well-being and which policy will best promote well-being. One way to do this is first to choose some characterization of well-being and then to decide which measures of well-being best represents this characterization.¹³ Turning to philosophers might seem like a natural step to take (at least to philosophers). The theories of well-being that would be helpful in deciding between the different measures of well-being are theories that answer the question of “[w]hat makes a life good for an individual Crisp (2006, p. 101). They focus on prudential value, not on what is a *morally* good life, what things are instrumentally good, what an *aesthetically* good life is, nor what is an exemplary life for a human, rather they focus on a “life that is good in itself for the one who lives it.” (Feldman, 2004, p. 9)

These theories of well-being can be used for a variety of purposes (e.g. to help one guide her own life or to help understand moral obligations to others). For our purposes, we need the theories to be able to guide policy-makers choice of measures. Because of this, these theories must be, to use L.W. Sumner’s terminology, normatively adequate, rather than descriptively adequate:

Whatever the particular normative context, the only criterion of adequacy for a candidate conception will be its ability to play its designated role with the framework in question, which will be determined in turn by the viability of

¹³Hausman (2012) argues that preference-based measures can sometimes be used as evidence for what is conducive to well-being even if we remain agnostic on what constitutes well-being. In chapter 5 I argue that many times this path is closed to policy-makers because there can be more than one measure which disagree in their assessment of policies, and Hausman’s argument from platitudes could justify policy-makers in treating any of these measures as a measure of well-being.

the framework when that conception is inserted into it. In this case theories of welfare are to be assessed solely for their *normative adequacy*.

The opposite procedure involves decoupling the nature of welfare from its potential role in a normative framework and testing candidate conceptions for their fit with our ordinary experience of welfare and our ordinary judgments concerning it. It will then count in favour of a conception that it is faithful to that experience and makes sense of those judgments. Call this criterion *descriptive adequacy*.”¹⁴ (p. 8)

Regardless of whether the characterization we arrive at is descriptively adequate, we want it to be normatively adequate in the sense that it is useful for guiding us in choosing the best measure of well-being.

In what became a somewhat accepted categorization in recent years (see Woodard (2012)), Derek Parfit (1984) divides theories of well-being into hedonistic (or mental-state) theories, desire-fulfillment (or preference-satisfaction) theories and objective list theories. According to Parfit:

On *Hedonistic Theories*, what would be best for someone is what would make his life happiest. On *Desire-Fulfillment Theories*, what would be best for someone is what, throughout his life, would best fulfill his desires. On *Objective List Theories*, certain things are good or bad for us, whether or not we want to have the good things, or to avoid the bad things. (p. 493)

Mental-state theories characterize well-being as constituted by things like the level of pleasure and pain an individual enjoys and suffers, preference-satisfaction theories characterize well-being as constituted by a person’s satisfied preferences, and objective-list theories characterize well-being as constituted by a list of objective goods. While

¹⁴Sumner goes on to develop his account of descriptive adequacy, which he thinks should guide our choice of a good theory of well-being. Sumner’s four criteria for a theory of well-being to be descriptively adequate are fidelity, generality, formality and neutrality. Fidelity requires that a theory must be faithful to our ordinary concept and our ordinary experience. Generality requires that a theory of welfare should be complete and cover all welfare assessments. Formality requires giving conditions for benefit or harm, e.g. ‘x benefits y if and only if x stands in relation R to y. Neutrality requires the avoidance of bias in favor of any good or way of life. Nevertheless, Sumner’s account appears lacking to some. Daniel Haybron (2008) adds practical utility to these, and Anna Alexandrova (2014) takes issue predominately with the generality criterion, considering the possibility of a deriving context specific applications for a general theory of prudential value (GPV) to be far-fetched.

each characterization has some advantages, arguments are made and counter-examples are offered to support the implausibility of any specific characterization of well-being.¹⁵

More fundamental than Parfit's division is a division between invariable and variable theories of well-being, with all of Parfit's theories being of the invariabilist kind:

The difference between a variabilist and an invariabilist theory of well-being is shown in their answer to the second of two questions about well-being. The first is: which things are capable of being well-being enhancing?' The second is: when will they be so?' Holders of the kinds of invariabilist positions considered above have tended to assume that the answer to the second question is always. A variabilist will suggest that the answer to the second question is not always but rather under certain circumstances. (Fletcher, 2009, p. 32)

While Guy Fletcher finds invariabilist theories too rigid, I disagree that the invariabilist's answer to Fletcher's second question needs to be 'always.' Rather, it is 'always *ceteris paribus*'. When in the business of well-being one does not deal in exceptionless laws of nature as one might in physics. For example, the satisfaction of one's preferences might be considered an invariabilist good, but of course no advocate of a preference-satisfaction theory of well-being would seriously argue that the satisfaction of *all* preferences is conducive to well-being. Even if the satisfaction of a preference non-instrumentally enhances well-being in one context, in different contexts the satisfaction of preferences has different consequences, some of which are instrumental. Sometimes, satisfaction of a preference can lead to furthering the satisfaction of other preferences, sometimes it can lead to thwarting the satisfaction of other preferences. The instrumental consequences of satisfying a preference can be such that in some contexts they trump the benefit to well-being that the non-instrumental good of satisfying a preference is not worth

¹⁵Ben Bradley (2009) proposes dividing theories of well-being into hedonism, which "takes atomic states of affairs to be value atoms," and correspondence theories (all the rest), which take well-being as a correspondence between propositional attitudes and the truth of the objects of the propositional attitudes (p. 17). This classification seems much less developed than the other classifications I discuss (Parfit's, Fletcher's and Woodard's), and so I only briefly note it.

the instrumental cost. Context matters, even for someone that holds an invariabilist theory of well-being. Like Fletcher, Alexandrova (2012b) explains that well-being invariantism (WBI) encompasses two claims: well-being is concerned with the most general total evaluation of a person's life as a whole, and a theory of well-being should be capable of specifying conditions that apply in all cases of well-being. Alexandrova argues that WBI is a "very narrow and impoverished goal for theorizing about well-being" (p. 628).

Even if we accept invariable theories of well-being, the widespread use of Parfit's tripartite division might still be considered problematic. Christopher Woodard (2012) argues against it on the grounds that it is not exhaustive, and that it obscures Roger Crisp's distinction between enumerative and explanatory theories. The first criticism is that the tripartite classification seems to exclude reasonable theories such as Sumner's Authentic Happiness (Sumner, 1996) and Sen's capabilities approach (Sen, 1987), so much so that Dan Haybron (2008), for example, feels compelled to add several more categories.¹⁶ This criticism, however, does not seem very worrisome. First, it is not clear that the tripartite classification is meant to be exhaustive, as we might think that these are merely three types of accounts out of the potentially many one could hold. Second, as Woodard admits, this criticism could be addressed by calling the third category other-list theories, rather than objective-list, as a catch-all category for anything that does not fall squarely into the first two.¹⁷

The more biting criticism is that Parfit's division obscures Roger Crisp's distinction between enumerative and explanatory theories. According to Crisp, enumerative theories ask 'which things make someone's life go better for them?', while explanatory theories ask 'what is it about these things that make them good for people?' (Crisp, 2006, p. 102). Fletcher (2013) makes the distinction somewhat more succinctly and

¹⁶Haybron's categories include hedonism, desire-fulfillment, authentic happiness, eudaimonism and list theories (Haybron, 2008, p. 38).

¹⁷In fact, Woodard creates such a catch-all category in his classification, which is discussed later.

clearly: “Enumerative theories of well-being specify which things enhance well-being. Explanatory theories aim to explain why something enhances well-being” (p. 207).

Yet when Fletcher argues that mental-states and objective-list theories are enumerative and preference-satisfaction theories are explanatory, he is too quick in reaching his conclusion. The same argument he provides for why preference-satisfaction theories are explanatory can apply just as well to mental-states theories. Woodard, by contrast, argues that the different theories can be understood to play either role, depending on how they get cashed out. In addition, Woodard does a better job than Fletcher when he defends the importance of Crisp’s distinction. Woodard argues that focusing on the enumerative question makes room for welfare nihilism—according to which nothing is non-instrumentally good for a person—and welfare variabilism as plausible contenders for a theory of well-being (p. 793-4).

Richard Arneson (in progress) argues that his preferred theory of well-being—the bare objective list (BOL) theory—is no less explanatory than desire-satisfaction or hedonic theories of well-being. According to Arneson, rather than explain what constitutes well-being, desire-satisfaction and hedonic theories each merely enumerates a single good; satisfaction of desires and hedonic experiences respectively. Thus, while the standard criticism against theories such as BOL is that they have no explanatory power, Arneson argues that standard alternatives are in the same camp. The family of theories that are genuinely explanatory, perfectionist theories of well-being, fail Arneson’s ‘cheeseburger test,’ according to which simple ordinary pleasures, like eating a cheeseburger or enjoying a sunset, do not count as conducive to well-being.

Since my aim is normative adequacy in that I am looking for theories of well-being that can justify using one measure or another, it makes sense to focus on enumerative, rather than explanatory, theories of well-being. To figure out which measure better represents well-being, we need to know what well-being is constituted by, we do not

need a theory that explains why well-being is constituted by that particular thing. Once we know this, we are better situated to figure out which measure measures these things better. This is not to say that there is not a close relationship between explanatory and enumerative theories. Whenever someone is interested in figuring out *why* something that an enumerative theory takes as conducive to well-being is conducive, they are interested in explanatory theories. Moreover, there is a sort of reflective equilibrium relationship between enumerative and explanatory theories. To argue that an enumerative theory is right in taking something as conducive to well-being we can appeal to explanatory theories, and to argue that an explanatory theories gets things right, we can turn to enumerative theories to show that what we think is conducive to well-being is entailed as such by the explanatory theory.¹⁸

Fletcher proposes to divide enumerative theories into monistic and pluralistic theories, where what determines whether a theory is one or the other is whether it enumerates only one object as enhancing well-being, or more than one. Fletcher, thus classifies hedonism as a monistic theory and objective-lists as pluralistic theories. Such a classification hits on an important division among theories of well-being, especially when these are used to guide decisions. Monistic theories will be able to provide a decisive ordering of well-being states, according to how well they do on the single well-being object. By contrast, pluralistic theories, with their multiple well-being enhancing criteria, will give rise to a weighting problem. For example, without knowing what weights to assign, we cannot assess whether policy *x* that increases people's health more than policy *y* is better than policy *y* which increases education more than policy *x*.

Nevertheless, monistic theories can be simply thought of as pluralistic theories with a single item on the list with a weight of 100%. Richard Arneson makes this point when discussing his Bare Objective List account (BOL). The difference between monistic

¹⁸I thank Saba Bazargan for raising this point.

and pluralistic theories of well-being is thus not a difference in kind, but one of degree. Moreover, if weights are assigned, then in a sense the pluralistic theory is reduced into a monistic one. If we were to have some overarching theory of why health should be weighted as half as important as education, then that theory is itself a monistic one with the only good being that particular assignment of weights. Thus, undefined weights are an inherent feature of any truly pluralistic theory.

Woodard's proposal to divide (invariabilist) theories according to "whether they accept or reject the experience requirement and the desire requirement (p. 794), provides a more fine grained way to divide the different enumerative theories of well-being than Fletcher's. According to the experience requirement: for any subject S, the only constituents of S's welfare are S's experiences," and according to the desire requirement: for any subject S, the only constituents of S's welfare are satisfactions of some set of desires that is appropriately related to S's desires." Both requirements can be interpreted in different ways, depending on how the key terms are understood. Thus, these requirements leave open a broad set of theories, and so can be seen as a family of theories. For example, satisfaction of desires can be understood as occurring if either the state of the world in which what S desires obtains, or S is aware that what she desires obtains; either as a world-state theory or a mental-state theory.

The resulting division is represented by Woodard in the following table (p. 796):

Table 2.1: Woodard's classification of enumerative theories

	Accepts desire requirement	Rejects desire requirement
Accepts experience requirement	1	2
Rejects experience requirement	3	4

Woodard takes his taxonomy to have several advantages over Parfit's tripartite

division: it respects Crisp's distinction, it makes a variety of enumerative views (such as hybrid views, variabilism, or nihilism) salient, and it enables distinguishing and discussing different kinds of subjective endorsements according to their requirements rather than simply following tradition (Woodard, 2012, p. 797). Having a principled reason for categorizing theories a certain way, rather than merely doing so because of tradition seems to be an improvement. Nevertheless, whether the other differences can be viewed as significant improvements is unclear. First, the inclusive taxonomy is something that the tripartite division could easily be converted to provide by altering the 'objective-list' category to an 'other' category. Second, whether using an additional category that does not capture a theory that is significant in the literature constitutes an improvement is questionable. Third, grouping all remaining theories together based on the fact that they neither require experience nor desire makes such a category a catch-all that might not be sufficient. If there are principled differences between theories without a desire or experience requirement, it would seem that a third requirement category would be appropriate.

2.4 Problems with theories of well-being

In this dissertation I follow Parfit's tripartite division, but do so for a principled reason rather than tradition. I classify theories of well-being based on where they fall on a spectrum. On one end of the spectrum are the views that take well-being to wholly depend on the individual's internal mental state. On the other end are the views that take well-being to wholly depend on the external state of the world. Viewing the theories as lying somewhere on this spectrum is useful in making salient a feature of some of the central criticisms that are often raised against the different theories. Each theory can be

criticized for where it falls on the mental-state - state-of-the-world spectrum.¹⁹

Mental-state, or hedonic, theories of well-being focus exclusively on subjective internal mental-states, which opens them to being criticized for failing to connect well-being to the external world. Objective-list theories rely exclusively on the objective state of the world (with respect to the individual in it), which opens them to being criticized for failing to connect well-being to an individual's subjective inner life. Lastly, preference-satisfaction, or desire-fulfillment theories, focus on the correspondence between an individual's subjective internal mental-states—with respect to her preferences or desires regarding the world, and objective external states of the world—with respect to how well those preferences or desires are satisfied or fulfilled. This focus on the correspondence opens preference-satisfaction theories to being criticized for the difficulties that arise when trying to cash out this correspondence.

Taken jointly, there is no possibility of a well-being theory that can withstand these criticisms. Either it is too focused on mental-states, too focused on states of the world, or weights the different states in an unjustifiable manner. Other criticisms are leveled against the different theories of well-being as well, many of them highly damaging.²⁰ Nevertheless, my goal here is not to deal a decisive blow to any well-being theory. Instead, by arguing that each theory can be criticized for where it lies along the subjective-objective spectrum, I show that there is no hope for any satisfactory resolution of the differences that motivate the different theories. As long as there is disagreement about where the focus of the theory needs to lie on this spectrum, there will remain a disagreement among the proponents of the different theories.

¹⁹This continuum view is a more nuanced view of the objective-subjective distinction that has been discussed extensively in the literature (see (Griffin, 1986; Sumner, 1996; Tiberius, 2007; Woodard, 2012)).

²⁰For some arguments against preference-satisfaction theories of well-being see Hausman (2012); Feldman (2010); Sumner (1996); Parfit (1984); Griffin (1986). For arguments against objective-list theories see Feldman (2010); Sumner (1996); Griffin (1986) and for arguments against mental-state theories see Nozick (1974); Sen (1999); Angner (2012).

2.4.1 Mental-states

When we look at mental-states theories from the perspective of the internal-external spectrum the central criticism that can be lobbied against mental-states is that they give no weight to the external world in evaluating well-being. Robert Nozick, who provides the best known criticism against mental-states theories of well-being, attacks mental-states on account of their focusing solely on the internal subjective world of individuals' mental states at the cost of a total lack of attention to the external objective state of the world. In Robert Nozick's famous 'Experience Machine' (Nozick, 1974) thought experiment individuals have the option of experiencing anything positive sensation. If despite such promising experiences people do not want to plug in to the machine, what seems to follow is that other things matter to our well-being besides positive hedonic experiences, and therefore hedonism is false. Nozick needs to create such a fanciful science fiction type case, because in regular everyday cases it is difficult to determine with much certainty that there are any states or events that both seem intuitively relevant to our well-being and have no effect on our subjective mental-states. We would be hard pressed to find any plausibly relevant situations in which we can clearly divorce what appears to be affecting a person's well-being from it having an effect on her mental-states.

The experience machine has at least two drawbacks. First, it depends on the empirical claim that people do not want to 'plug in.' As Dan Weijers (2013) argues, the hypothetical case Nozick uses incorporates several irrelevant factors when used to test people's intuitions about whether well-being is constituted by mental-states, as well as elicits a status quo bias. Weijers argues that it is possible to control for these factors. Imaginative resistance can be addressed by adding more depth to the description of the machine experience, such as some hardship (in order to appreciate good times) and unpredictable experiences (in order to enjoy the unexpected). Irrelevant factors, such as

the effect of the decision on one's family or society, can be eliminated by explicitly asking to ignore those. A status quo bias for one's own life trajectory is avoided by framing the scenario in terms of the well-being of a stranger. Taken all these adjustments together, Weijers found that respondents were split down the middle on whether to connect to the experience machine. Thus, the adjusted experience machine does not provide strong evidence either to refute or support mental-states theories of well-being.

Second, the experience machine can be seen as too hypothetical to be of any interest. We might worry that whatever we think about science fiction cases like this one has no bearing on well-being in practical real-world cases. A more plausible case is that of a secretly cheating spouse. We might want to say that the cheated on individual is harmed by being cheated on, despite being ignorant of her spouse's infidelity. This would contradict mental-states accounts and be motivated by a view that well-being depends on the external world as well. Even if we stipulate that there are no effects on the individual's mental-states in the cheating spouse case, I suspect most people would nevertheless think that her life is going worse for her, than if things were exactly the same except that she was not being cheated on. For the proponents of mental-states theories, biting the bullet in this case is of no particular difficulty. They would simply claim that her life is not any worse for being cheated on without her knowledge.

Amartya Sen (1999, p. 14) provides some more realistic cases, cases that have significant relevance to public policy. Sen thinks hedonism is problematic because "[a] person who is ill-fed, undernourished, unsheltered and ill can still be high up in the scale of happiness or desire-fulfillment if he or she has learned to have realistic desires and to take pleasure in small mercies." If such a person can be said to be doing well, then there seems to be something problematic about hedonism. Our tendency is to say that person has adapted as best as she can to poor life circumstances, and she is making the best of a bad situation, but that does not mean she is doing well:

The destitute thrown into beggary, the vulnerable landless labourer precariously surviving at the edge of subsistence, the over-worked domestic servant working round the clock, the subdued and subjugated housewife reconciled to her role and her fate, all tend to come to terms with their respective predicaments. (p. 15)

If Sen is right that individuals can fully come to terms with their oppressive life conditions, then mental-states theories have some counter-intuitive implications.²¹ Mental-states can either be improved by improving the state of the world for individuals, or by increasing individuals' ability to adapt their mental states to the disagreeable state of the world. While making lemonade when life hands you lemons might not be a counter-intuitive way to improve one's well-being, what is counter-intuitive is that changing ones objective life circumstances and adjusting ones expectations to bad circumstances are on par as ways to improve one's well-being. In fact, if one can become delusional into believing that their objective circumstances are great and so be happy about their life, that will be indistinguishable from someone who enjoys the privilege of objective good life circumstances and is also happy with her life.

2.4.2 Objective-List

The need to connect one's well-being to the world leads us to objective-list theories of well-being. Nevertheless, while mental-states theories fail to pay attention to the external state of the world, objective-list theories can be faulted for paying too little attention to internal mental states. Whatever goes on the objective list need not depend on the individual's internal mental states. Most things on the list will reflect the individual's objective conditions in the world. For example, Martha Nussbaum's version of the Capability Approach²² enumerates the ten things on the objective list.

²¹There is a lot of empirical research that suggests that Sen is right, beginning with Brickman et al. (1978).

²²Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach differs in some significant ways from Amartya Sens version of the Capability Approach. Sumner (1996, pp. 60-8) argues that while Sens capabilities approach seems at

Nussbaum's basic capabilities are: (i) Life, (ii) Bodily Health, (iii) Bodily Integrity, (iv) Sense, Imagination and Thought, (v) Emotions, (vi) Practical Reason, (vii) Affiliation, (viii) Other Species, (ix) Play, (x) Control over One's Environment (Political & Material) (Nussbaum, 2000, pp. 78-80). Because objective-list theories focus predominately on objective states of the world, they can be criticized for paying too little attention to an individual's internal mental state. The elements on an objective list are taken to be conducive to an individual's well-being regardless of whether she endorses these things. Do these things make her happier? Does she have a preference or a desire for them? Since it is an objective list, such things need not matter.

Even if an objective list includes an element of happiness or desires in the list, as Nussbaum's account does (capabilities (v) Emotions, and (vi) Practical Reason), this does not solve the endorsement problem. An objective list that takes happiness as one more element on the list can still take an objective good, e.g. health, to be good for a person regardless of whether the person takes health to be beneficial to her, whether she desires it or whether it makes her happy. A simple objective list would thus deem a person who voluntarily fasts and may be just as deprived of food and nourishment as a famine-stricken victim, as suffering from the same low level of well-being according to that element on the list (Sen, 2009, p. 237). Granted, the faster's satisfied desire would have some weight in ascertaining her well-being. But reducing desires to one more item on a list that needs to be weighed against other items seems to be losing something.²³

Some hybrid theories have been proposed to overcome the challenge of integrating external state of the world objects on the list with initial mental states. While above I discussed how the two can be jointly sufficient, in a way that does not seem to alleviate the worry, one can consider both things being jointly necessary. Shelly Kagan (2009)

first to be objective, its reliance on the individual's valuation of the various 'beings and doings in order to discern between those that are intrinsically valuable and those that are not, makes it subjective in nature.

