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Well-Being in Contemporary Society

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Introduction

**Jelle de Boer, Jan-Willem van der Rijt, Johnny H. Søraker,
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Four Types of Questions About Well-Being

Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) famously argued that human happiness should be conceived as the fundamental principle of human conduct, both psychologically and morally. The desire to be happy normally guides individuals in their decisions in life, and in as far it does not, he believed it *should* guide them. Similarly, governments ought to regard happiness as the standard for improving society. In Bentham's time, this was seen as a revolutionary idea by which he aimed to counteract the force of tradition, superstition, and speculative systems of thought. Bentham claimed that the happiness principle alone followed from the dictates of reason. "Systems which attempt to question it," he wrote, "deal in sounds instead of sense, in caprice instead of reason, in darkness instead of light." (Bentham 1789/1823 [Chapter 1, Section I]). With hindsight, we can say that this assertion was perhaps a bit overconfident. As it soon came to light, the happiness principle too has its drawbacks, one of the most prominent being the difficulty to measure it. Others objected to it on the ground that people's happiness falls outside of the purview of government: people know best what is good for themselves. Due to recent scientific progress, these two arguments have now lost much of their force and as a result Bentham's thinking has made a major comeback.

Nowadays, the first objection is losing much of its urgency as the modern science of subjective well-being continues to develop its methods to measure people's happiness. One very influential method is questionnaire-based and asks people how satisfied they are with their life on, for example, a 0–5 scale, either in a global sense or in some specific domain of their life. Another method probes the emotional responses of people. This can be done in real-time, while they are engaged in their daily routines, or retrospectively, for instance by querying them about these emotions at the end of their day. Other techniques rely on brain scans or the measurement of physiological proxies of happiness. Such techniques enable us to learn what conditions are particularly apt to human beings experiencing

subjective well-being, how strong the influence of these conditions are, and to what degree these different measurement methods interrelate and validate each other.

The force of the second objection is also undermined by progress in this field of research, as it has been demonstrated that people surprisingly often fail in securing their own well-being when left to their own devices (Gilbert 2007, Haybron, 2007). By focusing on the wrong things, or through short-sightedness, people end up in far less favorable conditions than they could be—even by their own standards. Many of us, for example, find a high income important. Yet arguably we find it too important: the evidence suggests that money does not contribute much to happiness once a certain threshold level has been achieved.[1] Prima facie, the fact that people are so fallible in these regards provides a reason to develop public policies that engage with these human shortcomings and so increase subjective well-being.

Subjective well-being scholars have argued that governments should focus less on income as the standard for social well-being but should instead direct their attention to what really matters: well-being itself. For instance, Nobel Prize winner Daniel Kahneman and his coworkers have recommended that governments use this new research on happiness to enrich their bookkeeping methods and develop National Well-Being Accounts. Joseph Stiglitz and Armatya Sen, two further Nobelists, have likewise expressed concerns about traditional, social, and economic indicators and emphasized the need to develop better ones. These appeals have not remained without success: discontent with traditional measures and optimism about the new possibilities now resonate beyond academia, especially within the circles of politicians and policy makers. Currently, the UN, the OECD, the European commission and countries like Australia, Bhutan, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom have each issued statements that the subjective well-being of their citizens should be used as a guide for policy-making and as an indicator of its success; some of them have also taken steps toward implementation of this principle. Bhutan has famously gone furthest in this direction and uses a Gross National Happiness Index to guide policies and track progress.

For the study of well-being—what it is, how it works, and how to apply it for policy objectives—four types of questions are especially germane. The present volume is structured around these four issues. The first concerns our understanding of the concept of well-being: what is well-being, what does it consist in? The other three we borrow from John Rawls (2001). In his work on justice, Rawls argued that when working toward a more just society one should ask whether policies and courses of action are "likely to be effective" at the level of the individual (taking into account human psychology), whether they are "politically possible" and

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[1] This is sometimes referred to as the "Easterlin Paradox" (Easterlin 1974). The exact relationship between income and subjective well-being is contested, however (see e.g., Stevenson and Wolfers 2008). See also various contributions in Diener, Helliwell and Kahneman (2010).

whether they are "morally permissible" (Rawls 2001, p. 89) Our concern is with well-being, not justice, but the same set of requirements apply.