²³Sen views the problem as a stemming from a focus on functionings rather than capabilities.

proposes such a hybrid view according to which a person is well off if and only if she has objective goods in her life and she takes pleasure in them. Sumner's 'Authentic Happiness' theory views well-being as constituted for an individual by a satisfaction with her life that she authentically endorses (Sumner, 1996, p. 139). While both these theories as presented here require a significant amount of clarification, they both contain a component of mental-states—taking pleasure and endorsed life satisfaction respectively—as well as a state-of-the-world component—objective goods and *authentic* endorsement.

An alternative way of connecting between states of the world and mental states is to follow a preference-satisfaction theory of well-being, which I now turn to discuss.

2.4.3 Preference-satisfaction

A preference-satisfaction²⁴ theory of well-being, in its simplest form, states that what is good for us is the satisfaction of our *actual* preferences or desires. There are a variety of reasons to think that such a theory of what constitutes well-being is too simple.

Depending on how we parse desires, we might either claim that factual mistakes sometimes cause us not to satisfy our desires, or that satisfying our desires sometimes do not leave us better off because of mistakes concerning more fundamental desires. For example, I might desire to quench my thirst, and I mistakenly believe that the clear liquid in a glass in front of me is water rather than bleach. Alternatively, I might desire to drink the clear liquid in a glass in front of me, because I believe it will quench my thirst, yet it is in fact bleach and will cause me harm. These, in addition to lacking the proper concepts to define our desires, are variants of the epistemic challenge to desire-satisfaction that Griffin (1986, pp. 10-2) raises.

Another kind of factual mistake pertains to how satisfying a desire will make us feel. This type of mistake, while factual in nature, deserves its own mention because it

²⁴I use preference-satisfaction and desire-satisfaction interchangeably.

is not a mistake about the external world (which includes our bodies in it), but rather it makes clear the prospective nature of desires and the problems that arise out of it. According to Sumner (1996, p. 129), “[b]ecause a desire is always for some future state of affairs, at best it represents our *ex ante* expectation that the state will benefit us. But this expectation may be disappointed by our *ex post* experience of the state.” The prospective nature of desires creates this problem, which is why many turn to idealized or informed preferences.

Yet idealized or informed desired accounts suffers from additional problems. Even if we disregard the practical problems of how ideal preferences are to be understood, what the relevant information is, who the ideal advisor is, what they know, how the advisor relates to the actual person, Krister Bykvist (2014, p. 9) worries that the problem with “only counting ideal preferences is that actual preferences are completely ignored.” Similarly, Griffin (1986, p. 11) argues that “[u]tility must, it seems, be tied at least to desires that are actual when satisfied.” It is hard to get the balance between actual and informed desires quite right. To be plausible, the informed-desire account has to get right the balance between actual and informed desires so that individuals actually desire what they get.”

Regardless of degree of information, there is a central problem that preference-satisfaction accounts share. Forming preferences is a subjective exercise that occurs within the individual, while whether the preferences are satisfied is a matter of the state of the world.²⁵ This disjoint nature of preferences and their satisfaction raises two concerns that are somewhat related: First, the individual only needs to experience the desire, but not its satisfaction which is a world state. Second, desires and their satisfaction can be spatio-temporally disjoint, leading to problems in when (and where) well-being is

²⁵Some preference-satisfaction accounts focus on whether the individual *believes* that her preferences are satisfied, rather than whether they actually are. Such accounts share the same problems that mental-states theories have.

increased.

First, as Sumner (1996, p. 125) discusses, there is the failure to meet with an experience requirement for desire satisfaction. Desires can range over spatially and temporally remote states of affairs that the individual does not have experience or knowledge of whether they obtained. I can remain ignorant of whether my desire that the Amur Leopard not go extinct is satisfied. If I do not know whether my desires are satisfied it seems that their satisfaction cannot have an effect on my well-being. Griffin (1986, p. 23) also captured this worry: “The real trouble is our counting the fulfillment of aims even if (as it seems we must) we do not require that fulfillment enter experience.” This disconnect between the satisfaction of our desire and our experience of this satisfaction also means that preference-satisfaction theories of well-being do not have the resources to cope with disinterested, or other-regarding preferences. The satisfaction of my desire for a stranger I meet on the train to succeed in life, where her success has no effect on me (Parfit, 1984), seems to be irrelevant for my own well-being, both because I will have no knowledge of it and because intuitively her life has no relevance to mine. Any attempt to avert this consequence by holding that a “state of affairs benefits me whenever it satisfies some self-interested desire on my part. But any such qualification of the theory would be patently circular.” (Sumner, 1996, p. 135)

Second, because desires and their satisfaction can be spatially and temporally disjoint, it is not clear when and where well-being is increased. A person can form a desire that will be satisfied in the future, a future in which she no longer has the desire. Has her well-being increased when the old desire is satisfied? If so, when? A person can also form new desires about past events that occurred. Does she retroactively increase her well-being or does her well-being increase at the moment the desire is formed? As Bykvist (2014, p. 11) puts it: “This diachronic nature of our preferences can create problems when the preferences change from one time to another.” In a similar vein, Ben

Bradley (2009) argues that preference-satisfaction theories cannot account for when a change to well-being occurs. Since such accounts rely on the conjunction of propositional attitude (e.g. desire), which can occur at t_1 , and the object of that attitude being true, which can occur at a different time t_2 , a person's well-being at a given moment is not wholly determined by what obtains at that moment. Bradley argues that the lack of a definite level of well-being at a given moment is a problematic aspect of correspondence theories.²⁶

Taking both issues together, the problem arises when desires are satisfied after death. We definitely do not have during our lifetime knowledge of the satisfaction of our desires, and either our well-being increases posthumously, or it increases because of events that occur posthumously. I take it that posthumous effects on well-being seem at least *prima facie* problematic, even though some argue that they are not (see (Feinberg, 1984, pp. 83-9)). These two worries both stem from the lack of connection between desires and my experience. As Griffin argues “the posthumous cases are merely the most dramatic instances in which the fulfillment of a desire fails to benefit us because it has no impact, direct or indirect, on our experience.” (127) I take it that it is not just the lack of experience that Griffin observes, but also the diachronic nature of preference-satisfaction that Bradley and Bykvist flag.

2.5 Moving beyond disagreement

The disagreement on the correct way to characterize well-being constitutes the first problem facing policy-makers when trying to decide what measure to use to guide their well-being policies. The disagreement among explanatory theories of well-being arises because well-being is what Nancy Cartwright, following Otto Neurath, calls a

²⁶Bradley's criticism obtains only so far as we are interested in a definite momentary well-being requirement. His criticism falls flat if we are interested in the whole-life nature of well-being.

Ballung concept (Cartwright et al., 2008; Cartwright and Bradburn, 2012). A *Ballung* concept is a concept with various different clustering but no central core. The term comes from the German term for a congested urban area a *Ballungsgebiet* (Cartwright et al., 2008). Although well-being is a *Ballung* concept with no central core, each theory of well-being aims to demarcate a different area of the *Ballung* concept as what constitutes the central core of the well-being concept. Since different theories of well-being demarcate different areas as the central core, these theories will characterize the concept of well-being differently.²⁷

To illustrate what being a *Ballung* concept entails, consider the following example.²⁸ Both affiliation with others and relation with other species are on Nussbaum's list of capabilities (Nussbaum, 2000), which can be considered an objective-list theory. Such an objective-list would, for example, view both spending the holiday with one's family and owning a pet as conducive to a person's well-being. Bodily health is also on Nussbaum's list and so smoking cigarettes, for example, would be considered a harm. By contrast, according to a preference-satisfaction theory of well-being, if a person has a preference for smoking and spending time with her family, these things are conducive to her well-being, while if she has a preference to avoid other species, owning a pet will reduce her well-being. Yet it is possible that according to a mental-state theory of well-being, owning a pet, even if a person does not want to, will still give her a 'warm fuzzy feeling' that will be conducive to her well-being. Alternatively, if smoking cigarettes, while unhealthy, will make a person happier by being more relaxed, it too is conducive to her well-being. Lastly, even if a person has a preference to spend time with her family, yet it makes her stressed out and miserable, then this reduces her well-being.

²⁷One reason that there are so many counterexamples to theories of well-being is that well-being is a concept that lacks a central core, yet theories of well-being demarcate some area of the well-being concept as the central core. Trivially, if no core actually exists it is not very surprising that there are many examples that fall outside the non-existing core.

²⁸This is a toy example that is meant merely as an illustration of the idea, *not* to deal with complications that arise for each theory.

This is illustrated in the following table:

Table 2.2: comparing different theories

	Family	Pet	Smoking
OL	Y	Y	N
PS	Y	N	Y
MS	N	Y	Y

This example is meant to illustrate that different theories of well-being can have some agreement and some disagreement between different groups of theories, without there being any universal agreement on any core.²⁹ Because of its nature as a *Ballung* concept, how to characterize well-being poses a problem. There is no agreement on what constitutes well-being, and no agreement on the question appears to be forming any time soon. As a result, it is not clear what theory, among the many available, is the most appropriate theory of well-being for policy-makers to turn to.

One way to proceed is to consider the different ways of characterizing well-being as applying to different areas of well-being and thus not in competition at all. By analogy, the concept of ‘responsibility’ might be divided into various types of responsibility that need not be in competition with each other. For example, ‘causal responsibility’ and ‘moral responsibility’ are related, though since they do not purport to be about the same thing, arguing which one is ‘correct’ would be misguided.³⁰ Such an approach would suggest a variabilist view of well-being. Anna Alexandrova (2012b) argues for what she calls a methodological thesis of well-being variabilism (WBV), which is committed to the claims that: (1) a general notion of well-being is not uniquely useful, and (2) different substantive theories of well-being can be appropriate to use depending on

²⁹It might be the case that judgments regarding well-being, *at the concept’s core*, are all similar, regardless of theory. To show that this is not the case, however, would require systematically providing counterexamples to any claim that some *x* is necessary for well-being, regardless of theory. This is beyond my aims or ability.

³⁰I thank Saba Bazargan for this point.

context. Alexandrova attacks the view that well-being only concerns the most general aspect of prudential life, what she calls the “death-bed assumption,” as well as the view that a theory of well-being can cover all and only cases of well-being, what she calls the “uniqueness assumption.”

Alexandrova makes a compelling case that everyday discourse, scientific discourse and philosophical discourse talk past each other with respect to well-being. However, Alexandrova takes a stand on what it is that policy-makers are, and perhaps should be, interested with respect to well-being, namely, not what philosophers think of as well-being. Alexandrova seems to view the interest of science and policy in domains of well-being as more or less aligned. This need not be the case. While a lot of well-being policy might be interested in aspects of well-being that are contextual, it also is reasonable for policy-makers to be interested in well-being as it is understood by philosophers—in the life-as-a-whole context. If this is true, then regardless of whether one is a varibilist about well-being the way Alexandrova is, one needs to figure out how to characterize the well-being in the life-as-a-whole context.³¹ I attempt to make sense of such an effort in this dissertation.

Even if there is a way to contextualize the different ways philosophers characterize well-being and avoid them from competing, proponents of different characterization do view them as in competition. The different characterization purport to characterize the *same* thing, namely well-being as a whole. Insofar as this is what the different characterizations are purported to do, we face a difficulty. This problem is exacerbated when policy-makers are interested in well-being policy purport to be interested in promoting well-being as a whole, not in promoting different aspects of well-being.

While there is substantive disagreement between explanatory theories of well-being on what constitutes well-being, this need not entail that there exists as much

³¹I set aside whether this is the only plausible way to understand well-being or whether Alexandrova is right and it is merely one of many well-being contexts.

disagreement among enumerative theories regarding what things are conducive or deleterious to well-being. If a person has a preference to be healthy, being healthy makes her happy and health is an element on an objective list, then it need not matter what theory of well-being one subscribes to; being healthy is conducive to well-being.³² Thus, there is also room for broad agreement on many things being either conducive or deleterious to people's well-being. Real people generally have preferences for things that also cause them pleasure, and these generally are viewed by others as beneficial for that person. The exceptions to these are real as well, and are helpful when trying to figure out what constitutes well-being.

For philosophers that aim to figure out truths about explanatory theories of well-being what matters is not what things are conducive to well-being, but rather what constitutes well-being. By contrast, for policy-makers that aim to increase individual well-being, what matters is not what explanatory theory is correct about what constitutes well-being, but rather what enumerative theory tells us are the things that public policy can do will be conducive to well-being. While the disagreement among explanatory theories is real and might be significant in a variety of ways, it need not much concern policy-makers who aim to promote well-being through public policy. Policy-makers need not take a stand on what the correct explanatory theory of well-being is because many of the disagreements among theories get washed out when moving from theory to measurement to public policy.

In the next chapter I argue that while the characterization problem is difficult enough, even if it were settled, we would face a second problem—the operationalization

³²However, things are not so simple. Not everyone prefers being healthy, being healthy might be a cause of displeasure for some, and not all objective lists need to list health as one of their elements. Furthermore, for many, health comes at a cost; one person might prefer a bacon-centered diet over keeping her cholesterol levels in check, another might gain much more pleasure from watching reruns of *Seinfeld* than jogging in the park and for a third health might come at the cost of affiliations with others. Of course health itself is a complex and multifaceted concept, and figuring out if agreement among theories regarding health is as substantial as might first appear is not my goal here.

problem. Even if we characterize well-being a certain way, what measure is most appropriate to use as an operationalization of that characterization requires a substantive account that connects a measure to a characterization. Such accounts are currently lacking in the literature.

Chapter 3

The operationalization problem

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I introduced the characterization problem that is generated by the disagreement among theories of well-being as to what constitutes well-being. I argued that the characterization problem is here to stay. Once isolated, the significance of the characterization problem is clear. Nevertheless, the characterization problem is often dealt with without being separated from another problem—why we should think that a particular measure is a good operationalization of a given characterization of well-being. When this problem, which I call the operationalization problem, is not separated from the characterization problem, confusion arise. So much so that the social scientists which construct different measures often seem to talk past each other when arguing for and against their different measures. This is because they often fail to distinguish the need to characterize well-being from the need to operationalize that characterization through a measure.

Yet, even when the distinction is made, those who advocate using a measure provide only a cursory account of why their chosen measure is an adequate operational-

ization of well-being characterized a certain way. To date, there is a peculiar lack of effort to try to provide accounts in defense of the measures as operationalizations of some way of characterizing well-being. For the purpose of discussing the operationalization problem I assume away the problem of characterization (though I reintroduce it in the last section of this chapter).

In §2 I assume that the correct characterization of well-being is as constituted by preference-satisfaction. In §3 I ask whether well-being is better operationalized by economic preference-based measures (as Erik Angner (2012) and Matthew Adler (2013) think) or whether SWB measures are more appropriate to use. In §4 and §5 I introduce two accounts that can be seen as models for how a certain operationalization of well-being can be defended; Arthur Pigou's and Daniel Kahneman's. In §6 I argue that such accounts are sorely needed. §7 makes clear how the difficulties are compounded when the characterization problem is reintroduced.

3.2 Characterizing well-being as constituted by preference satisfaction

If we want to ask why we should think that a particular measure is a good operationalization of a given characterization of well-being, it will make our lives much simpler to assume that we have a characterization of well-being in hand, and then merely ask why we should think that a particular measure does a good job representing that characterization. If, for example, we assume a mental-states theory of well-being, then we can ask why we should think that a particular measure, for example a SWB measure, is a good operationalization of a mental-states theory of well-being. SWB measures focus on how an individual evaluates how well her life is going for her, which can seem to be equatable with her mental state. Consequently, it can seem plausible that we have

good reason to think that a SWB measure is a good operationalization of a mental-states characterization of well-being. Diener et al. (2009), for example, think that SWB measures are useful for well-being public policy, because they hold what they consider to be neither a unique nor an unusual definition of well-being, one which they believe many would agree on (p. 11). They take people to have well-being “only when they believe that their life is going well, regardless of whether that life has pleasure, material comforts, a sense of meaning, or any other *objective* feature that has been specified as essential for well-being” (p. 11).

However, two authors, Erik Angner and Matthew Adler, argue that it would be a mistake to appeal to mental-states theories of well-being to defend the use of SWB measures because mental-states theories are problematic.

Angner (2011), in his paper “Are subjective measures of well-being ‘direct’?”, argues against what he calls the ‘argument from directness’ that is endorsed by proponents of SWB measures for policy purposes, according to which because SWB measures are ‘direct measures of well-being while economic measures are not, SWB measures are a better way to operationalize well-being better than economic measures.¹ Angner, who is a proponent of preference-satisfaction accounts of well-being (see (Angner, 2012)), argues that the argument from directness ultimately fails because it wrongly assumes that well-being is constituted by subjective mental-states. Angner cites Nussbaum (2008) when he claims that philosophers have virtually unanimously rejected simple mental-states accounts of well-being, and he takes the recent efforts to rehabilitate mental-states accounts as moving away from the idea that well-being is identical to subjectively experienced mental states (p. 125). Angner’s view about the current state of hedonism is in line with Roger Crisp’s view that “these days hedonism receives little philosophical attention, and students are warned off it early on in their studies, often with a reference

¹As Angner notes, his opponents do not explicitly define ‘directness in the context of measurement. This is gap that Angner fills.

to Nozick (Crisp, 2006, p. 99), although Crisp laments these ‘unkind’ sentiments towards hedonism.² Since he rejects the view that well-being is constituted by mental-states, Angner concludes that the premise that well-being is constituted by mental-states is false, and consequently that the argument from directness is unsound.

In “Happiness Surveys and Public Policy: What’s the Use?” Adler (2013) argues, like Angner, that appealing to a mental-states cannot defend the use of SWB measures in public policy (Adler’s strong “experience-quality” (EQ) defense of well-being) because mental-states are a problematic philosophical account of well-being (p. 1568). Adler claims that “the view [mental-states] fell into philosophical disfavor” and that for a time Nozick’s experience machine (Nozick, 1974) was seen as a decisive refutation of mental-states accounts of well-being (p. 1570). While Adler acknowledges that over the last decade some philosophers pushed back, mental-states accounts of well-being are a “philosophically controversial position” (p. 1570) and appealing to them offers a poor defense of SWB measures.³

To get traction on the question of which well-being measure to use we need well-articulated accounts in defense of the different measures. Following Angner and Adler’s lead, I assume in this section that mental-states theories of well-being are indeed problematic, and that preference-satisfaction theories are correct. By making such an assumption I am choosing to set aside the characterization problem for the time being. On such an assumption it would be mistaken to defend the use of SWB measures in well-being policy by appealing to mental-states theories. However, if it is possible to defend SWB measures by appealing to preference-satisfaction accounts, as both turn to try, then it seems that the use of SWB measures for public policy purposes can be

²The reference is to Robert Nozick’s experience machine thought experiment. See Nozick (1974).

³Adler supports his claim that mental-states are problematic by pointing out that “two widely accepted classes of well-being accounts preferentialism... and the objective-good approach reject the experientialism [mental-states] requirement” (p. 1570-1). Since these are competing characterizations of well-being it comes as no surprise that they contradict mental-states accounts. However, this does not support Adler’s claim that mental-states accounts are not a good way to characterize well-being.

adequately defended for anyone who holds a preference-satisfaction account.

Angner (2009) makes the point that it might be possible to defend SWB measures as representing well-being understood to be constituted by something other than mental-states:

If it turned out that mental state accounts are inadequate, this would constitute *prima facie* evidence against the subjective measures of well-being (since they were designed to represent mental states). It would not constitute proof, however, since it would remain possible for subjective measures to represent well-being properly understood. (p. 569)

Angner (2011) proposes that even if we accept that mental-states do not constitute well-being, SWB measures might still be useful measures of well-being as long as we treat SWB measures as “(imperfect) indirect measures of well-being” (p. 126). On this line of reasoning, Angner (2012) argues that “Happiness-based measures of well-being can be used without assuming that happiness is constitutive of or “essential to” well-being. Instead, happiness matters because people desire it for its own sake because they want it or because they desire things that are sufficiently correlated with or suitably causally connected to it.” (p. 18)

Adler discusses the preference-realization defense of SWB, which takes an individual’s self-reported SWB as a defeasible indicator of her preference realization (or satisfaction). According to Adler, the idea behind the preference-realization defense is that individuals have pretty good epistemic access to the extent to which their preferences are realized. This knowledge, in turn, affects their mental states so that the better their preferences are realized, the higher they will rank their SWB. As a result, individuals’ mental states can be taken to reflect the realization of their preferences and thus their well-being.⁴

⁴Adler subsequently rejects the preference-realization defense for reasons which will be discussed in §6.

Both Angner and Adler demonstrate the potential for disentangling the defense of SWB measures from a commitment to mental-states theory of well-being. This is an important step towards clarifying that one does not have to subscribe to a mental-states theory of well-being to defend the use of SWB measures. Nevertheless, it is possible to extend Angner's and Adler's arguments both with respect to other possible defenses for using SWB measures, as well as with respect to possible defenses available for other measures.⁵ In the next section I argue that extending Angner's and Adler's arguments highlights the under-discussed problem of determining which measure to use to operationalize a given characterization of well-being.

3.3 The operationalization problem emerges

Following Angner and Adler's lead and adopting a preference-satisfaction theory of well-being, we see that such a theory of well-being can be represented both by traditional economic measures and SWB measures. Thus, even if we assume that well-being is constituted by preference-satisfaction, we need to decide which measure better represents such a characterization. However, Angner's and Adler's accounts are not sufficiently developed to convince us to use either measure (they don't mean them to be). Why are these accounts unconvincing and what would a convincing account look like?

The problem is similar to what Hasok Chang (2004) calls the "problem of nomic measurement":

1. We want to measure quantity *X*.
2. Quantity *X* is not directly observable, so we infer it from another quantity *Y*, which is directly observable. (See "The Validation of Standards" in the analysis part for a full discussion of the exact meaning of "observability.")

⁵This is not to fault them for not doing this. Angner (2011) focuses on arguing against the argument from directness and Adler (2013) focuses on arguing in favor of economic measures over SWB measures.

3. For this inference we need a law that expresses X as a function of Y , as follows: $X = f(Y)$.
4. The form of this function f cannot be discovered or tested empirically, because that would involve knowing the values of both Y and X , and X is the unknown variable that we are trying to measure.

This circularity is probably the most crippling form of the theory-ladenness of observation. (p. 59-60)

Chang's discussion of temperature enjoys the advantages of hindsight. He discusses the problem of nomic measurement within the context of a historical narrative of the development of temperature measurement, where it proves to be useful for making sense of a particular episode in the history of science. When we try to apply Chang's operationalization framework to well-being measurement as it develops it might simply be inappropriate. Nevertheless, Chang's framework can not only increase our understanding as observers (as in the case of temperature), but also help guide the development of the debate itself. This is one place where history and philosophy of science can aid both social science and public policy.

In the context of well-being measures, proposed measures of well-being can be thought of as quantity Y whereas well-being itself can be thought of as quantity X . The question then is how to figure out if there is a function f , and what it is, without being able to measure quantity X directly. This is the challenge of operationalization: "to link abstract theoretical structures to concrete physical operations (197)."

Angner and Adler's unconvincing accounts (again, they were not intended as fully fleshed out accounts by their authors) represent cursory attempts to link an abstract theoretical structure—preference-satisfaction, with concrete physical operations—SWB or economic measures. If we are ever to decide which of the different measures (Y) better represents some characterization of well-being (X), we need to look at how the proponents of the different measures account for the link between a given characterization of well-being and the measure they champion. We need fully fleshed out accounts in

defense of some measures that can then be assessed. Once such accounts are on the table, their validity can be judged by assessing the correspondence between the different levels of the operationalization.

But perhaps there is no need to compare the accounts in favor of different measures at all. Currently, well-being is operationalized in a variety of ways. One way of dealing with the multiplicity of measures is to take what Chang calls, following P.W. Bridgman (1927), an operationalist approach. According to Bridgman: “In *principle* the operations by which length is measured should be *uniquely* specified. If we have more than one set of operations, we have more than one concept, and strictly there should be a separate name to correspond to each different set of operations” (p. 10; *emphases original*). In the well-being literature Anna Alexandrova (2012a,b) can be thought of as in favor of such an approach when she argues for well-being variabilism and contextualism. For example, many economists, when pressed, do not think that GDP is necessarily linked to well-being, and simply view GDP as measuring national economic *production*. As Nordhaus and Tobin (1972, p. 4) succinctly put it: “GNP is not a measure of economic welfare... Economists all know that, and yet their everyday use of GNP as the standard measure of economic performance apparently conveys the impression that they are evangelistic worshippers [*sic.*] of GNP.”

In a similar vein we could simply view SWB measures as measuring *subjective* well-being, which need not be linked in any way to well-being.⁶ O’Donnell et al. (2014) takes this approach, when they say that “there remain differences about how to define ‘overall wellbeing’” (p. 10). Instead of trying to tackle well-being, they focus on happiness and life satisfaction: “One solution is to use measures of subjective wellbeing (sometimes expressed as SWB) by which we mean the answers to questions about people’s happiness and satisfaction with their lives.” However, they are not being entirely clear that this is

⁶Another option is claiming, like Daniel Kahneman, that is merely one aspect of well-being. This option is discussed in §5.

all they are presuming to do, since they conclude by saying “So in this report we focus on subjective wellbeing or what, for short, we shall often simply call ‘wellbeing’.” (p. 10). Thus it would seem that they are implicitly assuming that well-being is constituted by life satisfaction, rather than avoiding taking a stand on the issue.

Yet this operationalist approach, while avoiding any dispute by taking each measure as measuring a distinct and different concept, also avoids providing policy-makers with helpful guidance. Policy-makers who are interested in promoting well-being as a whole through policies, are interested in promoting *well-being*, not economic production or subjective well-being.⁷ Insofar as policy-makers are interested in well-being as a whole, the operationalist account does not allow for there to be an answer to their question. What is needed, then, is an account of why we should think that a certain measure is a good operationalization of a given characterization of well-being, or in Chang’s terminology, we need to know what the form of function f is. Once we have such an account (or function) in favor of some measures, we can then compare the accounts and decide which is more plausible. I will expand on the evaluation of accounts shortly, but first I discuss two accounts (by Arthur Pigou and Daniel Kahneman) that give us a sense of what such an account ought to look like.

3.4 Pigou’s account of GDP

Since GDP per capita has been around for a while (Gross National Product (GNP), the predecessor of GDP, was first used in the US in 1942 (Coyle, 2014)), it is not surprising that there have been attempts to provide accounts of its link to well-being (although as Nordhaus and Tobin (1972) argue, GDP can be measured for other reasons

⁷I do not actually argue against Alexandrova, as I begin by stipulating that policy-makers are interested in well-being as a whole (or a philosophical conception of well-being), whereas Alexandrova’s variabilist approach views what she calls this “death bed” view of well-being as just a partial way of thinking of well-being that is prominent among philosophers but nowhere else.

than seeking to measure well-being). One account to defend GDP as a measure of well-being characterized by preference-satisfaction is provided by Arthur Pigou (1920), a Cambridge economist in the first half of the 20th century, perhaps best known for his discussion of externalities and what is known as the ‘Pigouvian tax’ to deal with them.⁸

Before getting into the practicalities of Pigou’s discussion, it actually is not clear what theory of well-being Pigou is working with. Pigou talks about satisfaction (p. 23-4) and the desires for satisfaction, but it is not clear if he uses satisfaction in the sense of satisfaction of desires, or in the sense of something more akin to enjoyment. While the term is used in the literature today with respect to desires, Pigou lays down earlier what he considers a dogmatic proposition, that “welfare includes states of consciousness only” (p. 10). It is uncontroversial that mental-states (including hedonic) theories of well-being deal solely with such states of consciousness. However, preference-satisfaction theories can be seen either as purely mental (see e.g. (Griffin, 1986)) or a combination of mental and state of the world (as discussed in Chapter 2). This lack of clarity notwithstanding, I will assume here that Pigou is assuming that well-being is constituted by satisfaction of desires in the standard sense, rather than with ‘satisfactions’ understood as pleasures, since this is how economists generally tend to view satisfaction.

Pigou’s account for why GDP per capita is a good measure of well-being characterized as preference-satisfaction proceeds in three central steps. First, he argues that the money a person is willing to expend on something directly measures the intensity of that person’s desire for the object, rather than directly measuring the extent of that things contribution to her (desire) satisfaction (p. 23). Pigou appropriately states that this distinction sometimes gets lost when using the term ‘utility’, however he does little to convince us that the money a person is prepared to offer for a thing indeed measures the intensity of her desire for it. This is one point at which further discussion is sorely

⁸More precisely, Pigou advocates using the national dividend, which is similar enough with respect to the basic reasoning from well-being theory to measure.

needed. Nevertheless, Pigou does convincingly argue that there are *defeasible* reasons to take a person's desires for things as indicating the degree to which her desires will be satisfied by obtaining that thing:

It is fair to suppose that *most* commodities, *especially those of wide consumption* that are required, as articles of food and clothing are, for direct personal use, will be wanted as a means to satisfaction, and will, consequently, be desired with intensities proportioned to the satisfactions they are expected to yield. For the most general purposes of economic analysis, therefore, not much harm is likely to be done by the current practice of regarding money demand price indifferently as the measure of a desire and as the measure of the satisfaction felt when the desired thing is obtained. (p. 24) [emphasis added]

But, Pigou acknowledges, this link does not always hold:

The substantial point is that we are entitled to use the comparative amounts of money which a person is prepared to offer for two different things as a test of the comparative satisfactions which these things will yield to him, only on condition that the ratio between the intensities of desire that he feels for the two is equal to the ratio between the amounts of satisfaction which their possession will yield to him. This condition, however, is not always fulfilled. (p. 23-4)

Next, Pigou focuses only on economic welfare, which he distinguishes from welfare as a whole. Pigou is aware that “[o]ur ultimate interest is, of course, in the effects which the various causes investigated are likely to have upon welfare as a whole.” (p. 11). Nevertheless, He takes it to be the case that “[t]he one obvious instrument of measurement available in social life is money. Hence, the range of our inquiry becomes restricted to that part of social welfare that can be brought directly or indirectly into relation with the measuring-rod of money.” (p. 11) This part of welfare is what Pigou calls economic welfare. He acknowledges that “no precise boundary between economic and non-economic welfare exists, yet the test of accessibility to a money measure serves well enough to set up a rough distinction.” (p. 11) By introducing this distinction Pigou

lowers his goals to something he believes is more attainable.⁹

Pigou is aware that whether economic welfare is a good substitute for welfare as a whole is a contingent matter, and that the effects economic welfare has on welfare as a whole can be canceled out by effects of other parts of welfare as a whole (11-2). Moreover, Pigou admits that the link between economic welfare and welfare as a whole, and subsequently his use of money as a useful measure for welfare as a whole, is based on an *assumption* that he is aware does not always hold:

The preceding discussion makes it plain that any rigid inference from effects on economic welfare to effects on total welfare is out of the question. In some fields the divergence between the two effects will be insignificant, but in others it will be very wide. Nevertheless, I submit that, in the absence of special knowledge, there is room for a judgment of probability. When we have ascertained the effect of any cause on economic welfare, we may, unless, of course, there is specific evidence to the contrary, regard this effect as *probably* equivalent in direction, though not in magnitude, to the effect on total welfare; and, when we have ascertained that the effect of one cause is more favourable than that of another cause to economic welfare, we may, on the same terms, conclude that the effect of this cause on total welfare is probably more favourable. In short, there is a presumption what Professor Edgeworth calls an “unverified probability” that qualitative conclusions about the effect of an economic cause upon economic welfare will hold good also of the effect on total welfare. This presumption is especially strong when experience suggests that the non-economic effects produced are likely to be small. But in all circumstances the burden of proof lies upon those who hold that the presumption should be overruled. (p. 20)

Thus far Pigou links desire-satisfaction to the intensity of desires, which he assumes can be measured by willingness to pay for the thing. He implicitly assumes that the wealthier an individual, the more money she will have to pay for things. Having more money will allow the individual to satisfy her desires to a greater degree, and increase her economic welfare, which can be viewed as a stand in for her welfare as a whole. Once this link is made clear, Pigou can then move to the macro level and argue that the richer a

⁹Perhaps if SWB measures were available during Pigou’s time he would advocate for them as measures of well-being.

nation, the higher the degree of welfare in that nation.

Pigou is seeking a way to measure economic welfare, not of individuals, but of nations. The reason is that his measurement search is motivated by the goal of advising policy, and to this end he is seeking to determine through a measurement tool—national dividend—what causal effects different policies have on economic welfare (p. 35).

The last step, then, is the move from the individual level to the national level, which is taken as a move from parts to a sum:

Just as economic welfare is that part of total welfare which can be brought directly or indirectly into relation with a money measure, so the national dividend... The two concepts, economic welfare and the national dividend, are thus co-ordinate, in such wise that any description of the content of one of them implies a corresponding description of the content of the other. [sic.] (p. 30)

Pigou is not as naive as to think that measuring the general economic welfare of a nation can tell us much about the economic welfare of individuals, and he provides several reasons to question the straightforwardness of such an inference. Nevertheless, he puts forth a proposition that:

Any cause which, without the exercise of compulsion or pressure upon people to make them work more than their wishes and interests dictate, increases productive efficiency, and, therewith, the average volume of the national dividend, provided that it neither injures the distribution nor augments the variability of the country's consumable income, will, in general, increase economic welfare. (p. 47)

There are several qualifications at play here, which demonstrate the caution Pigou exercises. The point, though is that Pigou provides an argued account for why we ought to use GDP as a measure of a preference-satisfaction characterization of well-being.

3.5 Kahneman's account of objective happiness

Like Pigou, Daniel Kahneman also does not presume to provide a measure of well-being as a whole, merely a measure of one component of well-being, what he calls 'objective happiness'. Perhaps Kahneman is even less aspirational than Pigou in that he avoids making claims as to whether objective happiness correlates pretty well with well-being as a whole, something Pigou holds (with some qualifications) regarding economic welfare.

Objective happiness (or experienced utility, Kahneman uses the two interchangeably) (Kahneman, 2000; Kahneman et al., 2004) is objective in the sense that it is an aggregation according to objective rules of subjective experiences during short moments of time. Traditionally, economists focus on expected utility, which is based on preferences the individual has and the expectation that fulfilling those preferences will make her better off. Kahneman instead, focuses on what he calls experienced utility, which he characterizes as a summation of moment-utilities. Moment utilities are represented "exclusively by measures of the affective state of individuals at particular moments in time" (p. 8). These affective states are a combination of valence and arousal, which while difficult to unify into a single ordinal ranking, are "tested by examining the correspondence between ranking of objects in explicit comparisons and ratings of the same objects, considered one at a time (see chapter 36) (p. 10)".

Kahneman uses his Day Reconstruction Method (DRM) to measure moment utility. Kahneman views the DRM as an imperfect way of approximating moment utility since it relies on remembered experienced utility, which might be subject to distorted memory. Nevertheless, this reliance on memory is far less than that required by life-satisfaction surveys. Kahneman thus provides a concrete image of the abstract concept—experienced utility, and matches this image with an actual system of entities

and operations—the Day Reconstruction Method. The way Kahneman provides an account that clarifies why he operationalizes experienced utility the way he does can serve as a model for how to argue for a match between a characterization of a concept and its operationalization. Without such arguments being made explicit, it will be difficult to make progress in the well-being measurement debate.

As far as our interest with measures of well-being is concerned, Kahneman's account suffers because of its equivocation between utility, happiness, experienced utility, total utility and objective happiness, none of which are well-being. All of these terms seem to be operationalized in a single way—exclusively by measures of the affective state of individuals at particular moments in time. As Kahneman's objective happiness is only meant to be a partial element of well-being, then operationalizing objective happiness gets us only a partial operationalization of well-being. Since our goal is a measure of well-being, rather than a measure of happiness, even if his measure is perfect, Kahneman only takes us part of the way.

Nevertheless, Kahneman does provide an account of how moment-utility can be used to measure a partially constitutive element of well-being. While there are several gaps that need filling out, Kahneman's account provides a sketch of what a good account could look like. Kahneman's account provides a reason for those in favor of a happiness-centered mental-states account of well-being to take objective happiness as a measure of well-being. It also provides reason for an objective-list account that takes happiness as an element on the list to view objective happiness as one measure that ought to be used.

While some might contest Kahneman's operationalization of happiness as positive affective state at a particular moment in time, it provides a basis for a serious discussion. How ought we evaluate Kahneman's account of experienced utility, or a similarly robust account in favor of a particular measure of well-being? It is unlikely that there is any decision procedure which we can algorithmically apply and get an unequivocal answer

in favor of measure x or y. Rather, the different accounts will need to be judged with respect to the plausibility of their auxiliary assumptions.

Kahneman's account, for example, relies on a claim about the accuracy of memory when it comes to an individual's experiences. The more distant in time the experience is, the less accurately it will be remembered by the individual. While this assumption sounds plausible, if it is wrong, or the accuracy is only marginally compromised, then it seems that his DRM cannot claim immediacy as an advantage over life-satisfaction surveys. Kahneman has reasons for thinking he is right about people's memory being unreliable, which come up in his discussion of the his colonoscopy (Redelmeier and Kahneman, 1996) and unpleasant sounds (Schreiber and Kahneman, 2000) studies. In these studies subjects' preferences correlated with a relatively high accuracy (.67) with what Kahneman terms the "peak-end rule," which takes the "average of the most intense level of pain reported during the procedure, and of the mean pain level reported over the last three minutes" (p. 676). Kahneman believes that if subjects' memories after the fact were reliable, they would not exhibit such preferences, but would instead prefer the least amount of moment dis-utility.

Kahneman's account also relies on self-reporting. If, as many economists think, self-reports are unreliable as evidence for what is being reported—in this case experienced utility, then that would count against Kahneman's account of experienced utility. It might be the case, for example, that some alternative way of measuring experienced utility, such as asking close friend and relatives about a person's state of mind or looking at the person's facial expressions, might provide more reliable evidence of experienced utility. It is an open question whether this is the case.

These are just some of the criticisms against Kahneman's account. Nevertheless, the point is that Kahneman provides an account at all, which can indeed be criticized. This is something relatively rare in the literature.

3.6 Deciding between competing accounts

Both Pigou and Kahneman provide detailed accounts of why their measure succeeds in measuring what they intend it to. Pigou provides an account of why the national dividend is a good measure of preference-satisfaction in the realm of economic welfare. Kahneman provides an account of why objective happiness is a good measure of a mental-state component of well-being. Although each conceives of well-being differently, neither presume to give us a measure of well-being as a whole. Since the two writers provide accounts of why their chosen measure succeeds in representing different things, comparing between them is comparing apples and oranges.

Nevertheless, these accounts are helpful in pointing us towards what we need from those advocating various measures as measures of well-being as a whole. If these advocates were to provide fully fleshed out accounts, it would then be possible to seriously examine the merits of each measure as an operationalization of some characterization of well-being. Without such positive accounts, all we are left with are negative arguments against different measures. While negative arguments are helpful in guiding us as to which measures seem to be poor operationalizations of which characterizations, in light of the variety of ways one can defend multiple measure as operationalizations of multiple characterizations, the process of elimination is a long one.

Imagine that Pigou and Kahneman are trying to argue for different measures (as they are), but as operationalizing the same characterization of well-being (which they are not). In such a case we could look at their different assumptions and evaluate which is more plausible. Does intensity of desire (as operationalized by willingness to pay) approximate extent of desire satisfaction as Pigou argues? Can we rely on self-reporting of experienced utility as Kahneman believes? Is economic welfare a decent stand in for welfare as a whole as Pigou claims? Is remembered experienced utility, even if only for

a day, reliable enough as Kahneman argues? By examining the assumptions that each account relies on, and comparing the plausibility of the conjunction of these assumptions, we can decide which account is more convincing.

By looking at the assumptions that support different accounts, we can judge the relative plausibility of these accounts. This is a comparative exercise. It is only meaningful to reject an account in favor of a given measure as an operationalization of well-being characterized a certain way when a more plausible account is at hand. It is important to consider how a variety of measures can be defended by different accounts of well-being because how well a measure can be defended by a given account is a comparative exercise. If we consider defending SWB by appealing to a preference-satisfaction account on its own, it might appear to be weak. However, the defenses of alternative measures might be as weak as Adler finds the defenses of SWB measures to be, or even weaker. If this turns out to be the case, then perhaps, even if Adler is right in all his criticisms of SWB, SWB measures are the best measures available. Adler addresses this point and claims that stated-preference surveys are a better way to operationalize preference-satisfaction better than SWB measures do (p. 1562-3).

To what extent one measure can be better defended by a given account of well-being than another measure also matters. If the difference is not significant, there might be other reasons to prefer one measure to another as a pragmatic concern. This is true even if, as Adler claims, stated-preference surveys dominate SWB measures as an operationalization of preference-satisfaction. It might be much easier to measure SWB than economic measures (I doubt that), or justifying policies to the public is easier with one measure rather than another. Thus, it not only matters which measure can better be defended by a given account of well-being, but also how much better.

Adler argues that despite the conceptual possibility of defending the use of SWB measures as measures of well-being for public policy if we assume that well-being is

constituted by preference-satisfaction, SWB measures are inferior to economic measures (and more specifically stated-preference surveys) and consequently should not be used. First, Adler argues that there are significant methodological obstacles to inferring willingness to pay / accept (WTP/WTA) from SWB: scale recalibration—different individuals rank similar preferences on different scales, preference heterogeneity—knowing a person’s preferences about one bundle give no indication about WTP for a different bundle, evaluation error—an answer given on a life-satisfaction survey does not match the person’s preferences due to a mistake on her part, and miscommunication—unmatched life-satisfaction answers and preferences due to a focus on things other than preferences. Second, attempting to defend the use of SWB surveys as imperfect evidence for preference-satisfaction fails because “SWB surveys have no advantages over stated-preference surveys and many disadvantages” (p. 1548).

Adler’s argument against using SWB as an operationalization of preference-satisfaction, focuses on SWB as a measure for eliciting an individual’s WTP/WTA, which is used to determine the monetary value of non-market goods. Adler does this because he views the WTP/WTA assignment of value to be one of the concrete policy tools of the SWB measures advocates. While the attempt to gauge the merits of a measure with respect to a concrete policy tool is laudable, Adler’s exclusive focus on SWB with respect to WTP/WTA commits him to the view that a preference-satisfaction characterization of well-being needs to be cashed out in monetary terms. Thus, rather than arguing against SWB as a operationalization of preference-satisfaction, Adler argues for the weaker conclusion that SWB is dominated by stated-preference surveys when used to evaluate WTP/WTA.

If an advocate of SWB measures were to take the time to provide the best account she can give in defense of SWB as an operationalization of preference-satisfaction (rather than the more limited WTP/WTA), then perhaps it would not be so straightforward

to reject SWB measures in favor of economic measures. Nevertheless, the spirit of Adler's exercise is well-received. It is beyond the scope of this chapter and the ability of the author to provide the strongest possible account in defense of SWB measures as a good way to operationalize well-being characterized as constituted by preference-satisfaction. The claim made here is that such an account needs to be provided for it to be possible to reasonably defend SWB measures as representing a preference-satisfaction characterization for well-being.