1. ***The nature of well-being***. At the most general level, a person's well-being tells us how well his or her life is going. This means that the concept of well-being has both a descriptive and an evaluative component. For example, whether a certain individual is very happy is something that can be true or false: it is a matter of fact. At the same time, to say that somebody is happy conveys evaluative meaning. It expresses approval or endorsement: a judgment that this person is on the right track, that she should keep doing what she is doing. Since well-being has both descriptive and evaluative components—to use the words of Bernard Williams: it is a "thick concept" (Williams 2006)—it attracts the attention of empirically minded scientists as well as normatively oriented philosophers, as this volume attests. As mentioned, empirical scholars apply various methods to measure well-being. Some are more cognitively oriented, others more affectively, and still others physiological. We can understand this variety of methods in different ways. They can be taken to represent different approaches to one and the same subject: well-being as a unitary entity; alternatively, each of them can be taken to measure a different aspect of well-being.

    What well-being consists in is an issue that precedes its measurement. We might call it a philosophical question, and there are predictably many different theories of well-being within philosophy. Derek Parfit (1986) has usefully distinguished these theories in three categories: desire satisfaction theories, hedonic experience theories, and objective list theories.[2] From a practical point of view this variety may at first sight seem unfortunate, possibly even dispiriting. When one is interested in measuring and furthering well-being, it can be highly frustrating to get bogged down in philosophical questions regarding its true nature. However, a closer look shows that the requirement of practical applicability can be used to re-examine our most prominent theories of well-being: we can seek to determine where these theories overlap and in what sense they are complementary. This is an exercise that may well bear fruit. It is the subject of Chaps. 1 and 2 of the present volume, "Towards Consensus on Well-Being" by *Tim Taylor* and "Towards a Widely Acceptable Framework for the Study of Personal Well-Being" by *Sam Wren-Lewis*. Independently of each other these authors both argue that subjective well-being can be conceived as a value in itself, as an indicator of what is valuable, or as a resource to create value. Through this troika Wren Lewis ties together the main *empirical* approaches to the study of well-being, while Taylor ties together the most prominent *philosophical* theories. The prospect that empirical science and philosophy could mutually inform each other and are not doomed to talk past each other is further explored in Chap. 3 "Well-Being, Science, and Philosophy" by *Raffaele Rodogno*.

2. ***Effective at the level of the individual***. Human beings are finite beings: it is a fact of life that we cannot get or do whatever we may happen to want.

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2 See also Griffin (1986), Sumner (1996) and Brey (2012).

Proposals regarding the promotion of well-being, either for specific individuals or for society at large, must meet the condition that they are in accordance with human psychology. They must take note of human capacities, dispositions, and the limits of what people can achieve and learn. These constraints are not fixed, however, as they depend on the resources and technologies that are available.

Our prospects of improving well-being are dependent on our knowledge of what makes people happy and their lives go well. Here, the current insights from positive psychology, with its focus on happiness and positive functioning, are especially helpful. In Chap. 4, "Improving the Health Care Sector with a Happiness-Based Approach," Laura A. Weiss, Sarah Kedzia, Aad Francissen and Gerben J. Westerhof show how this knowledge can be applied to help people who are trapped in a vicious spiral of illness, depression, and social isolation via what is called "the Happiness Route".

Aids for improving people's happiness must connect with what people have in stock themselves, their natural dispositions and capacities. This includes their potential to use self-insight, i.e., to use their knowledge of how their own motivations can change due to the choices they make, as *Rixtar Arlegi and Miriam Teschl* demonstrate in Chap. 5, "Conflict, Commitment and Well-Being." Their chapter addresses an important problem for desire satisfaction-based theories of well-being: how to deal with the fact that people often have conflicting desires. Commitment is a technique that allows individuals to cope with this problem of conflicting motivations. Alegri and Teschl contribute to our understanding of this technique by arguing that commitment assisted by self-knowledge can be understood in terms of a volitional solution to motivation conflict.