3.7 Complicating the matter: reintroducing the characterization problem

In this chapter I have assumed away the problem of characterization by stipulating that well-being is constituted by preference-satisfaction. However, by acknowledging that substantive disagreement about how to characterize well-being exists, we can see that the problem is exacerbated. Not only is there disagreement about how to operationalize a given characterization of well-being, there is also disagreement about how to characterize well-being in the first place.

If we do not assume that well-being is characterized by preference-satisfaction, and instead remain open to a variety of possible ways of characterizing well-being, we can see that different measures can be viewed as ways of operationalizing other characterization of well-being. Conceptually, any measure of well-being can be considered as an operationalization of any way of characterizing well-being. How well the measure does depends on how the measure functions as an operationalization of that characterization and whether the account supporting it relies on plausible assumptions.

If, as a contingent matter it turns out, for example, that all characterizations of well-being provide a better defense of economic measures than of SWB measures, that

seems like good reason to use economic measures regardless of which characterization of well-being we think is best. Alternatively, if for example, a mental-states characterization provides a vastly better defense of SWB measures than of any other measure, and only SWB measures are only mildly inferior to economic measures in the defense provided by a preference-satisfaction characterization of well-being, it might still be reasonable to support using SWB measures no matter what characterization of well-being one assumes. Even for those who are concerned solely with getting at the truth by measuring well-being using the correct measure, there can be trade-offs, like between false positives and false negatives, or being a little off on everyone vs. getting many spot on and others very far off.

By realizing that well-being characterizations and well-being measures can come apart, we can better understand what is at stake when choosing a specific measure or a specific characterization. We can better direct criticism appropriately to the adherents of a given measure or characterization, and we are better positioned to defend the view we hold.

This chapter only begins to scratch the surface of the possible ways of defending the use of measures of well-being as representing different theories of well-being. While Angner and Adler focus on a critique of appealing to either mental-states or preference-satisfaction characterizations of well-being to defend the use of SWB measures as measures of well-being in public policy, there is room for a much wider discussion. What criteria should policy-makers use to choose the best measure given a certain characterization of well-being? Given the philosophical disagreement surrounding characterizations of well-being, should policy-makers appeal to any particular characterization to defend their choice of measures at all? These are not easy questions and answering them satisfactory requires much more work. However, since this debate has a real impact on people's lives through its effects on public policy, it is imperative that it progress in a constructive

manner. Recognizing that such questions require answers before we can comfortably accept the choices policy-makers make with respect to well-being measures is a step in the right direction.

In the next chapter I discuss Richard Easterlin's findings on the divergence between measures of happiness and measures of income. I use this case to show that how one implicitly characterizes well-being and how one operationalizes that characterization can determine whether empirical findings like Easterlin's have significant implications for public policy, as he and his interlocutors believe.

Chapter 4

Ignoring Easterlin; why the Easterlin Paradox need not matter to public policy

4.1 Introduction

The characterization and operationalization problems, discussed in chapters 2 and 3, make it clear that substantive assumptions both about the nature of well-being (characterization) and about which measures we use (operationalization) influences how we treat the empirical findings of the different measures. Acknowledging these influences enables us to better cope with claims about the policy implications of different empirical findings.

According to the Easterlin paradox, while there is a correlation between happiness and income within a country at a given time, the correlation between happiness and income breaks down across different countries and across different times (Easterlin, 1974). There have been attempts to explain away the paradoxical nature of the Easterlin

paradox by appealing to such concepts as positional goods, adaptation or the hedonic treadmill. While the paradox itself need not worry us, Easterlin's empirical finding that income and happiness are not correlated within a country over time can nevertheless be cause for concern for public policy. As some economists believe, this correlation breakdown seems to entail the conclusion that well-being policies should be made based on happiness measures, rather than income measures. They arrive at this conclusion because they equivocate between well-being and happiness, and assume that well-being policies are meant to increase happiness. On this view, a direct measure of happiness will measure happiness, and consequently well-being, better than an income measure.

I argue that there are several ways of avoiding the conclusion that policies should be made based on happiness measures rather than income measures. Economists, such as (Hagerty and Veenhoven, 2003) and (Stevenson and Wolfers, 2008), have tried to avoid the conclusion by denying Easterlin's empirical findings. However, by distinguishing between how well-being is characterized and how that characterization is measured introduces unexplored ways of denying that Easterlin's findings lead to the conclusion that policies should be made based on happiness measures. Thus, it is possible to avoid the conclusion by either denying well-being hedonism, or by denying that happiness measures are better measures of well-being hedonism than income measures.

4.2 The Easterlin Paradox

Looking at the correlation between measures of income and measures of self-reported happiness, Richard Easterlin (1974) asks: "Is there evidence that economic growth is positively associated with social welfare, i.e., human happiness?" (p. 90). Or, put more simply: "Does greater happiness go with higher income?" (p. 99) The answer to this question is that "[w]ithin countries there is a noticeable positive association

between income and happiness in every single survey, those in the highest status group were happier, on average, than those in the lowest status group” (p. 118). However, “the positive correlation between income and happiness that shows up in within-country comparisons appears only weakly, if at all, in comparisons among societies in time or space” (p. 119). That happiness and income can correlate within a country at a given time, but not correlate across different countries or in different times, came to be known as the “Easterlin Paradox.”¹

Since his 1974 paper Easterlin has remained steadfast that the paradox exists. When Easterlin revisits the question twenty years later he rhetorically asks: “Will raising the incomes of all increase the happiness of all? The answer to this question can now be given with somewhat greater assurance than twenty years ago (Easterlin, 1973; Easterlin, 1974). It is ‘no’” (Easterlin, 1995, p. 35). An additional fifteen years later Easterlin et al. (2010) rearticulate the paradox: “Simply stated, the happiness-income paradox is this: at a point in time both among and within nations, happiness varies directly with income, but over time, happiness does not increase when a country’s income increases” (p. 22463). Easterlin et. al. double down on their claims and even generalize their findings to encompass less developed countries as well: “The happiness-income paradox now holds for countries ranging from poor to rich: among countries, at a point in time happiness and income are positively related, but over time within a country, happiness does not increase as income goes up (p. 22467).

¹Easterlin attributes this inconsistency to what he sees as the adaptability of mankind: “In judging their happiness, people tend to compare their actual situation with a reference standard or norm... the dispersion in reference norms is less than in the actual incomes of rich and poor. Because of this, those at the bottom of the income distribution tend to feel less well off than those at the top. Over time, however, as economic conditions advance, so too does the social norm, since this is formed by the changing economic socialization experience of people. For the same reason, among different societies at a given time, there tends to be a rough correspondence between living levels and the social norm. As a result, the positive correlation between income and happiness that shows up in within-country comparisons appears only weakly, if at all, in comparisons among societies in time or space.” (118-119)

4.3 Reconstructing the argument

Easterlin's findings, if correct, can be a cause for concern for those who consider income a good measure of well-being for well-being public policy. Easterlin claims that according to the prevailing economic theory "policy measures aimed at increasing the income of society as a whole lead to greater well-being." (2003, p. 11176). However, Easterlin claims that his findings "clearly contradict the expectation based on economic theory that happiness increases with income" (p. 11180).

Both Michael Hagerty and Ruut Veenhoven, and Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers, worry that Easterlin's findings have substantial policy implications. Hagerty and Veenhoven (2003) say that Easterlin's finding, if correct, "is particularly worrisome because accepting the conclusion that economic growth has no effect on happiness would have sweeping implications for national policy, suggesting that a focus on economic growth will not benefit the long-run happiness of citizens" (p. 3). Similarly, Stevenson and Wolfers (2008) explain that "[t]he conclusion that absolute income has little impact on happiness has far-reaching policy implications. If economic growth does little to improve social welfare, then it should not be a primary goal of government policy" (p. 2).

In a later paper Easterlin asks:

If economic growth is not the main route to greater happiness, what is? A simple, but unhelpful answer, is that more research is needed. Possibly more useful are studies that point to the need to focus policy more directly on urgent personal concerns relating to such things as health and family life and to the formation of material preferences (28), rather than on the mere escalation of material goods. (Easterlin et al., 2010, 22467)

To see whether Easterlin's findings indeed have implications for well-being policy, it is useful to try to reconstruct the argument that results in such a conclusion. One way to construct the argument is as follows:

1. Well-being policies should be made based on a good measure of well-being

2. A Happiness measure is a good measure of well-being
3. Happiness and income diverge
4. An income measure is not a good measure of well-being (2,3)
5. Well-being policies should not be made based on an income measure (1,4)
6. Well-being policies should be made based on a happiness measure (1,2)

When policy-makers choose policies aimed at promoting well-being, there are a variety of ways by which they can proceed. They can rely on their experience to inform them what policy will best promote well-being, they can choose policies that platitudensiously relate to well-being, they can ask their constituents what policies aimed at promoting their well-being they would like to be implemented.

The increased interest in evidence-based policy in recent years has given rise to an emphasis on the importance of scientific measurement in informing policy choices, which supports P1.² At the same time, the rise in popularity of happiness measures among both social scientists and policy-makers might be thought to support P2 (Dolan and White, 2007). P3 is the empirical finding of the Easterlin Paradox.

Easterlin is explicit in taking his happiness measure to be a good measure of well-being: “I take the terms happiness, utility, well-being, life satisfaction, and welfare to be interchangeable and measured by the answer to a question such as that asked since 1972 in the United States General Social Survey (GSS): “Taken all together, how would you say things are these days would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?”” (Easterlin, 2003, 11176)

If we accept premises 1, 2 and 3, then premises 4, 5 and 6 follow. However, economists, as well as policy-makers, resist the conclusion that well-being policies should

²See Cartwright and Hardie (2012) for a discussion of issues regarding evidence-based policy.

be made based on a happiness measure rather than on an income measure. Since income measures have traditionally been used as a guide to well-being policy, the implication that they should be replaced by happiness measures is for some a hard pill to swallow.

4.3.1 Terminological accounting

The discussion until now has been focused on measuring happiness and the lack of correlation between happiness and income. Three comments on terms are appropriate.

First, Easterlin uses as his measure of happiness the United States General Social Survey (GSS): “Taken all together, how would you say things are these days—would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?” (Easterlin, 2003, p. 11176). Whether this measure is a good measure of happiness is highly contested, yet the argument in this paper holds for *any* happiness measure.³ Even if there is a better measure of happiness than the US GSS that Easterlin uses, this does not bear on the argument in this paper. As a result, I take the measure Easterlin uses as a place holder for whatever is the best measure of happiness available.

Second, the economic measure discussed in the Easterlin paradox is couched both in terms of individual income and Gross Domestic Produce (GDP) per capita. As with the specific happiness measure, it does not matter to my purposes what economic measure is used, but it is worth noting that the measures do not track the same thing.

Third, Easterlin equivocates between several concepts: “I take the terms happiness, utility, well-being, life satisfaction, and welfare to be interchangeable” (Easterlin, 2003, p. 11176). Whether these concepts all refer to the same thing is also highly contested. Because the usefulness of *any* happiness measure as a measure of well-being depends on the relationship between happiness and well-being, this issue is taken up later in this chapter. There might be agreement that policy-makers ought to pursue policies that

³I include Subjective Well-Being (SWB) measures in this group.

increase well-being (more on this in §3), yet if contrary to Easterlin we do not equate happiness and well-being, whether there is agreement that public policy should focus on happiness is a separate issue. To philosophers, who draw meaningful distinctions between these different terms, such equivocations are unacceptably confusing.⁴ If, as anyone who does not favor a hedonic theory of well-being thinks, happiness and well-being can sometimes come apart, even a successful measure of happiness need not be a good measure of well-being.

4.4 Denying that well-being policies should be based on a good measure of well-being

The conclusion that well-being policies should be made based on happiness measures can be avoided by denying the fundamental claim that policies aimed at improving well-being should be made at all. Whether policy-makers should be in the business of promoting well-being through public policy is a fundamental question about the appropriate aims of government, which is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, since policy-makers do, in fact, take increasing well-being (whether legitimately or not) as a goal of public policy, it is reasonable to address how this ought to be done, even without addressing the more fundamental question of whether this ought to be done.⁵

Even if we accept the legitimacy of well-being policies, we might nevertheless deny P1. When policy-makers choose policies aimed at promoting well-being, there are a variety of ways by which they can proceed. They can rely on their experience to

⁴Broome (1999), for example, discusses the problem of equivocation between utility as it is used by economists as a technical term and the way it is used by the layperson to mean 'having value'. Alternatively, Sumner (1996) argues that well-being is constituted by authentic happiness, thus drawing a clear distinction between happiness *per se* and well-being.

⁵These include the UK prime minister, David Cameron, former president of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, and former chairman of the US Federal Reserve, Ben Bernanke, among others.

inform them what policy will best promote well-being, they can ask their constituents what policies aimed at promoting their well-being they would like to have implemented, or they can choose policies that platitudinously relate to well-being.

First, policy-makers can rely on their own experience to guide their decisions. While this might be both efficient and potentially accurate, a policy-maker's own views, experience and judgments lack the advantage of being externally justifiable. Few would be satisfied with a policy-maker who asked why she decided on a certain policy, responds by "trust me, I know". We seek justification and accountability from our policy-makers for their policy choices, and a policy-maker who can appeal to nothing beyond her own internal mental-states to explain her decisions would come up short.

Second, and on the other extreme, a policy-maker can defer to her constituents regarding what policies aimed at promoting their well-being they would like to be implemented. While this strategy has the appeal of being the most democratically justifiable, it is impractical at any fine grained level, as it would require a form of direct democratic participation. More importantly, such a strategy conflates preferences with well-being. If we do not start by assuming that well-being is constituted by preferences, what will promote well-being can come apart from what people want.

Third, policy-makers might choose to play it safe. Rather than appealing to anything contestable, policy-makers might decide to only implement those well-being policies that are incontestably conducive to well-being by appealing to platitudes about well-being. One way to think of platitudes is as *commonly* agreed on propositions about what generally is conducive to people's well-being, *ceteris paribus*. Using a *ceteris paribus* clause allows general statements to hold. Thus, a general propositions such as: "devoting the weekend to recreational activities is generally more conducive to a person's well-being than spending it working," while easily defeasible, can still hold thanks to the *ceteris paribus* clause. Such a proposition can still hold even if working this one weekend

will earn Casey and extra million dollars and it seems that working once, this particular weekend, will be more conducive to his well-being than spending it climbing rocks.

Understanding platitudes this way makes sense of what it means to rely on platitudes in order to only adopt policies that promote what is uncontestably conducive to well-being. Since on this view platitudes are commonly agreed on propositions about what generally is conducive to people's well-being, platitudes inform policy-makers of what is uncontestably conducive to well-being. On this view, when policy-makers adopt policies that promote a platitude regarding what is generally conducive to well-being, they are adopting a policy that promotes what is uncontestably conducive to well-being.

Yet platitudes can offer a window into well-being only for the generally non-controversial cases. That is why they are platitudes - they are banal, trite and obvious. While the generality of platitudes leaves them immune to specific counter-examples, it also reduces their helpfulness as a guide to policy decisions. While platitudes might tell us that illness diminishes well-being and enjoyment increases it, they do not tell us how much enjoyment is appropriate to sacrifice in order to reduce illness. Platitudes might give policy-makers indications of what is conducive to well-being, but they do so only in general terms, only when all other things are equal (i.e. *ceteris paribus*), and they do not provide policy-makers a way of weigh the various elements that contribute to well-being. In fact, platitudes do not provide much guidance for anything but the most obvious decisions. Some policy decisions might indeed be made based on general insights. Yet any attempt to adopt policies that promote well-being when what is conducive to well-being is not obvious requires an appeal to more than platitudes, precisely because in such cases what is conducive to well-being is neither obvious nor commonsensical.

The move towards evidence-based policy in recent years has given rise to an emphasis on the importance of scientific measurement in informing policy choices. Policies are often guided by other methods of determining the best means to achieving

a policy goal, and good measures for informing policy are often lacking. Nevertheless, relying on good measures to inform policy choices in a justifiable manner offers an ideal to strive for and is a standard view in public policy. In the domain of well-being public policy this means using well-being measures.

4.5 Denying that happiness and income diverge

A different way to avoid the conclusion that well-being policies should be made based on happiness measures rather than income measures, is to deny P3. If happiness and income do not diverge, then it is reasonable to continue basing well-being policies on income measures. This is the strategy that Hagerty and Veenhoven (2003); Stevenson and Wolfers (2008) pursue by attacking Easterlin's findings.

According to Hagerty and Veenhoven (2003) the way previous studies that have shown a lack of correlation between income and happiness (including Easterlin's) interpreted their results were "biased downward because of low statistical power and incorrect effect-size estimation" (p. 3). Hagerty and Veenhoven claim that their own study "improves statistical power by including longer time series, by adding 9 nations with low GDP/capita and (in some analyses) by pooling countries into income tiers (p. 22). Hagerty and Veenhoven claim that contrary to Easterlin's findings, "increasing the income of all *does* increase the happiness of all, but adaptation reduces the rate of increase to about half of its peak" (p. 21). If Hagerty and Veenhoven are correct and happiness and income are correlated at about 0.5 within countries, between countries and over time, then Easterlin's paradox does not exist.

Like Hagerty and Veenhoven, Stevenson and Wolfers (2008) also criticize Easterlin's findings: "The difficulty of identifying a robust GDP-happiness link from scarce data led some to confound the absence of evidence of such a link with evidence of its

absence” (p. 3). They claim, contra Easterlin, that: “the relationship between subjective well-being and income within countries (that is, contrasting the happiness of rich and poor members within a country) is similar to that seen between countries, which in turn is similar to the time-series relationship (comparing the happiness of countries at different points in time as they get richer or poorer)” (pp. 67-69).

Since these critiques of Easterlin are of his methodology, it has led to a back-and-forth between Easterlin and his critics. Easterlin replies to Hagerty and Veenhoven in (Easterlin, 2005), which they reply to in (Veenhoven and Hagerty, 2006), and Easterlin discusses these in (Easterlin et al., 2010). Similarly, in response to Wolfers and Stenvenson, Easterlin claims that they arrive at a mistaken conclusion because they “estimate a positive short-term relationship between life satisfaction and GDP, rather than the long-term relationship, which is nil” (Easterlin et al., 2010, p. 22465).

I take no stand on the question of who is right in the debate between Easterlin and his critics. Instead, I aimed to show that there exists a debate among prominent economists regarding the empirical claims that the Easterlin paradox is based on. Furthermore, as I discuss in §2, this empirical debate has a policy related motivation. The conclusion that Easterlin wishes to establish, and that his critics wish to deny, is that well-being policies should be made based on happiness measures rather than income measures. If Easterlin is right, this goes some of the way to establishing that policy should rely on happiness measures, whereas if his critics are right, this goes some of the way to establishing that policy should continue to rely on income measures.

Yet denying the factual claims Easterlin makes regarding the lack of correlation between happiness and income is not the only way to avoid the conclusion that well-being policies should be made based on happiness measures rather than income measures. Instead, in the next section I argue that this conclusion can be avoided by denying the premise that happiness is a good measure of well-being.

4.6 Denying that happiness is a good measure of well-being

If we set aside P1—well-being policies should be made based on a good measure of well-being—because it is a central premise of the well-being public policy literature and is generally accepted, and we avoid P3—happiness and income diverge—because the empirical findings are still disputed, we are left with P2—happiness is a good measure of well-being. This premise is left untouched by both Easterlin and his critics. Both seem to take for granted that if it is the case that if the Easterlin paradox is empirically correct and happiness and income measures diverge, this entails that well-being policies should be made based on happiness measures. However, whether happiness is a good measure of well-being is far from obvious. Other assumptions must be made to establish it.⁶ A fuller argument would be:

1. Well-being policies should be made based on a good measure of well-being
2. (a) Well-being hedonism is true
 - (b) A happiness measure is a good measure of hedonism
 - (c) A happiness measure is a good measure of well-being (2a,2b)
3. Happiness and income diverge
4. An income measure is not a good measure of well-being (2,3)
5. Well-being policies should not be made based on an income measure (1,4)
6. Well-being policies should be made based on a happiness measure (1,2)

⁶This is not the only argument that has P2 as its conclusion. In chapter 3 I discuss alternative possibilities. However, it is the most straightforward and simple way to establish P2.

If what happiness measures find is what actually mattered for public policy, then policies that do well on happiness measures would be those worth pursuing. If this were the case, then clearly a lack of correlation between happiness and income measures has significance for public policy (since currently income measures are mostly used). But if promoting well-being, rather than doing well according to a happiness measure, is the goal of public policy, then only by connecting happiness measures to well-being do we have reason to think that policy makers should take note when happiness and income come apart.

But we can deny the link between happiness measures and well-being in two ways. First, we can deny that well-being is constituted by happiness. This is a common view in the well-being philosophical literature which I discussed in chapter 2. Second, we can deny that a happiness measure like the US GSS question of how happy respondents are is a good measure of well-being hedonism. There are several reasons to doubt that such happiness is a good measure of hedonism and, as discussed in chapter 3, there are no serious accounts claiming otherwise.

It is possible to avoid the conclusion that a happiness measure is a good measure of well-being and consequently that well-being policies should be made based on a happiness measure, by denying well-being hedonism (P2a). Indeed, as discussed in chapter 2, many philosophers deny P2a and argue in favor of other ways of characterizing well-being.

Sumner (1996) succinctly sums up the current standing of hedonism when he writes that “[t]ime and philosophical fashion have not been kind to hedonism” (p. 83). The most well-known argument against well-being hedonism relies on Robert Nozick’s (1974) experience machine thought experiment in which individuals have the option of experiencing anything they desire. If people do not want to ‘plug in’ to the machine, this is meant to illustrate that other things matter to our well-being besides positive hedonic

experiences, and therefore hedonism is false.

Another criticism, by Amartya Sen (1999) views hedonism as problematic because “[a] person who is ill-fed, undernourished, unsheltered and ill can still be high up in the scale of happiness or desire-fulfillment if he or she has learned to have ‘realistic’ desires and to take pleasure in small mercies.” (p. 14) Alternatively, James Griffin (1986) argues that as Freud’s preference ‘to think in torment than not to be able to think clearly,’ demonstrates that there is not a single mental-state (e.g. happiness) according to which Freud could rank these two experiences. Thus, a hedonic theory is too narrow because it “assumes that we value only one kind of thing, whereas we value many irreducibly different things” (p. 31).

Whether well-being hedonism is or is not in fashion, it is implicitly assumed both by Easterlin and his critics. When both Easterlin and his critics take the possibility that happiness (as measured by the happiness measure) can come apart from income measures, they are implicitly and unjustifiably assuming that well-being hedonism as the correct way to characterize well-being. If, however, we deny well-being hedonism, then it is not clear why a divergence between happiness and income measures should cause policy-makers to favor policies that do better according to the former rather than the later. If currently policy-makers rely on income measures to evaluate policies, merely discovering that other measures evaluate policies differently need not be a reason to change current practices.

Yet even if we accept well-being hedonism, the conclusion that a happiness measure is a successfully tracks well-being can be avoided by denying that it is a successfully tracks happiness. As discussed in chapter 3, accounts for why happiness measures are appropriate operationalizations of well-being hedonism are lacking. As a result, all we have are negative arguments against the usefulness of these measures.

There are indeed several reasons to doubt that a happiness measure, like the US GSS question of how happy respondents are, successfully tracks happiness. First, there are worries about response biases that arise when an individual self-reports their mental-state. Second, hedonism takes a whole-life view of a person's happiness, whereas surveys only capture a single time slice. Third, happiness reports are some combination of affective states and evaluative attitudes, whereas hedonism focuses on affective states (over a lifetime). Fourth, however a hedonic theory of well-being cashes out happiness, individuals answering questions about their happiness understand the term in a plurality of ways that diverge from how happiness is defined by the hedonic theory.

Thus, accepting that well-being hedonism is true does not automatically end the debate as to which measure best tracks happiness and is the most useful for policy purposes. Analogously to Erik Angner's proposed defense for SWB measures as "(imperfect) indirect measures of well-being" (p. 126) characterized as constituted by desire-fulfillment, we can think that income measures, for example, are an (imperfect) indirect measures of well-being hedonism. There exists conceptual space to view several measures as possible measure of hedonism for policy purposes.

If we are to decide whether a happiness measure successfully tracks well-being hedonism, we need to look at how the proponents of the happiness measure link between it and a hedonic characterization of well-being. Unfortunately, such accounts are grossly missing from the discussion regarding happiness measures. Proponents of happiness measures in general, and the happiness measure Easterlin uses in particular, do not provide well-articulated accounts in support of their happiness measure as a measure of hedonic experience. If fully fleshed out accounts in support of happiness measures were provided, it would then be possible to seriously examine the merits of these measures. Without such positive accounts, all we are left with are negative arguments against different measures. While negative arguments are helpful in guiding us as to which

measures seem to be an inadequate way of measuring well-being hedonism, insofar as we are interested in which measure is the best one, we need a positive account as well.

4.7 Conclusion

Some economists have made significant efforts in trying to refute the existence of the Easterlin paradox. These efforts might only be motivated by a desire to get the facts right, a desire to disprove what they take to be an empirically false claim. However, there is reason to believe that the motivation to disprove the existence of the Easterlin paradox, stems from a belief that if true, it can have significant repercussions to public policy. If happiness is uncorrelated to income, then trying to raise national incomes in order to promote happiness seems like a foolish endeavor.

Without taking a stand as to whether attempts to deny Easterlin's empirical findings succeed, I have argued that there are several ways to deny the conclusion that well-being policies should be made based on happiness measures rather than on income measures. Thus, if the motivation behind the attempt to deny Easterlin's findings is to deny such a conclusion, then even if Easterlin's findings are correct, there are other reasons to suspect that the conclusion is false. Those economists who argue against Easterlin's findings seem to accept as given that if Easterlin's findings are correct, the conclusion is warranted. I have shown this not to be the case. In fact, policy-makers who hold certain theoretical commitments regarding what constitutes well-being or how it is best represented can comfortably ignore Easterlin.

In the next chapter I discuss Dan Hausman's evidential account of preferences, according to which we can use preferences as evidence for what is conducive to well-being. Hausman's account thus seems to rule in favor of using income measures, even without needing to appeal to a particular way of characterizing well-being. Hausman

attempts to avoid the problem of characterization by proposing an evidential account. Nevertheless, I argue that Hausman's account cannot justify using a particular measure of well-being for public policy, because it can be used to justify several competing theories of well-being.

Chapter 5

Can an evidential account justify relying on preferences for well-being policy?

5.1 Introduction

The Easterlin paradox leaves us in a bind how do we choose which measure to use to guide policy when the measures disagree? If we hold a certain theory of well-being we could come up with an answer, but how to decide if there is disagreement as to what constitutes well-being? Even if we agreed on how to characterize well-being, it is difficult to justify any choice to operationalize that characterization by using a particular measure. Instead of tackling these two difficulties head on, we would be wise to explore how they can be sidestepped. Dan Hausman proposes an evidential account that seems like it could do just that. Daniel Hausman (2011, 2012) argues that policy-makers can sometimes take people's choices as evidence for what is conducive to their well-being. According to Hausman, if policy-makers take people's choices as evidence for what is conducive

to well-being, they can sometimes use preferences-based (or choice-based) measures to compare different policies.

In this chapter I claim that Hausman's evidential account often does not justify the use of any one measure more than it justifies the use of any other measure. Consequently, it often does not specifically justify using preference-based measures to evaluate policies aimed at improving well-being, even when his assumptions hold.

There are many cases for which policy choices are made for which it does not matter which measure one uses. However, there are non-trivial cases for which policy choices need to be made, yet there is substantial disagreement among different measures in their assessment of policies. Because Hausman's evidential account provides no reason to think that preference-based measures, or any other measures, are the appropriate measures to use, it leaves us at a loss as to which policy should be chosen in such cases.

This paper proceeds as follows: §1 and §2 discuss Hausman's evidential account and his argument from platitudes. §3 argues that Hausman's evidential account fails to single out using preference-based measures rather than other social measures. §4 presents two cases in which relying on one measure rather than another has substantial policy implications. §5 concludes that often one cannot justify policy-makers relying on preference-based measures as measures of well-being by appealing to Hausman's evidential account.

5.2 Hausman's evidential account

There is no intrinsic need for economic theory to link well-being and preferences (or their numerical representation utility¹). The need to link the two only arises when

¹It is important to avoid equivocating between the standard economic technical sense of 'utility' and the way it is sometimes commonly used as 'having value'. In the context of the current paper utility is used in the standard economic technical sense as a numerical representation of preference orderings. For a further discussion see Broome (1999).

policy-makers turn to measures of individuals' choices with the intention of assessing the effects of well-being policy.² For policy-makers to use preference-based measures that reflect preferences (through choices) to assess well-being policies, well-being must be understood to be linked to preferences. The challenge is to provide an account that justifies the link between well-being and preferences.

Clearly, there are other possible reasons for policy-makers to be interested in preferences and the subsequent utility maximization, other than to promote individual well-being. One such reason might be thinking that the satisfaction of preferences is good in itself. If the satisfaction of preferences is a good in itself, then it would be a reasonable goal for policy-makers. Such a view seems plausible if one maintains that because in democracies the government is elected by the people, it ought to enact the will of the people. Furthermore, one might think that enacting the will of the people is best accomplished by devising policies that will maximally satisfy individuals' preferences. If enacting the will of the people were the only goal of policy, there would be no need, from a policy perspective, to provide an account that links well-being to preferences. Yet it seems to be the case, and in this paper assumed to be the case, that governments and policy-makers aim not only to enact the will of the people, but also to do what is good for people, by implementing policies that promote individual well-being.

While it is possible to justify linking well-being to preferences by turning to a philosophical theory of well-being, it is not clear what theory, among the many available, is the most appropriate theory of well-being to turn to.³ Consequently, policy-makers might wish to avoid relying on any specific philosophical theory of well-being and in effect remain agnostic as to what constitutes well-being. However, to justifiably rely on

²Choices are standardly thought of as revealed preferences, since the individual, given some assumptions that are discussed later in the paper, is thought to reveal her preferences through her choices. Measures of choices are thus usually referred to as preference-based measures. In this paper I will either talk of choices or preference-based measures.

³For some discussions of the different theories of well-being see Parfit (1984); Sumner (1996); Haybron (2008); Raibley (2011).

preference-based measures for well-being policy, while remaining agnostic about the correct philosophical theory of well-being, policy-makers need some other way to link preferences to well-being.

Daniel Hausman proposes an evidential account as a way of linking well-being to preferences. On Hausman's evidential account, "[r]ather than constituting well-being, preference-satisfaction can serve as evidence of well-being, regardless of what theory of welfare one accepts" (Hausman, 2012, p. 88). According to Hausman's evidential account, policy-makers are justified in relying on preference-based measures for well-being policy because choices can be taken as evidence for what is conducive to well-being. Choices, in turn, can be taken as evidence for what is conducive to well-being when three assumptions hold:

1. Individuals have true beliefs about what the feasible alternatives are.
2. Individuals are competent evaluators of what is conducive to their well-being.
3. Individuals' choices are aimed at promoting their own well-being.

Thus, for example, if someone has a true belief that drinking the beverage in front of her (which is laced with arsenic) will cause her to die, if she can competently make the evaluation that dying is not conducive to her well-being, and if her choice is aimed at promoting her own well-being, then she will choose to not drink the beverage.

Of course individuals do not *always* have true beliefs about what the feasible alternatives are, they are not *always* competent evaluators of what is conducive to their well-being and their choices are not *always* aimed at promoting their own well-being. Hausman is well aware of this. Sometimes individuals might have a false belief that the beverage in front of them (which is laced with arsenic) will not cause their death, perhaps because they don't know what arsenic is. Other times individuals might be incompetent at evaluating what is conducive to their well-being and believe that death is conducive to

their well-being because at the moment they are emotionally frail (or, to take no stand on suicide, they might mistakenly believe that death is not conducive to their well-being).

Yet even if a person has true beliefs about what the feasible alternatives are, and she is a competent evaluator of what is conducive to her well-being, it does not follow that she will *choose* the alternative that is conducive to her well-being. Unsurprisingly, sometimes people make choices that are not aimed at promoting their own well-being even when they know which choice is most conducive to their well-being. The person faced with the choice of whether or not to drink the beverage might choose to drink it knowing full well that she will die and that dying is not in conducive to her well-being. She might do so, for example, because it is the only way to convince the authorities that the water source for millions of people is replete with arsenic and if those millions drink the water they will die.

To use a more plausible and less macabre example, an individual might have a true belief that she can either continue to smoke or quit smoking, she competently evaluates that smoking is not conducive to her well-being, yet she nevertheless chooses to continue to smoke due to her weakness of will. Alternatively, a mildly hungry person might choose to give her sandwich to a famished stranger, despite knowing that this will leave her mildly hungry and that being mildly hungry is not conducive to her well-being.⁴

The merits of Hausman's evidential account are that, first, viewing choices as evidence for what is conducive to well-being explains the link between preferences and well-being. If choices are evidence for what is conducive to well-being, it is clear why policy-makers are justified in using preference-based measures in order to assess well-being policies. Second, despite not knowing what the correct theory of well-being is, "[e]conomists and everyday folk do not have to wait for a satisfactory philosophical

⁴Psychological egoists think that as long as individuals have true beliefs and are competent evaluators of what is conducive to their own well-being, their choices will *always* be aimed at promoting their own well-being. For a discussion of psychological egoism see Shaver (2010). I will assume, as I think Hausman reasonably does as well, that choices are not always aimed at promoting one's own well-being.

theory of welfare before they can say anything about what makes peoples lives better or worse” (Hausman, 2012, p. 92). If policy-makers are justified in treating preference-based measures as evidence for what is conducive to well-being, then whether there is an acceptable philosophical theory of well-being should not matter. Thus, on Hausman’s account, policy-makers can remain agnostic regarding the philosophical debate on well-being but still use preference-based measures to assess policies aimed at promoting well-being.

Yet remaining agnostic regarding the correct philosophical theory of well-being means that we lack a standard by which to assess whether the individual’s evaluations of what is conducive to her well-being are correct and whether her choice is aimed at promoting her own well-being. Consequently, we cannot assess whether preference-based measures can serve as evidence for which policy is more conducive to well-being. To overcome this problem Hausman turns to platitudes.

5.3 The argument from platitudes

To distinguish cases in which individuals make choices aimed at promoting their own well-being from cases in which they make choices that are not, and to distinguish cases in which individuals are competent evaluators of what is conducive to their well-being from cases in which they are not, Hausman turns to platitudes. Platitudes about well-being are supposed to help us discern the cases in which choices can be taken as evidence for what is conducive to well-being and cases in which they cannot.

Hausman appeals to platitudes because he acknowledges that “[a]n economist cannot regard people’s preferences as evidence concerning what is good for them, unless he or she has some notion of what is good for people” (Hausman, 2012, p. 92). On Hausmans account, in order to justifiably take some choices as evidence for what is

conducive to well-being, there needs to be reason to think that those choices are aimed at promoting their own well-being and that people are good judges of what is conducive to their well-being. Platitudes are supposed to provide such a reason:

Platitudes concerning what makes people better or worse off, like the claims that enjoyment contributes to well-being and illness diminishes it, depend on no philosophical theory that specifies what things are intrinsically good for people and why. (Hausman, 2011, p. 7)

One way to think of platitudes is as *commonly* agreed on propositions about what is conducive to people's well-being, *ceteris paribus*. Because the proposition is about what is conducive to well-being *ceteris paribus*, a proposition such as "devoting the weekend to recreational activities is more conducive to a person's well-being than spending it working, *ceteris paribus*" can still hold even if working this one weekend will earn Casey an extra million dollars and it seems that working once, this particular weekend, will be more conducive to his well-being than spending it rock climbing.⁵

Such an account of platitudes is positive since it makes clear, at least in principle, how to ascertain whether a proposition about what is conducive to people's well-being is commonly agreed on, and thus is a platitude. One can, at least in principle, simply go and ask enough people whether they agree or disagree with a proposition, and when enough do (whatever enough is in this case), we can conclude that the proposition is a platitude.⁶

⁵Since we are interested in platitudes in the context of actual policy-making it seems we should be dealing with actual agreement rather than hypothetical agreement. If we are committed to propositions of the kind that people *actually* agree on, we cannot use either concocted propositions or propositions about particular cases. On an 'actual position' there will clearly be no platitude about a specific situation involving a specific person and specific possible actions because there will be no actual common agreement on such a specific platitude.

⁶This leaves unclear what constitutes common agreement. Clearly unanimous agreement is too demanding. It seems reasonable that for any proposition there might always be some people who think it is wrong. But whether 'common agreement' is an overwhelming majority, a simple majority, or simply enough people agreeing so that it doesn't sound far-fetched, is unclear. Whether the agreement is among all people, all adults, all rational agents or all reasonable people is also an issue. Perhaps in the context of this paper the agreement is most appropriately between the policy-makers who are actually deciding on a particular policy. Since this is a generally tricky issue in political philosophy, I only flag the issue, rather than address it. However 'common agreement' is generally cashed out in political philosophy will probably be sufficient for my needs here as well.

Since, according to Hausman, it is supposed to be significantly easier to ascertain platitudes than to ascertain which philosophical theory of well-being is correct, it is supposed to be significantly easier to figure out whether his assumptions hold according to platitudes than to figure out whether his assumptions hold according to the correct theory of well-being (which we are agnostic about). Because, according to Hausman, we can use platitudes to make claims regarding well-being, then while “economists need to know something about what is good for people... it does not follow that they need a philosophical theory of well-being for this purpose” (Hausman, 2011, p. 7). It follows that policy-makers do not need a clearly defined concept of well-being, but can instead rely on platitudes about what things conducive to well-being. Since policy-makers presumably do have access to platitudes, they can assess whether the assumptions needed in order to take choices as evidence for what is conducive to well-being hold according to our platitudes.

At this point we might wonder why policy-makers should bother to ascertain what people’s choices are. It might seem that policy-makers can simply treat platitudes as evidence for what is conducive to well-being, instead of bothering to ascertain individuals’ choices, which requires a lot of empirical work. Indeed, Hausman seems to point in this direction:

Assuming that human beings are generally capable of judging what sorts of things are good for themselves and *others*, presumably economists are capable of doing so, too. [emphasis added] (Hausman and McPherson, 2009, p. 18)

The justification for treating choices as evidence for what is conducive to well-being is that platitudes tell us that the assumptions that support treating choices as evidence hold. If all the evidential account is meant to do is tell policy-makers they can rely on people’s choices as evidence for what is conducive to well-being when there are relevant platitudes, it seems that policy-makers indeed do not need to turn to choices, since platitudes are

more readily available. This, in turn, would undermine the point of having this account in the first place.

A more charitable way to understand Hausman is to view the reliance on platitudes as meant to inform us not when the assumptions hold, but rather the kinds of situations in which we should expect the assumptions to hold. These would include cases for which we have no platitudes. In these cases policy-makers might take individuals' choices as evidence for what is conducive to well-being because they seem similar to cases for which platitudes tell us that the assumptions hold.

Platitudes can offer a window into well-being only for the generally uncontroversial cases, for which there is indeed no need to turn to choices. That is why they are platitudes they are banal, trite and obvious. Policy-makers need to turn to choices in order to figure out what is good for people in the unclear and potentially controversial cases. These can be mundane cases, such as whether school uniforms should be made from cotton or polyester, or more substantial cases, such as whether people should be required to have health insurance.⁷ Neither of these cases seem to have platitudes which apply to them. Of course, if platitudes would turn out to apply to all cases, there would indeed be no need to turn to choices at all. I suggest that a better way to understand Hausman's account is as meant to justify relying on choices as evidence for what is conducive to well-being in cases for which we have no relevant platitudes and so cannot confidently determine whether the assumptions hold.

Yet if Hausman's evidential account relies on platitudes to justify taking choices as evidence for what is conducive to well-being even in cases for which there are not relevant platitudes, there is some need to justify such an extrapolation. We might do this by first acknowledging that platitudes give a decent, pre-theoretical approximation of well-being. Furthermore, in cases to which platitudes apply, we can see whether

⁷Of course other considerations besides the person's well-being can be involved in the decision. The point is that it is not clear what is more conducive to the person's well-being in these cases.

Hausman's assumptions hold. If they do, choices are good evidence. If the assumptions do not hold, choices are not good evidence for what is conducive to well-being. Next, policy-makers can extrapolate from the cases in which choices are good evidence to cases which seem similar, but where we have no platitudes by which to check whether the assumptions hold. Extrapolating allows policy-makers can treat choices as evidence also in cases for which there are no relevant platitudes.

One might contest that extrapolating from choices in cases for which platitudes apply to choices in cases for which platitudes do not apply is unjustified. This raises traditional concerns of the problem of induction which this paper does not attempt to address. While this might pose a serious challenge for how I propose to understand Hausman's account, my claim is that even if such an extrapolation is justified, Hausman's evidential account often does not specifically justify using preference-based measures to evaluate policies aimed at improving well-being over other available measures, even when his assumptions hold.

5.4 The limitations of Hausman's evidential account

In §1 and §2 I presented Hausman's evidential account and the argument from platitudes. Hausman's account denies the need to turn to any specific philosophical theory of well-being, and instead he relies on platitudes to tell us when the assumptions that justify viewing choices as evidence for what is conducive to well-being hold. In this section I argue that platitudes can inform us of when the assumptions that justify viewing *several* measures as evidence for what is conducive to well-being hold. When the assumptions that justify viewing several measures as evidence for what is conducive to well-being hold, relying on platitudes fails to uniquely justify relying on choices as evidence for what is conducive to well-being.

The existence of the various measures discussed in chapter 2 complicates matters for Hausman's evidential account. Recall that Hausman's evidential account justifies taking choices as evidence for what is conducive to well-being when platitudes tell us that assumptions about individuals' competency at evaluating what is conducive to their well-being and about individuals' choices being aimed at promoting their own well-being hold. Yet Hausman's evidential account does not uniquely justify taking choices as evidence for well-being. Platitudes can also tell us that assumptions that justify treating other measures as evidence for what is conducive to well-being also sometimes hold. Consequently, Hausman's evidential account justifies relying on any social science measure as evidence for what is conducive to well-being when the assumptions that justify relying on it hold, just like it justifies relying on choices as evidence when Hausman's assumptions hold. These assumptions do not *always* hold, but they need not. Just as with choices as evidence, the assumptions that justify treating a measure as evidence for what is conducive to well-being only need to hold well enough for policy purposes.

Consider, for example, the assumption that individuals are competent evaluators of how well their life is going for them. Turning to platitudes about what is conducive to well-being we can see that this assumption holds often, though not always. We take it as platitudinous that much of the time individuals are indeed competent evaluations of how well their life is going for them. However, there are instances in which our platitudes tell us that this assumption does not hold.

Amartya Sen (1987) discusses possible cases of a satisfied begging destitute, landless laborer, and subjugated housewife, all of which might judge their lives as going well for them. In all these cases, if the individuals evaluate their lives as going well for them, we rely on platitudes to determine that these individuals are not in this case competent evaluators of how well their life is going for them.

Alternatively, consider the findings mentioned in Strack et al. (1991, p. 36):

Thus, we found that finding a dime on a copy machine greatly increased subjects' reported happiness with their life-as-a-whole (Schwarz, 1983), as did receiving a chocolate bar (Mnkel, Strack and Schwarz, 1987), spending time in a pleasant rather than an unpleasant room (Schwarz, Strack, Kommer and Wagner, 1987, Exp. 2), or watching the German soccer team win rather than lose a championship game (Schwarz et al., 1987, Exp. 1).