Natural human psychological capacities are of crucial importance in regards to well-being, but in our modern age technology plays no less important a role when it comes to the prospect of increasing people's happiness. In Chap. 6, "Can Technology Make Us Happy? Ethics, Spectator's Happiness and the Value of Achievement," *Andreas Spahn* outlines the different ways in which modern technology contributes to different aspects of well-being. Positioning himself on the side of Enlightenment optimism with regards to technology, rather than suffering from Romantic uneasiness, Spahn discusses the potential of "persuasive technologies" that can make people both more happy and more likely to act as morality demands. The subsequent two chapters concentrate on specific technologies for improving well-being. *Birgit Beck and Barbara Stroop* in their contribution "A Biomedical Shortcut to (Fraudulent) Happiness? An Analysis of the Notions of Well-Being and Authenticity Underlying Objections to Mood Enhancement" (Chap. 7) question the validity of the common view that mood enhancers should not be used outside of the medical context to make people feel happier because this would merely lead to a fake kind of happiness. They argue that this view is mistaken and that mood enhancers can improve genuine well-being. Not all technologies need to work through such physiological interventions, as *Judith Annett and Stefan Berglund* show in their "Increasing Societal Well-Being Through Enhanced Empathy Using Computer Games" (Chap. 8). They make a case for the development and use of a special kind of social computer

game, designed to increase and stimulate people's empathic capabilities. This should smoothen the interaction between people, which in turn will improve societal well-being.

3. ***Politically possible***. Even if it may be possible to increase well-being for some individuals because their psychological makeup is favorable to interventions that are presently within technological reach, it does not follow that the same holds on a larger scale. At the political level, problems that will undermine the promotion of well-being on a societal scale may, for example, arise due to various sorts of conflicting individual aims, or because of disrupting interaction effects.

   In order to further well-being in a given society, appropriate institutional arrangements and mechanisms are required. In democracies, people must be willing to give their votes to policies that improve well-being, politicians have to endorse such policies, and policy makers and bureaucrats have to implement them. The route to higher societal happiness levels is for a large part a political route, and therefore dependent on the way collective decision-making is organized.

   The question of promoting well-being can enter the political domain in various ways. Political questions arise, for instance, when the provision of a public good impacts societal well-being. This is the subject of Chap. 9 "Well-Being, Happiness and Sustainability" by *Bengt Brülde*. A more sustainable way of life requires drastic changes in consumption, both with respect to its pattern and to its level. How to achieve this environmental goal is an intricate puzzle that involves solving questions regarding the scale and distribution of behavioral types and of particular activities that impact sustainability and well-being. Another factor that advances issues of well-being into the political domain is the occurrence of interaction effects. In Chap. 10 "The Political Pursuit of Happiness: A Popperian Perspective on Layard's Happiness Policy" *Aloys Prinz and Björn Bünger* discuss status competition: the fact that a person's well-being is not only determined by absolute facts about their lives, but also is affected by relative comparisons. To the extent that one person's well-being depends on how well others are doing, the pursuit of happiness becomes a zero-sum game. If this is the case, then governments should arguably intervene to prevent a self-defeating rat race. Prinz and Bünger address this question and examine the possible traps and obstacles on the political road toward reducing the effects of positional comparisons on happiness.

   Knowing how to operationalize well-being indicators and knowing how to foster well-being on an individual level do not entail that we know how to promote well-being on the scale of a whole society. This is demonstrated by Chap. 11 "Measuring Quality of Life—An Idea Whose Time Has Come? Agenda-Setting Dynamics in Britain and the European Union" by *Ian Bache*. Whether an idea catches on depends on the political context. Through a comparative analysis between the UK and the EU, Bache shows how institutional design and political entrepreneurship helped determine the success and timing of the idea that we can improve society through application of the new Benthamite subjective well-being methods and indicators.