By turning to platitudes like “obtaining small amounts of money does not significantly increase an individual's well-being” we can see that trivial factors such as finding a dime or receiving a chocolate bar at most barely influence how well an individual's life is going for them as a whole. It then follows that the assumption that individuals are competent evaluators of how well their life is going for them does not seem to hold in these situations.

Nevertheless, sometimes this assumption does hold and in those cases life-satisfaction surveys appear to be good evidence of what is conducive to well-being. While Hausman only claims that choices can be treated as evidence for what is conducive to well-being when his assumptions hold, three issues arise when we look at other measures as well.

First, there might be cases in which platitudes make it clear that the assumptions that justify treating a certain measure as evidence for what is conducive to well-being do not hold, while those assumptions that justify treating another measure as evidence do hold. In such cases it seems fairly straightforward that policy-makers should not treat the first measure as evidence of what is conducive to well-being. Furthermore, if platitudes show that only the assumptions that support treating a single measure as evidence for what is conducive to well-being, then Hausman's account seems to justify doing so. This measure may not necessarily be the preference-based measures that Hausman defends, but rather whatever measure is the only measure for which the supportive assumptions hold.

Second, even if policy-makers can rule out some measures, there might be cases in

which platitudes make it clear that the assumptions that support treating one measure (e.g. choices) as evidence for what is conducive to well-being hold, as well as assumptions that support treating another measure (e.g. life-satisfaction surveys) as evidence for what is conducive to well-being hold. In such cases Hausman's evidential account does not provide policy-makers with any reason to treat one measure as better evidence for well-being than another.

Third, there might be cases for which we do not have platitudes that can help us tell whether assumptions that justify treating a certain measure as evidence for what is conducive to well-being hold. These can be either the mundane or substantial cases discussed in §2 (school uniforms and mandatory health insurance), which do not seem to have platitudes which apply to them. In such cases, Hausman's evidential account does not provide policy-makers a reason to either accept or reject the assumptions that support treating a measure as evidence for what is conducive to well-being. As a result, it is not clear which measure, if at all, policy-makers ought to treat as evidence. But it is also clear that in such cases the evidential account does not favor any one measure over another.

That assumptions that justify relying on different measures sometimes hold does not in itself undermine Hausman's evidential account. All that follows from it is that policy-makers might be justified in using these other measures to assess the effects of different well-being policies as well. It might seem reasonable to think that even if platitudes justify a host of other social measures, it is fine to simply rely on preference-based measures whenever platitudes justify them.

First, these different measures, for the most part, indicate the same policies as conducive to well-being. So even if there are multiple measures that might be justified to use, most of the time they will be in agreement, and cases of actual disagreement between measures might be rare. Second, even if the cases of disagreement are not rare, they

might only pertain to trivial policy cases. So while it might be true that platitudes can generally justify using a variety of measures, this can be seen as a mere theoretical issue that does not pertain to actual policy. Third, the disagreement might not be substantial. If measure x ranks policy a just a little higher than policy b , while measure y ranks policy b just a little higher than policy a , then it seems the difference will not be substantial enough for policy purposes.

In the next section I argue that not only do cases of disagreement between measures exist, but that they can pertain to non-trivial policy cases and they can disagree substantially.

5.5 Two cases of measure disagreement

It seems that preference-based measures, SWB measures and objective measures (among others) can all provide evidence of what is conducive to well-being well enough for policy purposes when the relevant assumptions hold. As a result, one might draw the conclusion that when either platitudes support assumptions that justify several measures or when there are no relevant platitudes, a savvy policy-maker ought to consult with all of the measures when deciding on policy aimed to promote well-being. Consulting with all the different measures might indeed boost confidence in a policy when all measures are in agreement. However, problems arise when there is disagreement between the measures. When a person's choices tell us one thing and her report of her life-satisfaction, for example, tells us another, it is not clear which policy is most conducive to her well-being.

The "Easterlin Paradox," discussed in chapter 4, is a case in which the correlation between measures of income and measures of self-reported happiness come apart. If Easterlin is indeed correct and the correlation between income and happiness breaks down across countries and across time, then policy-makers who use GDP per capita or

subjective well-being (as measured by life-satisfaction and financial satisfaction reports) as measures of well-being will assess potential well-being policies differently.

Both preference-based measures and life-satisfaction measures can be seen as evidence of what is conducive to well-being according to the platitude-based argument of Hausman's evidential account, and so policy-makers might be justified in using either measure to assess the effects of different well-being policies as well. Since these measures substantially diverge, it is not clear which measure is more appropriate to use. Hausman's evidential account, in denying the possibility of turning to theories of well-being, lacks the resources to adjudicate between them.

Turning to another social measure, Daniel Kahneman's objective happiness, one can observe a similar divergence from preference-based measures. Kahneman (2000) proposes a measure of objective happiness, which is a summation of moment-utility over a certain time and refers to the sign and intensity of affective/hedonic experience at that duration time. Kahneman's experience-based measure comes apart from memory-based measures (which include both SWB measures and preference-based measures) in cases such as his colonoscopy study (Redelmeier and Kahneman, 1996). According to Kahneman's objective-happiness measure shorter colonoscopy procedures, with fewer moments of dis-utility, rank higher than longer procedures with more moments of dis-utility. Nonetheless, subjects exhibited a preference that was barely correlated to length of the procedure (.03), and therefore barely correlated with the amount of dis-utility they suffered from. Instead, subject preferences correlated with a relatively high accuracy (.67) with what Kahneman terms the "peak-end rule," which takes the "average of the most intense level of pain reported during the procedure, and of the mean pain level reported over the last three minutes (p. 676).

Thus, rather than the amount of dis-utility being negatively correlated with the individuals' preferences, which would imply that preferences and objective happiness

point in the same direction, Kahneman discovered that preferences correlate much better with what might seem to be an arbitrary rule. Patients will prefer to undergo longer procedures, and so suffer more moment dis-utility, if the pain at the end of the procedure peters off. Other experiments arrived at similar results, for example an experiment involving unpleasant sounds (Schreiber and Kahneman, 2000). In this experiment most subjects also chose longer durations of unpleasant sounds over shorter durations in conformity with the peak-end rule. These experiments provide clear cases in which preferences and the objective happiness measure diverge.

While findings regarding such divergences might at first seem to only pertain to marginal policies that deal with either colonoscopies or loud noises, their policy implications can be much wider. These findings can potentially pertain to any instance in which pain or discomfort are involved, and if the findings extend to pleasure as well, then it would seem that policies that have some effect on individuals' hedonic states (which are far from rare) will be assessed differently based on whether preferences or objective happiness are taken as the appropriate measure.

In addition to preference-based measures, both life-satisfaction and objective happiness measures can be seen as evidence of well-being according to the argument of Hausman's evidential account. Since these measures diverge it is not clear which measure is more appropriate to use to assess well-being policies.

Hausman's evidential account, which explicitly denies appealing to controversial philosophical theories of well-being, lacks the resources to discriminate between measures. One could make the argument that one measure is better than another as a measure of well-being *qua* well-being by appealing to a theory of well-being. But this path is explicitly what the evidential account is trying to circumvent. If policy-makers appealed to a theory of well-being they would no longer be agnostic with respect to which theory of well-being is correct.

We might have other reasons to turn to preferences rather than to other measures. Preferences might exhibit more respect for individual autonomy, they might be easier to measure or they might be easier to work out using mathematical tools. There might be a whole host of pragmatic reasons to rely on preference-based measures, but none of these potential pragmatic advantages give us any reason to think that preference-based measures are better measures of well-being than any other available measure. All these potential advantages are advantages only insofar as we are interested in things other than actually measuring well-being.

5.6 Implications for policy

When different measures substantially diverge and platitudes tell us that the assumptions that support several measures hold, then Hausman's evidential account does not justify relying on preference-based measures even when platitudes tell us that the assumptions that support preference-based measures hold. There are often substantial policy cases for which Hausman's evidential account gives no reason to prefer preferences (or any other measure) as evidence for what is conducive to well-being over other types of measures. Hausman's evidential account can, however, be taken as a general argument in favor of relying on well-being measures when the assumptions that support them hold. Thus, without appealing to philosophical theories of well-being, all we may conclude is that when it comes to assessing policies aimed at promoting well-being, policy-makers are *not* justified in relying on well-being measures when the assumptions that support them do *not* hold.

It would seem as though we arrive at an impasse. Policy-makers cannot have their cake and eat it too. If they wish to promote policies aimed at promoting well-being, and wish to use a measure of well-being that can guide them even in cases in which

different social measures disagree, policy-makers must make a choice. Either forgo the agnosticism and commit to a certain theory of well-being, rely solely on pragmatic considerations, or ditch the attempt to promote well-being through policy.

In the next chapter I propose another option—relying on an intermediate account of well-being. As I argue in the next chapter, an intermediate account generates agreement both by reducing the scope to which the disagreement applies and by including what is central for each theory of well-being in the intermediate theory.

Chapter 5, in part, has been published in the *Journal of Economic Methodology*, 22(3), 2015; Hersch, Gil, “Can an Evidential Account Justify Relying on Preferences for Well-Being Policy?”. The dissertation author was the sole author of this paper.

Chapter 6

Generating an intermediate account of well-being for public policy

6.1 Introduction

The search for normative adequacy—the theory’s ability to “play its designated role with the framework in question” (Sumner, 1996, p. 8)—discussed in chapter 2, stems from the goal of finding a way to defend the use of some measure of well-being to guide well-being public policy. Since normative adequacy is an instrumentalist requirement, it sets a lower bar than that of descriptive adequacy, which requires that the concept be:

faithful to our ordinary assessments of well-being, including the role they play in our common-sense psychology, will cover all core cases and provide a principled resolution of peripheral cases, will not confuse welfare with its sources or ingredients, and will be free of distorting bias. (p. 18)

As such, descriptive adequacy sets an appropriately high bar for philosophical theories of well-being. Yet for the purpose of choosing a measure to use to guide well-being public policy, which does not need to provide a principled resolutions or take stand on the sources or ingredients of well-being, it is unnecessarily demanding.

If the standard philosophical theories of well-being cannot provide the normative adequacy because of the disagreement on which theory ought to be used, some shift must occur to engender agreement. This can be a shift in how well-being is viewed, either by one convincing the others that she is right, or through some reflective equilibrium process. Because the philosophical debate on how well-being ought to be characterized shows no sign of reaching a resolution any time soon, I doubt that any agreement on the correct view of well-being is imminent.

Alternatively, Hausman's evidential account of preferences, which remains agnostic on what constitutes well-being, might seem like a good route. However, Hausman's account defends viewing other measures as evidence of well-being as well, but it does not have a way to choose between them.

Another option is for proponents of different theories of well-being to hold their original views, yet agree to compromise on a joint intermediate view that no one actually views as correct. Constructing an intermediate theory is a viable possibility. An intermediate theory of well-being for public policy aims to achieve a compromise and subsequently agreement that can provide the base for choosing a well-being measure to rely on.

An intermediate account generates agreement in two ways. First, by reducing the scope to which the disagreement applies. Second, by including what is central for each theory of well-being in the intermediate theory. This two pronged approach both reduces the scope of disagreement and is as inclusive as possible. The nature and needs of public policy make it the case that some compromise is both necessary and possible. The possibility arises from the fact that an account of well-being for public policy need not meet as demanding an adequacy requirement as philosophical theories of well-being must meet. The necessity arises from the need to justify the ongoing attempts on the part

of policy-makers to enact well-being public policy.¹

In sections §2 through §4 I provide three reasons why the bar of adequacy is lower for a normatively adequate policy directed account of well-being than for a descriptively adequate philosophical account of well-being. In §2 I argue for the limited influence of well-being measures for policy—policy-makers know they do not get involved in all facets of life. In §3 I argue for the limited specificity of well-being measures for policy—policy-makers only want/can deal with populations, not individuals. In §4 I argue for the limited practicality of well-being measures for policy—policy-makers do not care about hypothetical or extreme cases. I then turn in §5 through §7 to propose an intermediate normatively adequate account of well-being that is useful for guiding policy-makers in their choice of well-being measure.

6.2 Limited influence

Well-being policies are not meant to encompass all walks of life. In a liberal democracy, which is where I assume most readers live, policy-makers, even those who are interested in implementing policies aimed at promoting the well-being of their citizens, believe that there is a limit on the extent to which they can legitimately influence and interfere with people's lives. A policy-directed account of well-being need not be descriptively accurate for areas that are beyond the legitimate influence of public policy.

We might follow John Stuart Mill (1985) in thinking that in liberal democracies there are many aspects of people's well-being—all those that are considered the private sphere, and are off limits from a policy perspective:

As soon as any part of a person's conduct affects prejudicially the interests of others, society has jurisdiction over it, and the question whether the general

¹Even deciding not to enact any well-being directed policy is, as a matter of fact, a kind of well-being directed policy, since such a choice has the consequences of leaving well-being to be influenced indirectly by other non-well-being-focused policies.

welfare will or will not be promoted by interfering with it, becomes open to discussion. But there is no room for entertaining any such question when a person's conduct affects the interests of no persons besides himself, or needs not affect them unless they like (all the persons concerned being of full age, and the ordinary amount of understanding). In all such cases there should be perfect freedom, legal and social, to do the action and stand the consequences. (pp. 141-142)

Indeed, often when the government intervenes through policies on things that are considered the individuals' 'own business,' citizens oppose it. Attempts to regulate the size of soft drink beverages in New York or attempts to decriminalize Marijuana can be seen as an example of this tension.

However, Mill's requirement does not seem to accord with current attitudes in contemporary liberal democracies. There are many instances in which public policies interfere with people's lives for what policy-makers perceive as the person's own good. Paternalistically justified policies, such as seatbelt and smoking laws abound and are generally accepted.² More importantly, the project of implementing policies that are aimed at promoting well-being is inherently paternalistic. If we were to follow Mill's dictate, well-being policies would not get off the ground.

For policy-makers who aim to promote well-being through public policy, interfering with individuals' personal sphere for their own good is a necessary condition. The policy goal of promoting individuals' well-being is illiberal in that it does not necessarily take into account whether or not individuals welcome such interferences. This is why Sam Wren-lewis (2013) argues that "liberal societies should not base policy on comprehensive religious, moral, or philosophical doctrines that many reasonable citizens may not accept," and as a result, substantive well-being policies should not be implemented. Indeed, some things are generally considered off limits to governmental intervention. Government does not generally intervene on private aesthetic choices such as whether to

²While there are non-paternalistic justifications to such rules, many find the paternalistic arguments compelling.

paint one's walls pink rather than white (Sen, 1970), or what music one listens to (despite the Israeli government's refusal to allow the Beatles to perform in Israel in 1964 for fear that they will have a negative effect on the youth), religious beliefs and practices (despite a ban on face covering in France in 2010 that *de facto* is a ban on the Muslim Niqab), or ability to have children (despite compulsory sterilization throughout the US in the first half of the 20th century).

Nevertheless, policy-makers, especially those concerned with promoting well-being, do sometimes intervene on individuals' private sphere for paternalistic reasons. If the private/public or self-affecting/other-affecting distinctions are not what is used to limit governmental intervention, what is? This question is even more pertinent when considering the recent enthusiasm in policy circles with applying ideas from Cass Sunstein's and Richard Thaler's "Nudge" (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008) in public policy. Sunstein and Thaler advocate for what they call "libertarian paternalism," which according to them is "an approach that preserves freedom of choice but that authorizes both private and public institutions to steer people in directions that will promote their welfare" (Thaler and Sunstein, 2003, p. 179). In the UK, the 'Behavioural Insights Team (BIT), was formed and is now a joint partnership between government and the private sector.³ The BIT aims to apply insights from academic research in behavioural economics and psychology to public policy and services. Generally, the BIT aims to 'nudge' individuals through the architecture of choice situations to make choices that are viewed as socially optimal (e.g. rearranging desserts in cafeterias, putting healthy fruit before unhealthy cake, because people pick the first dessert more). These 'nudges' need not be paternalistic in that they might be motivated by considerations of societal cost or impact on others. Nonetheless, these 'nudges,' whether paternalistic or not, do seem to fly in the face of the traditional liberal conception of the proper domain of influence for

³While the UK BIT is the most established, other countries, such as the US, New Zealand and Israel are following suit.

government.

But libertarian paternalism also offers a way of distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate interference. Permissible interference only affects the choice architecture that the individual faces rather than coercing the individual through a reduction of the choices the individual has (Sunstein and Thaler, 2003; Thaler and Sunstein, 2003).⁴ Is this the right criterion to distinguish permissible interference by public policy on the individual sphere? There are several reasons to be skeptical. First, the quantity of choices can sometimes seem unimportant, rather the quality of the choices is what matter.⁵ Second, as Hausman and Welch (2010) argue, some interventions on individuals' choice architecture, e.g. government using subliminal messaging to cause people to increase their teeth brushing, seem more insidious than others, even without reducing their choice set.

However the distinction is made between permissible and impermissible intervention of the state in the individual' private sphere, there is a sense in liberal democracies that such a line exists. As a result there will be some set of possible policies that might promote well-being that are not pursued, regardless of how beneficial or detrimental they are to the individuals well-being. Even if social scientists discover that listening to Bach has a significant negative effect on well-being whereas listening to Niki Minage has significant positive effects on well-being, policy-makers in a liberal democracy will be reluctant to enact policies that encourage the later and discourage the former (and not only because of their own musical tastes).

Where the line between legitimate and illegitimate interference lies and what the domain of effects on well-being that are relevant to public policy can change within society over time and vary between societies. What policy-makers can legitimately

⁴Though Sustein and Thaler are not explicit on how they understand coercion, in the context of their writing it appears they mean something like the reduction of the choices the individual has.

⁵For an in-depth discussion of this position see Pattanaik and Xu (1990).

intervene on depends in part on what the electorate deems acceptable. Consider the case of physician assisted suicide. This is a classic case where the only effect of a person's choice to end her life is her own individual well-being.⁶ Oregon, was the first state in the USA to legalize the practice in 1997, and since then three more states (Montana, Washington and Vermont) followed suit. It seems that in the US the view that it is illegitimate for the state to forbid physician assisted suicide has been gaining ground in recent years (e.g. the End of Life Option Act (SB 128) in California).

Because certain aspects of the individuals' lives are off limit to policy-makers, there are certain aspects of peoples' well-being that will not be targeted by well-being policies. Policy-makers need only be interested in measuring well-being to the extent that these measures will inform their policy choices. As a result, from a public policy perspective, these aspects do not need to be measured. If what music an individual listens to affects her well-being, yet influencing the music an individual listens to is off limits to policy-makers, then there is no policy-related reason for policy-makers to be interested in measuring how music affects well-being.

Social scientists might nevertheless be interested in measuring non-policy-related effects on well-being, albeit for reasons other than influencing public policy. Social scientists might be interested in measuring well-being out of academic interest of trying to figure out how people function. Alternatively, as the plethora of self-help books on how to be happy indicate, giving people good (or sometimes not so good) advice on what affects well-being, might be a profitable business. Less benevolent than policy-makers are supposed to be, commercial companies, might find it profitable to know that classical music decreases a person's well-being, and that people with low well-being are more prone to buy more at stores. While it might be somewhat sinister, it would be far from shocking if as a result all you heard in department stores was classical music.

⁶Of course others, such as her family might be affected, as well as it might be possible for the state to take some interest in this. However, as Mill argued, it "needs not affect them unless they like" (p. 142)

Because of this limit on policy, it might, as a matter of fact, turn out to be the case that legitimate public-policy interventions can only target factors that have a marginal effect on well-being. If, for example, urban zoning policies barely affect well-being, whereas home decoration policies are off limits but affect well-being substantially, then policy-makers have only marginally effective policy tools at their disposal. Nonetheless, if zoning policies are the *only* legitimate way policy-makers have to affect well-being, such policies are probably better than nothing.

Solely focusing on measuring the effects of well-being that are relevant to policy-makers reduces the likelihood that theoretically controversial claims will be made. The smaller the measured domain of effects on well-being, the less likely that theories of well-being will disagree as to whether these are positive or negative effects, and the less hinges on what the correct theory of well-being is. The inferences made from measures that only focus on policy relevant well-being are a subset of inferences that can be drawn from measures focused on all aspects of well-being. Consequently, there will probably be less disagreement in the first group.⁷ Consider, for example, how a preference-satisfaction theory of well-being might view a person spending time with her family over the holidays as conducive to her well-being, since she has a (real) preference to do so. By contrast, a mental-state theory of well-being might view that person spending time with her family as detrimental to her well-being, since it causes her anxiety and depression. The two theories of well-being have a genuine disagreement about whether spending time with her family during the holidays is conducive to a person's well-being. Nevertheless, public-policies aimed at encouraging or dissuading individuals to spend time with their family during the holidays are probably considered unacceptable in a liberal democracy, since such policies are too intrusive on the individual's domain. As a result, policy-makers would not measure whether spending time with one's family is

⁷It is possible that the disagreements are all in policy-relevant domains and so the subset will contain the entire set, but this does not seem likely.

conducive or harmful to her well-being to begin with. Subsequently, whether the measure of well-being that policy-makers use is sensitive to one theory or another does not matter in that instance.

6.3 Limited specificity

While philosophical theories of well-being deal with well-being at the individual level, public policy, being the blunt instrument it is, does not. First, public policy only targets populations or groups. Second, the measures public policy relies on are statistical in nature. Those disagreements among theories of well-being that arise only when focusing on individuals do not matter to well-being public policy. As result, a policy-directed account of well-being need not be descriptively accurate for individual cases, since these are beyond the limited specificity that policy-makers demand or well-being measures can supply.

Public policies affect real, individual, people. *My* well-being is affected by policies regarding bicycle lanes, *your* well-being is affected by policies regarding Influenza immunizations. But while policies affect the well-being of individuals, they do not target single (or specific) individuals. Policies, at the governmental level, are not meant to deal with individual cases. As F.A. Hayek (1944) argues, in a properly functioning liberal democracy, “[t]he state should confine itself to establishing rules applying to general types of situations” (p. 56). Hayek explains the distinction between the Rule of Law and arbitrary government:

The first type of rules can be made in advance, in the shape of *formal rules* which do not aim at the wants and needs of particular people... [The second type] cannot tie itself down in advance to general and formal rules which prevent arbitrariness. It must provide for the actual needs of people as they arise and then choose deliberately between them. (p. 55)

While we might disagree with Hayek on a large number of things, I consider this view

generally commonplace and acceptable.

Because public policies target groups of individuals, there will be some who (hopefully) will enjoy an increased level of well-being, while there will be others who (unfortunately) will suffer from a decreased level of well-being. Almost no public policy can be Pareto Efficient with respect to well-being.⁸

If policy-makers should not target (specific) individuals through their well-being policies, they do not need to demand information on whether a given policy will increase or decrease the level of well-being of a specific individual. They merely need to know whether the policy will increase or decrease aggregate well-being of the target group.⁹ The mirror image of the lack of demand by policy-makers for information about well-being of specific individuals is the lack of ability of well-being measures to meaningfully supply such information.

The information policy-makers have available to them regarding well-being is derived from the well-being measures that currently exist. Indeed, some well-being measures can measure the well-being of specific individuals. It is possible to measure individual income, and if we take income as a measure of well-being, then it would seem that we can measure the well-being of an individual. The same is true with SWB measure such as life-satisfaction questionnaires. If we assume that an individual's self reported life-satisfaction measures her well-being, then it seems we can measure individual well-being. However, relying too much on a well-being measure to provide evidence regarding an individual's level of well-being risks making errors. For example, SWB measure can

⁸An allocation is Pareto Efficient if there is no alternative way to organize the distribution of goods (in this case well-being) that makes some individual better off without making some other individual worse off. While such a goal appears minimal in what it commits one to, real-world policies will almost always cause some individuals harm, even if the policies are highly beneficial in the aggregate. For policy-makers to focus on increasing well-being at each individual level would be an insurmountable and counter-productive task. Put differently, almost any real-world status quo is Pareto optimal.

⁹There can be more sophisticated aims, such as increasing average well-being, or perhaps a prioritarian approach aiming to increase the well-being of the worse off members of the group. Even in the prioritarian case, it seems the focus should be on the worse off group rather than the worse of individual. For a discussion on prioritarian concerns in public policy see (Wolff and De-Shalit, 2007).

be significantly affected by trivial factors such as finding a dime or receiving a chocolate bar (Strack et al., 1991). For any mental-state theory of well-being to take the SWB measure as perfectly getting at mental states entails that finding a dime significantly increases a person's well-being. Yet common sense dictates that one instance of receiving a chocolate bar ought to at most barely influence how well an individual's life is going for them as a whole. Thus, it would seem to be a mistake to treat the information gathered from the measure in such a case as reliably representing well-being characterized as constituted by mental-states. Similarly, there are a variety of reasons we might suspect that an individual with high income might suffer from low levels of well-being and that one with low income can enjoy high levels of well-being. For example, a wealthy individual preferring to avoid suffering the acute pain she is feeling, going through a nasty divorce and getting fired in the near future as she expects seems likely to have a low level of well-being despite her high income. An individual with a preference for the fulfilling job she enjoys, the supportive family she has and living in the lively community she cherishes, seems likely to enjoy a high level of well-being despite her low income. Thus, on its own income does not seem to afford a reliable representation of well-being characterized as preference-satisfaction.

While discrepancies can be large in any individual case, discrepancies tend to get canceled out when looking at the aggregate level. Discrepancies in opposite directions cancel each other out, so, for example, when one person enjoys higher levels of subjective mental states than the measure indicates and another person suffers from lower levels, these two cancel each other out. There is a regression towards the mean. As a result, much of the noise is squelched in the aggregate. Thus, these well-being measures have a much better chance of providing an accurate picture of well-being for an aggregated group than for any particular individual.¹⁰

¹⁰Furthermore, as Heather Douglas (2007) points out, recognizing that measurement errors are significantly greater when focused on individuals than aggregates, and knowing that such errors can have real

Policies can only be legitimately chosen based on their effects on people at the aggregate level and reliable information can only be supplied at the aggregate level. The lack of a need on the part of policy-makers to demand information about individuals' well-being along with the lack of ability of well-being measures to supply such information, has the implication that differences among theories of well-being with respect to well-being at the individual level need not concern policy-makers.

Philosophical theories of well-being have the resources to get into fine grained distinctions and disagree on individual cases. Yet neither are the measures of well-being we currently employ fine grained enough to deal with such distinctions, nor do policy-makers need to be concerned about such distinctions. Well-being measures will simply not be sensitive enough to capture the various special cases and general outliers to the norm that theories of well-being are sometimes interested in. Unique individual cases expose where much the the disagreement between theories arises. However, because well-being measures are not useful for picking up small statistically insignificant differences, some difference between theories at the extremes will not get picked up.

Consider, for example, Amartya Sen's discussion of those who are persistently deprived (Sen, 2009). Sen claims that:

[O]ur mental make-up and desires tend to adjust to circumstances, particularly to make life bearable in adverse situations. It is through 'coming to terms' with one's hopeless predicament that life is made somewhat bearable by the traditional underdogs, such as oppressed minorities in intolerant communities, sweated workers in exploitative industrial arrangements, precarious share-croppers living in a world of uncertainty, or subdued housewives in deeply sexist cultures. The hopelessly deprived people may lack the courage to desire any radical change and typically tend to adjust their desires and expectations to what little they see as feasible. They train themselves to take pleasure in small mercies. (pp. 282-3)

Both preference-satisfaction and mental-state theories of well-being might con-

repercussions to which well-being policies get adopted, places a responsibility on those scientists who devise and implement these measures.

sider Sen's traditional underdogs to be doing well, or at least not as suffering terribly. As Sen sets up the example these individuals adapt their preferences so that they are nonetheless satisfied, and they train themselves to derive pleasure from circumstances that offer very little of it. By contrast, an objective-list theory would view them as suffering from low levels of well-being, since their objective situation is indeed dire.

Nevertheless, while such groups, which are sadly too commonplace, might have adjusted desires and pleasures, they are not without what we might think are 'normal' desires and pleasures. The exploited worker, while fearing radical change, might prefer better bathroom access and enjoy less abusive bosses. The subdued housewife while taking pleasure in small mercies, like her husband acquiescing to letting her take a walk (escorted by her brother) outside of the house, probably would also take pleasure in being able to drive a car unaccompanied by a male. Learning to take pleasure in small mercies does not preclude enjoying large ones and fearing radical changes does not preclude desiring gradual ones. If this is right, then mental-states and preference-satisfaction accounts are at most just exaggerating the degree of increase to well-being that those adjusted to their circumstances changes.

But if Sen is thinking of those who genuinely prefer, and take pleasure in, their oppressed status over a liberated arrangement, then I suspect that the numbers of such people is quite small.¹¹ Thus, I am making an empirical claim that most subdued housewives are not content, and most content housewives are not subdued (I leave open whether most non-subdued housewives are content). An SWB measure would, for example, rank the well-being of housewives that are subdued yet content as high and the well-being of subdued discontent housewives as low. If only subdued housewives were targeted by an SWB measure, assuming that most subdued housewives are not content (since I believe Sen's example is meant as an outlier), the measure will not find that some

¹¹This empirical claim could be mistaken.

subdued housewives are content. Rather, the group of content subdued housewives will merely cause the mixed group to seem overall less discontent (or more content) than many of its members actually feel. The content subdued housewives might have statistical significance, in that they might raise the SWB score for the entire group of both subdued housewives, or housewives in general in a significant enough manner. However, an SWB measure will not be able to differentiate between a case in which subdued housewives are a heterogeneous group of content and discontent housewives, and a case in which subdued housewives are homogeneous in their mild level of discontent.

Since SWB measures cannot differentiate between the two cases, and it is by using the measure that policy-makers can assess public policies aimed at promoting well-being, it does not matter in a policy-relevant sense whether content subdued housewives are in fact enjoying high levels of well-being (according to preference-satisfaction or mental-state theories), or whether they are suffering from low levels of well-being (according to objective-list theories of well-being).¹² The well-being measures, looking at the group as a whole, will not make salient any discernible difference. Because well-being measures provide less information than is required to resolve some disputes among theories of well-being, the theoretical disputes become irrelevant to public policy decisions that rely on the well-being measures.

6.4 Limited practicality

Because policy-makers aiming to promote well-being are only interested in measuring well-being insofar as it pertains to actual policies, they need not care about either hypothetical cases or rare cases. Yet much of the disagreement among competing

¹²By contrast, an objective measure that measures whether housewives are subdued, cannot differentiate between those that are subdued and discontent and those that are subdued yet content. However a subduction measure measures subduction, it will not resolve the issue.

philosophical theories of well-being only emerges in such hypothetical and rare cases. Many of the counter examples that challenge different theories of well-being only arise in hypothetical cases, such as Robert Nozick's experience machine, or rare cases, such as Amartya Sen's affluent faster. But such cases are irrelevant to well-being measures and policy. This is not to say that they are not legitimate challenges to a theory that purports to be a correct theory of well-being. Rather, many of these challenges simply do not arise when restricting the scope of the debate only to cases that have public policy relevance. A policy-directed account of well-being need not be descriptively accurate for cases that go beyond the limits of practicality that public policy deals with.

6.4.1 Hypothetical cases

The philosophical literature is rife with hypothetical cases that are meant to advance the philosophical debate. Color blind Mary (Jackson, 1986), Twin earth (Putnam, 1975) and the unconscious violinist (Thomson, 1971) are just some examples. One reason these hypotheticals are useful is that they generate cases that allows us to see what is at stake when holding certain philosophical positions, distinguishing between what these positions entail, and seeing where these positions disagree.

The most famous hypothetical case used in the well-being literature is Robert Nozick's (1974) experience machine. The experience machine is meant to challenge mental-state theories of well-being, according to which well-being is constituted by our subjective mental-states, and if we do not experience something it is irrelevant to our well-being. The experience machine is meant to show that "something matters to us in addition to experience" (p. 44). According to Weijers (2013) "The vast majority of people who read Nozick's scenario think that they would choose to remain in reality, including some who previously believed that only how their experiences feel to them affects the

quality of their lives.”¹³ Nozick needs to create such a fanciful science fiction type case, because in regular everyday cases it is difficult to determine with much certainty that there are any states or events that both seem intuitively relevant to our well-being and do have no effect on our subjective mental-states. We would be hard pressed to find any plausibly relevant situations in which we can effectively divorce what clearly appears to be affecting a person’s well-being from it having an effect on her mental-states.

A more plausible case is that of a secretly cheating spouse. We might want to say that the cheated on individual is harmed by being cheated on, even if she does not know that she is cheated on. This would seem to contradict a mental state account. Such an example might be irrelevant for policy purposes because it deals with individuals, but a group level example is not difficult to contrive. Imagine a town where, unbeknown to anyone in the town, the mayor is embezzling some of the tax revenue. It seems we would like to say that the well-being of the people of the town is reduced due to the mayor’s wrongdoing, despite no one being aware of it. A mental-state account would need to deny this. One might say that they are harmed by knowing that the town cannot afford an exciting performance of fireworks this year. Yet, this might be going to far, as it would be the lack of fireworks that is reducing well-being, not the act of embezzlement by the mayor.

Yet in both more ‘realistic’ cases we are required to stipulate enough background (e.g. no unconscious effect or reputation harms) so that the only thing at work is whether there is an experience or not. Cases that are couched in terms of nuptial relations or small town politics seem ordinary enough. However, for the thought experiment to do its work the cases need to be cleaned to the degree that they become unrealistic. In cases that are actually realistic, intuitions that can go both ways are at play. The real-life corollaries to the hypothetical thought experiments often do not make the point for or

¹³Weijers argues that Nozick’s scenario description elicits several biases, and improved versions show that even hypothetical cases do not provide conclusive evidence regarding intuitions against hedonism.

against some theory of well-being as clearly salient as does the hypothetical thought experiment, which is intentionally cleaned out of any additional factors. This saliency of the distinction between the implications of different theories of well-being is why we turn to hypothetical cases in the first case. However, if real-life cases often cannot distinguish as clearly between the implications of ascribing to different well-being theories, then in those cases what theory one ascribes to need not matter. The hypothetical cases, useful as they might be to argue for or against different philosophical theories of well-being as correct, need not concern the policy-maker insofar as such cases do not arise in the policy context.

6.4.2 Rare cases

Rare cases cannot be dismissed as easily as hypothetical cases by claiming that they are totally irrelevant to public policy. Rare cases do occur, albeit rarely. When policy-makers seek to decide on well-being policy, rare cases need to be dealt with as well. Consider Sen's affluent faster. Sen raises the possibility that a person might suffering through a lack of nourishment due to her choice to fast. Sen says that:

'[F]asting' as a functioning is *not* just starving; it is *choosing to starve when one does have other options*. In examining a starving person's achieved well-being, it is of direct interest to know whether he is fasting or simply does not have the means to get enough food. (Sen, 1992, p. 52)

While what alternatives the individual faces sometimes matter to how the functioning is framed, we would be reasonable to be skeptical that such cases of chosen deprivation are prevalent enough to warrant their relevance to public policy.¹⁴ While many religions have some form of fasting as part of their religious observance (e.g. Yom Kippur in Judaism or Ramadan in Islam), these cases of fasting do not come close to elicit malnourishment. Aesthetics, on the other hand, while not affluent, do seem to fit

¹⁴See also Wolff and De-Shalit (2007).

Sen's description of a person suffering malnourishment out of choice (These can include religious Hindu ascetics, but also people fasting as an act of protest, political or otherwise, such as Khader Adnan who fasted for being detained indefinitely by Israel without formal charges).

Sen's fasting person case exemplifies the need to look beyond material conditions to tell whether a person is suffering, and it is useful for making a philosophical point on the issue. Yet it has little to bear on public policy. The overwhelming majority of people suffering from malnutrition are starving rather than fasting, and do not do so by choice. For policy purposes the distinction between starvers and fasters, is a non issue.

6.4.3 Limited consistency

While hypothetical cases are merely hypothetical, rare cases could potentially produce cases that are worrisome to the philosophically inclined policy-maker. Nonetheless, policy-makers do not care nearly as much as philosophers whether they fail in what is a cornerstone of philosophical inquiring—consistency. Philosophical positions can be cast aside for failing the consistency test, and producing a *reductio ad absurdum* is considered a *de facto* refutation of a philosophical position. Yet this is not the case with public policy. As Jonathan Wolff (2011, p. 82) argues, the appeal to inconsistency, which is the philosopher's favorite weapon, is blunted in public policy. The most blatant inconsistencies are of course problematic. But public policies are the result of compromises between competing interests, and are enacted by different people at different times for different purposes. As such, some inconsistencies will arise.

6.5 Distilling the hard core theoretical requirements

The three ways in which the requirements from a normatively adequate account of well-being for public policy are lower than for a descriptively adequate philosophical theory open the door to the possibility for generating some agreement regarding the former. Yet whether this is enough to generate agreement depends on there being a positive account of well-being for public policy on which proponents of different philosophical theories can agree. I now propose an intermediate account of well-being that is meant to provide just that by including what is central for each philosophical theory. Again, it is important to stress that this is not meant to be a true theory of well-being. Rather, it is meant as a useful account around which agreement can be reached through compromise, and to guide policy-makers' choice of measures of well-being, rather than choice of policies.¹⁵

An intermediate theory of well-being is meant as a normatively adequate *compromise* between the different theories of well-being that are purported to be descriptively adequate, i.e. that purport to adequately describe what constitutes well-being. As a normatively adequate account, an intermediate account is meant to guide policy-makers in their choice among different measures for use in deciding on well-being public policy. Such an account need not be correct in any strict sense of the word, merely useful in guiding and justifying the choice of a particular measure. It can miss a lot of the nuance that the purportedly descriptively adequate accounts capture. This lack of nuance entails that some things that some theories might want to take as relevant to well-being are missed. Yet in light of the lesser goals of policy, this is not too high a price to pay for an account that can deliver agreement. Consequently, criticisms against the intermediate account on the grounds that it does not 'get well-being right,' that it characterizes well-being differently than how we normally think of it and so it is inadequate are not appropriate

¹⁵The choice of policies is supposed to be guided by the well-being measures that end up being chosen.

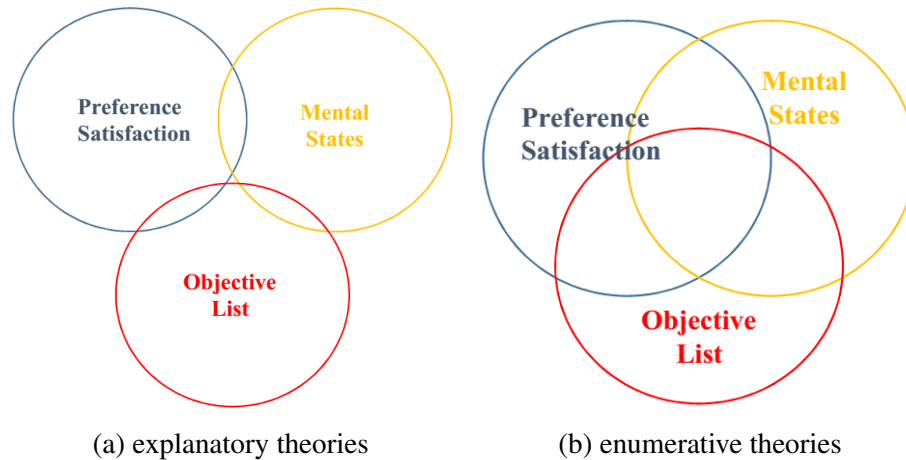


Figure 6.1: intersection of theories of well-being

arguments against the account. Claiming that an abstract painting is badly done because it poorly depicts a person's portrait, when the painting only depicts the portrait insofar as it helps express a sense of bewilderment, for example, would be a similarly misplaced criticism.

The different theories of well-being disagree on what constitutes well-being as well as on what things contribute to well-being. As discussed in chapter 2, theories that disagree on what constitutes well-being are explanatory theories, while theories that disagree on what contribute to well-being are enumerative theories. Disagreement among explanatory theories is more substantial than disagreement among enumerative theories. Enumerative theories would probably all agree that some minimal level of education, for example, is conducive to well-being. Explanatory theories, on the other hand, would disagree as to why this is the case (e.g. because the individual prefers it, it makes her happy, or it is one of the things on a list that is good for her). Thus generating agreement among enumerative accounts is much more plausible than generating agreement among explanatory accounts. Nevertheless, while all enumerative theories probably agree that education is conducive to well-being, they can disagree as to how much, what kind, and in what context education is indeed conducive to well-being.

As has been argued earlier in the chapter, the domain of application of a theory of well-being that is normatively adequate as a guide to well-being measure choice in public policy is narrower than the domain of descriptively adequate theories that meant to make claims about the nature of well-being. Consequently, the differences among enumerative theories in this restricted domain is lesser than the difference in the entire domain of well-being. However, there still is room for disagreement among the purported descriptively adequate theories as to what is conducive to well-being and what measure best captures that. Even if there is agreement on health, for example, being conducive to well-being, and even when restricted to the domain of public policy, disagreement can still arise. Given limited resources, there might be disagreement as to whether public policy should focus on mental health (assuming it will best improve mental-states), increased mobility for the disabled (assuming it will do best on an objective-list account), or increased dental services (assuming it accommodates people's preferences best). Thus there could be disagreement on what measure captures these different aspects of health in a way that best accords with each theory of well-being. Disagreement among enumerative theories still remains even after narrowing of the domain of well-being to only that which is relevant to well-being public policy, restricting the focus only to well-being at a statistically significant level and limiting attention only to those areas that policy-makers have political legitimacy to intervene in.

Fully accommodating the different theories could only be jointly made if no disagreement would arise among the theories, which clearly is not the case. Because disagreement still exists, an intermediate account can not jointly fully accommodate the different theories. To hope that working form two different directions—narrowing the domain of policy on the one hand, and creating an inclusive intermediate theory on the other—will result in perfect convergence is too optimistic. As such this method will not be a perfect one. However, as long as it yields a workable account to guide

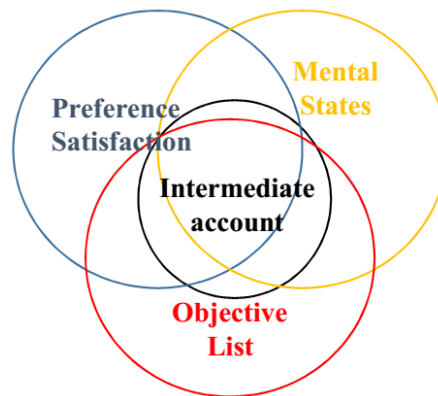


Figure 6.2: intermediate account of well-being

well-being measure choice for public policy that is better than the alternative approaches, it is good enough. But the intermediate theory is meant as a compromise among holders of competing viewpoints, it is not meant to be wholly in accord with any particular theory. A compromise often means that no one gets everything they want, though they get enough to generate agreement. Agreement to compromise enables us to get beyond an entrenched position in which cautious policy-makers who care to only use measures they can justify find themselves. People hold to different theories of well-being and so justify a measure choice by appealing to any one of them risks losing legitimacy with whoever holds an alternative view. An evidential account cannot circumvent this standoff on its own. The position policy-makers are in is either needing to give up the project of justifying their well-being measure choice, or else justify it by appealing to an intermediate account that can be seen as an acceptable compromise between the theories of well-being.

To propose a way of constructing an intermediate account of well-being I borrow from Imre Lakatos's on research programmes (Lakatos and Musgrave, 1970). According to Lakatos, scientific research programmes are comprised of a 'hard core' and a 'protective belt' of auxiliary hypotheses. The 'hard core' of the programme is 'irrefutable' by the "methodological decisions of its protagonists." The protective belt consists of a set of auxiliary hypotheses that are the "refutable variants' of the research-programme" (p.

135). Lakatos explains that “It is this protective belt of auxiliary hypotheses which has to bear the brunt of tests and get adjusted and readjusted, or even completely replaced, to defend the thus-hardened core.” (p. 133) Lakatos discusses Newton’s three laws of dynamics and his law of gravitation as an example of a research programme’s hard core. Newton’s auxiliary assumptions included planets that are mass-balls, interplanetary forces, spinning balls, wobbles and bulging planets (pp. 135-6). Nevertheless, anomalies and counter-evidence, according to Lakatos, are never completely exhausted and can only be digested piecemeal by a research programme (p. 135).

We can similarly conceive of philosophical theories of well-being as consisting of a combination of a hard core of the programme and a protective belt. This way of conceptualizing well-being theories guides the generation of the intermediate account of well-being I offer. It requires distilling the hard core of each of the central theories of well-being under consideration from its protective belt, and articulating it in terms of a requirement that the intermediate account must fulfill. This is in a sense a reverse engineering of theories of well-being. It is necessary for the intermediate account I propose because I take the hard core to be what the proponents of different well-being theories are most committed to, while the protective belt is the amalgamation of hypotheses required to make the theory descriptively adequate.

Theories of well-being have more to them than a single requirement at their core. Because theories are so rich, focusing on a single requirement to represent whole types of theories will lose some of the philosophically interesting variations that exist. This is unavoidable. Whether it is a problem for an account of well-being that is meant to be adequate for guiding measure choice for public policy is a different matter. Preference-satisfaction theories, for example, can vary widely. How are preferences construed and what does their satisfaction entail is open to different ways of articulating the theory. These can be revealed preferences (as economists use the term), actual preferences, ideal

preferences ('ideal' can then be construed in different ways). Preferences can be limited to self-interested preferences as well as limited only to forward looking preferences. The satisfaction can be thought of as only a question of the state of the world, require the individual's knowledge or experience of the satisfaction, or limited to satisfaction that only occur when the individual still holds the relevant preference. This is even more apparent with objective-list theories, which can be of entirely different kinds, such as perfectionist theories on the one hand and bare objective-list theories on the other. In the following subsections I address issues that arise with each theory when trying to distill its core.

This intermediate account is not meant to be true of well-being, merely useful to guide well-being measure choices for policy. Other intermediate accounts that set the point of compromise elsewhere than this one might be superior in different ways. This account relies on two conditions that have already been flagged in the literature—experience and preference (see (Woodard, 2012)). To these two conditions I add a third condition, existence, as a candidate for adding the agreement of the proponents of objective-lists. These are the three requirements, each representing a family of theories, that jointly make up the intermediate account:

Experience - for any subject S, the only constituents of S's welfare are S's experiences

Endorsement - for any subject S, the only constituents of S's welfare are the occurrence of some set of states that S endorses

Existence for any subject S, the only constituents of S's welfare are some set actual occurrences

6.5.1 Experience requirement

James Griffin (1986) introduces the experience requirement when criticizing desire-satisfaction accounts of well-being, and in particular informed-desire accounts.

Griffin takes the breadth of desire-satisfaction accounts as one of their central flaws. Well-being, on such accounts, can be influenced not only by things that we are unaware of, but also by things that do not affect our lives in any way. According to Griffin, “[t]he trouble is that one’s desires spread themselves so widely over the world that their objects extend far outside the bound of what, with any plausibility, one could take as touching one’s own well-being” (p. 17). Griffin thinks we need an experience requirement to limit the scope of what can be considered as affecting our well-being only to those things that we experience. Without such requirement, the well-being of those who died can be influenced by things still occurring, which he takes to be a problem. Griffin argues that the need for any desire-satisfaction account to introduce some experience requirement to avoid arbitrariness entails a loss of breadth that was what make such accounts attractive to begin with.

According to Scanlon (1993), the ‘experience requirement’ “is the thesis that nothing can affect the quality of a life except by affecting the experience of living that life” (p. 185). Scanlon thinks that the experience requirement might have a couple of reasons: first, it can be seen as bringing well-being “closer to the ordinary meaning of the phrase ‘quality of a person’s life’” (p. 186). Second, it preserves the idea that any improvements in well-being have positive ethical value. It seems implausible that we can have any *prima facie* obligation to improve an individual’s well-being if it is affected by changes in spatio-temporally distant states of affairs (like a change in the color of Uranus in the year 20,000 AD).

Woodard (2012, p. 794), citing Griffin (1986) and Scanlon (1993, 2000), and attempting to formalize the experience requirement, states that “[a] theory accepts the experience requirement just in case it claims that, for any subject S, the only constituents of S’s welfare are S’s experiences.” Woodard is clear that for a theory to reject the experience requirement does not mean that it rejects experiences as relevant to well-being.

Experiences might still play a role in well-being, it would simply not be the case that experience is a necessary condition for well-being.

Griffin does worry that the experience requirement might go too far:

It bans things that our ordinary notion of well-being cannot, without damage, do without. It is common that, as many persons' values mature, such things as accomplishment and close authentic personal relationships come more and more to fill the centre of their lives. If the Experience Requirement excludes these values from 'utility', then 'utility' will have less and less to do with what these persons see as making their own lives good. And those values do seem excluded. (p. 19)

Nevertheless, I do not see why the experience requirement would exclude such things as accomplishments and authentic relationships from well-being. It merely excludes accomplishments and authentic relationships that bear nothing on experience. If, for example, a researcher's work makes possible the discovery of a cure for some disease, but the researcher is unaware of this fact and so does not recognize the accomplishment as such, it would not count as an experience and would not count as conducive to her well-being. But, contra Griffin, this sounds reasonable to me.

Regardless of whether the experience requirement is plausible, it does embody a central element of a family of well-being theories—mental-states theories. The different versions of mental-states theories share in common a commitment to the idea that whatever contributes to one's well-being, it must have an effect on what 'happens in the head.' The individual's mental-states must in some way be affected for there to be an impact on her well-being, and so she must have an experience for something to count as impacting well-being. As Nozick's experience machine thought experiment shows, this experience can be wholly internal to the person, with no manifestation in the external world. Nevertheless, this would count as an experience of hers.

More problematic are distinctions between conscious mental-states and unconscious ones. It might seem plausible to some that some pleasant scent in a room causes

someone to be less stressed, though it is then not clear whether this counts as a mental-state and whether it counts as an experience, if the person is unconscious of it as such. The experience requirement of course does not capture all that mental-states theories consider important to well-being, as it takes no stand on what kind of experiences count as conducive or harmful to well-being, merely that they must be experiences. Specific theories, such as hedonism, narrow things down to pleasures and pains, though there are a variety of ways to cash these out as well. Nevertheless, the experience requirement captures a central aspect of mental-states theories.

6.5.2 Endorsement requirement

The endorsement requirement seems less intuitive than the experience requirement. For those who do not hold a preference-satisfaction theory of well-being, it seems plausible that something might be conducive to an individual's well-being, despite that individual not wanting/desiring/endorsing that good. This view is how we think of the well-being of children, but it also guides forms of paternalism. If something cannot in principle be good for us without us endorsing it, then paternalism is an oxymoron.¹⁶

Woodard (2012, p. 794) states that “[a] theory accepts the desire requirement just in case it claims that, for any subject S, the only constituents of S's welfare are satisfactions of some set of desires that is appropriately related to S's desires.” He is careful to explicate that a lot hinges on what counts as desires and what counts desire satisfaction. However, using Lakatos' terminology, it is clear that the hard core of desire-satisfaction theories is that well-being is constituted by desires, however understood, being satisfied in some way. This is intentionally vague, as it is the auxiliary assumptions in the protective belt that do the work of cashing out this core idea. How are preferences

¹⁶This assumes a variety of conditions hold, such that we know about the good, act on the endorsement, etc’.

construed and what does their satisfaction entail is open to different ways of articulating the theory. These can be revealed preferences (as economists use the term), actual preferences, ideal preferences (ideal can then be construed in different ways). Preferences can be limited to self-interested preferences as well as limited only to forward looking preferences. The satisfaction can be thought of as only a question of the state of the world, require the individual's knowledge or experience of the satisfaction, or limited to satisfaction that only occur when the individual still holds the relevant preference.

Since we are willing to view desires so broadly, it might be more appropriate to describe the hard core not as involving the satisfaction of desires, but the occurrences of states of the world that a person endorses. Endorsement is more general than either preferences or desires in that at a minimum it merely requirements some approval of the state of the world to make that conducive to the person's well-being. Such an approval need not manifest itself in desires or preferences, which, however understood, seem to be a subset of endorsement.

L.W. Sumner suggests that one way of combining the experience and endorsement (desire) requirements would yield a desired experience theory according to which:

[A] state of affairs can make me better off only if, in one way or another, it enters or affects my experience. A version of the desire theory which incorporated such a requirement might look like this: x makes me better off (directly or intrinsically) just in case (1) I desire x, (2) x occurs, and (3) I am at least aware of x's occurrence. (Sumner 127)

Such a combination would yield an account that is at the intersection of a desire-satisfaction theory and a mental-states theory. This would significantly limit what can count as conducive to well-being from what each of theories would count as conducive to well-being on its own.

Sumner's experience-desire intersection possibility is made salient in a table Woodard produces. Using his two requirements, Woodard covers Sumner's suggestion in

area 1 of his table (p. 796):

Table 6.1: Woodard's classification of enumerative theories

	Accepts desire requirement	Rejects desire requirement
Accepts experience requirement	1	2
Rejects experience requirement	3	4

Modifying it slightly to use an endorsement requirement we get:

Table 6.2: adjustment to Woodard's classification

	Accepts endorsement requirement	Rejects endorsement requirement
Accepts experience requirement	1	2
Rejects experience requirement	3	4

However, for reasons that will be made apparent in the next section I will present the same information slightly differently:

Table 6.3: alternative presentation of the same information

Experience	Y	N	N	Y
Endorsement	N	Y	N	Y

6.5.3 Existence requirement

Woodard provides a useful way of categorizing enumerative theories of well-being. Yet relying only on his two conditions is not sufficient for my purposes here.

To create a plausible intermediate account I need a requirement that represents the hard core of each family of theories. Thus, I need a third requirement that covers theories that neither require experience nor endorsement for well-being, but rather something else. However, as Woodard explains, his fourth category, does not merely contain standard objective-list theories, it contains all theories that do not share either of the two before mentioned requirements. This includes perfectionist theories, bare objective list theories, capabilities accounts, and any other theories that does not fit neatly with the two requirements mentioned thus far.¹⁷

While preference-satisfaction and mental-states theories have a fairly recognizable hard core that is common to each family of theories, this is not true for objective-list theories. The diversity of such theories poses the biggest challenge to the intermediate account, since for it to be useful it need to also distill a central requirement for objective-list theories. Coming up with a requirement that represents the hard core of such an eclectic list will probably be impossible. Instead, I set my sights lower. I propose three possible requirements.

The first proposal for a hard core for objective-list theories would be an objective good requirement:

Objective Good for any subject S, the only constituents of S's welfare are some set of states that are objectively good for S.

This sounds like it might very well be at the hard core of all theories that do not have some kind of experience or endorsement criteria. At least I can think of no counter examples. At the same time, it is also extremely question begging and uninformative. It is question begging since according to this requirement what is good for S is what is objectively good for her. Another way to put it is that what is good for S is what is good for S regardless of S's preferences and experiences. If we were at all clear as to

¹⁷This also includes well-being variablism and well-being nihilism (Woodard, 2012, p. 797), which have nothing in common with the theories just mentioned.

what is objectively good for people, we would not need an intermediate account at all. Nevertheless, this requirement does succeed in including a wide swath of objective-list theories, ranging from Arneson's BOL theory to perfectionist theories. Since BOL is so minimal, any requirement more substantive than the objective good requirement will probably not be able to accommodate it.

A requirement that does not suffer from such circularity, though it is very restrictive, is an excellence requirement:

Excellence for any subject S, the only constituents of S's welfare are some set of excellences for S

An excellence requirement is not circular as it makes welfare conditional on a person's excellences. This requirement successfully captures Aristotelean and perfectionist views of well-being. On such views there are properties that are essential to humans *qua* humans, and that the good life consists in a maximal development of these properties (see Hurka (1993)). An excellence requirement also captures some versions of the capabilities approach, most notably Martha Nussbaum's. According to Nussbaum (2000, 2011) certain functions are typically understood as the mark of the presence of human life and a mark of being distinctively human (2011, pp. 71-2), and pursuing one's own well-being is an expression of our powers of self-definition (2000, p. 18). Specifically, practical reason and affiliation are the two functionings that must be actualized for a person to manifest her humanity, because "they both organize and suffuse all the others, making their pursuit truly human (2011, p. 82).

However, an excellence requirement would exclude both Arneson's BOL and Amartya Sen's capabilities approach, which do not take the things on an objective-list to have anything to do with excellences. The BOL merely consists of a list of things that are objectively good for individuals to attain more of, without any regard for excellence in any way. Sen's capabilities approach takes 'functionings', which are "an achievement

of a person: what he or she manages to do or be” (p. 7), as central. An individual can jointly achieve different combinations of functionings, and each of these combinations of functionings can be viewed as a ‘capability set’. As a simplistic example, consider a person who has a gallon of gas. She can either drive her car thirty miles, keep herself warm for three hours or nourish herself with two dollars worth of food, each being a single functioning.¹⁸ Yet she cannot do all three with one gallon of gas. Such a person would have multiple capability sets, each corresponding to one of these functionings fully fulfilled, as well as capability sets corresponding to the achievement of various combinations of partially fulfilled functionings. The combination of all the capability sets taken together is the person’s ‘capabilities set’. This is a set of sets and represent all the various ways in which a person can combine the commodities under her control into actualized functionings. Sen’s capabilities approach, Like Arneson’s BOL, would not be represented by a requirement that takes excellence as its central feature. Since these are two significant views in the well-being literature, they are worth taking seriously when trying to construct an intermediate account of well-being.

A requirement that both avoids circularity but is also inclusive of all objective-list theories, is an existence requirement:

Existence for any subject S, the only constituents of S’s welfare are some set actual occurrences

What is it that must actually occur in the world for something to constitute S’s welfare is obviously open to a wide swath of interpretations. However, as argued earlier, there are a wide range of objective-list theories available. The existence requirement is meant to ground well-being in ‘objective’ reality. Such a requirement would reject the possibility of well-being increasing through false beliefs of any kind, including experience machines, mistakes, and adaptation. The existence requirement tells us that what can be considered

¹⁸What constitutes a functioning is left under-described by Sen, though each of these seem to potentially count as a functioning.

well-being influencing must exist regardless of whether we want it or experience it. I take this to be the hard core of objective-list theories. This is especially salient when objective-list theories are juxtaposed to mental-states and preference-satisfaction theories of well-being.

The existence requirement precludes false beliefs that might give rise to an individual being happy or the illusion that her preferences were satisfied. But the existence requirement also precludes welfare nihilism, according to which there are no constituents of welfare. If any theory relies on an existence requirement then it does not cohere with welfare nihilism. Since the intersection of any theory of well-being (other than welfare nihilism) with welfare nihilism is an empty set, to have welfare nihilism taken as another requirement for an intermediate account would be counter productive.

By supplementing Woodard's taxonomy with a third requirement—an existence requirement—we can generate an intermediate account of well-being that generates some agreement among at least three families of theories of well-being: preference-satisfaction, mental-states and objective-list. As all three requirements begin with an 'e', we can call this the 3e intermediate account.

6.6 From intermediate account to measure choice

We thus arrive at an expanded table, with a nine section grid. We might not have theories to fully populate all nine sections. This disadvantage, however, might turn out as an advantage, encouraging us to seek novel (and hopefully better) theories that fit the different sections of the grid.

Yet the goal here is not, like Woodard's, to produce a classification of theories of well-being. Rather, the goal is to generate an intermediate account of well-being that can be thought of as an agreed on as a useful account to guide choices of well-being measures

Table 6.4: possible theoretical space

Experience	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N
Endorsement	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	N
Existence	N	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N

to be used in public policy. The intermediate account is constructed as an account that sets requirements that make up the hard core of the different theories.

What is well-being on the 3e account? well-being is an experience that exists and is endorsed. This is a way of characterizing well-being for public policy purposes that is comprised of each theory's central requirement, respects these central requirements, and so ought to be plausible to that theory. There can still be disagreement between the intermediate theory and the basic theories. But, the hope is that this disagreement will not be too big a pill for the proponents of any of the base theories to swallow. While the theoretical disagreement is not put to rest, reasonable compromise is achieved.

The intermediate account is meant to justify well-being measure choices, which then are used to guide policy choices. The account is not supposed to be used to guide the policy choices directly. A theory of well-being *merely* tells the policy-makers what things they should care about, but a measure is needed to then divine which policy options best achieves those things. We thus need to look at the different measures available in light of the intermediate account. Is there a measure is the best operationalization of the intermediate account? Do we have a substantive account for why a given measure should be used? Currently, I believe the answer is no to both.

But having a way of characterizing well-being that can be accepted by proponents of the different theories of well-being is a big first step. It is now up to the social scientists working on creating and refining well-being measures to construct a measure that can be viewed as an operationalization of the 3e account. As I see it, the way the 3e intermediate account was set up, the most promising measure will be an index consisting of a measure

that corresponds to each requirement. Is this really the way to go? The philosophical work ends here and the social science work begins. This is the appropriate division of labor. Of course philosophers can have more to say on the construction of the measure and its success as a operationalization of the intermediate account, but the actual construction is beyond our means.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

This dissertation does not offer a final answer with respect to how well-being ought to be measured for guiding public policy aimed at promoting well-being. Neither does it offer an answer to the more fundamental question of whether policy-makers should be in the business of trying to improve well-being in the first place. Rather, it occupies the space in between both questions. Assuming that promoting well-being is a legitimate goal of public policy, there is a need to justify the choice of measures policy-makers use to guide their choices. Yet appealing to contested philosophical theories is unappealing, and complete agnosticism with respect to well-being is unhelpful. Instead, an intermediate account of well-being that takes the hard core of each family of well-being theories, frames it as a requirement, and then produces a new account that is the conjunct of each of these is a promising way to go.

I began by arguing (Ch. I) that because we usually cannot neatly separate the effects of different types of risk, attacking on the moral permissibility of improving low well-being that is due to chosen risk through public policy fails. Then I discuss (Ch. II) the central philosophical theories of well-being currently debated in the literature and their flaws. I argued that while justifying ones choice of well-being measure by appealing

to a philosophical theory of well-being is methodologically sound, this commits the policy-maker to a contested theory of well-being and entrenches her in a philosophical debate that has yet to be settled. Even if we could commit to a particular way of characterizing well-being, I argued (Ch. III) that we still face a difficulty of determining which measure we ought to use as the best operationalization of well-being characterized that particular way. I presented (Ch. IV) Easterlin's findings and argued that whether they commit us to change current measurement practices depends on how we characterize and operationalize well-being. I argued (Ch. V) that Hausman's evidential account of preferences fails as an alternative because it does not uniquely justify any single well-being measure for public policy, because it can justify several measures as evidence for what is conducive to well-being, yet it cannot provide a way of choosing between them. To overcome the impasse, I made the case (Ch. VI) that the bar of adequacy for public policy is lower than the bar of philosophical truth, and proposed a policy-directed intermediate account of well-being, which borrows elements from the different theories of well-being.

The strength of the intermediate account is that it neither commits to any particular theory, yet engages with all. It provides a way to create the sorely needed consensus among policy-makers on how to conceive of well-being in order to choose what measure to use for public policy. The Intermediate account is not, however, meant to be the final word on well-being measurement for policy purposes. It is, as its name suggests, intermediate between philosophical theories of well-being and social scientific measures of well-being.

The next step, then, is to operationalize (and provide an account of why that operationalization is a good one) the intermediate account's characterization of well-being. It is based on this, currently lacking, measure that I suggest policy-makers make their well-being policy choices. While the task of creating and using a measure is one that befits a social scientist rather than a philosopher, there is still more room for

philosophical work. First, it is possible to propose ways of understanding the intermediate account such that it would be clearer how to best operationalize it. Second, looking at existing measures, we can ask where they fall short as a way of operationalizing the intermediate account, and suggest improvements.

But beyond these, a fundamental issue is left unaddressed by the intermediate account—how do the requirements weight against each other? We know that any way of operationalizing well-being must exhibit attention to the three requirements (experience, endorsement and existence), but what if there are two (or more) measures that take these three requirements into account? How are we to judge between them?

This weighting problem is something to be tackled in a future project. It is significant for my intermediate account, but also significant in a much broader context. For any measure that is constituted by an index made up of several indicators, the weighting problem arises. In particular, it is worthwhile to ask how can we defend the use of well-being indices to guide policy decisions when these indices fail to provide any help in weighing the relative importance of the various dimensions of well-being they track? The appropriate answer, in my view, is that a lack of a weighting function for the different dimensions of well-being is not a shortcoming of the measure but is rather an appropriate limitation for any measurement tool used in the public sphere. There ought not be an algorithmic decision procedure taking us from measurement of well-being to policy decision, because some space must exist for political deliberation.

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