4. ***Morally permissible***. Individual and political feasibility together do not suffice to justify the new-Benthamite endeavor. Knowing how to improve the well-being of (a subset of) the population and being able to install the appropriate policy to implement this may be sufficient to ascertain that governments *can* improve individual and societal well-being, but that does not imply they also *should*. Well-being is not the only political value, and neo-Benthamism is not the only moral theory. The goal of fostering well-being among a group of people seems laudable on its own, but any attempts to put it into practice must be carefully considered taking note of their effects on other values, goals, and considerations. These may set constraints, point to trade-offs, or even put the entire Benthamite project into doubt.

This means that even when it is possible to implement the happiness principle on an individual level by means of effective psychological and technological methods and on the societal level by designing and using institutional and political mechanisms, there can be weighty reasons to refrain from doing so. This is what *Jan-Willem van der Rijt* argues in Chap. 12 "The Political Turn Towards Happiness." Van der Rijt examines the reasons to be wary of a government that is too happily devoted to promoting the happiness of its citizenry, to a Benthamism unbound.

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Chapter 1
Towards Consensus on Well-Being

Timothy Edwin Taylor

1.1 Introduction

The subject of human well-being has been of interest to philosophers since the time of the Ancient Greeks. In modern times, it has also attracted the interest of other academic disciplines, and of medical and other professions which see their role as, in part, to preserve or improve quality of life. Well-being has not always been an explicit priority of governments, however. For much of the period since the second world war, economic growth, as measured by changes in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), was regarded by most nations as the prime indicator of national progress, and as a result widely enjoyed a pre-eminent status as a goal of public policy. That dominance reflected, in part, the assumption, derived from economic theories of utility based on preference-satisfaction, that GDP was also a good proxy for national well-being. In recent years that assumption has often been challenged, in the light of research which appeared to suggest that beyond a certain point, increases in GDP have not resulted in increased happiness (Easterlin 1974). A number of Governments and international organisations have begun to adopt well-being itself, unmediated by GDP, as an aim of public policy, or a criterion against which the effects of policies can be evaluated. This has led to a recognition of the fact that levels of well-being, and the impact of specific policies upon well-being, need to be measured, and a number of governments are proceeding with projects which seek to quantify well-being through a variety of different methodologies.

In the UK, The Prime Minister, David Cameron, in a speech on 25 November 2010, declared his intention to measure national progress not merely by standard of living, but by quality of life. The UK's Office of National Statistics (ONS) subsequently instituted a programme entitled Measuring National Well-being.

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Following an extensive consultation exercise on domains and measures of well-being, ONS adopted a wide range of subjective and objective well-being measures, comprising ten domains with three to five measures within each domain. Its first report on national well-being, "Measuring National Well-being: Life in the UK, 2012" was published in November 2012 (Office of National Statistics 2012). H.M. Treasury's Green Book, which sets out the framework for appraisal of policies, programmes and projects now makes reference to well-being approaches to valuing non-market goods, alongside more traditional means of appraisal (Bache and Reardon 2013; Treasury 2013).

Similar developments have been occurring elsewhere in Europe (Bache 2013). France has begun implementing quality of life measures in response to the findings of a Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress (CMEPSP), headed by Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen. In Germany, a Federal Commission was established to develop new indicators of prosperity and in March 2013 announced nine additional indicators to supplement GDP, including both well-being related indicators such as life expectancy and others such as biodiversity (Berlin 2013). There have also been initiatives in other countries such as Italy and Spain. In 2009 The European Commission issued 'GDP and Beyond', a roadmap of five key actions to improve the EU's indicators of progress in ways more appropriate to citizens' concerns than GDP alone. This was endorsed by the European Parliament in 2011. More widely, the UN introduced the Human Development Index, combining measures of life-expectancy, education and standard of living, as far back as 1990, with the aim of shifting focus from financial to people-centred indicators. The OECD has also been active in this area, promoting the measurement of well-being at successive World Forums since 2004 (most recently in New Delhi in October 2012), and launching the Better Life Index in May 2011 in response to the findings of the CMEPSP.

1.2 The Problem

Interest in well-being as a factor that might influence public policy gives rise to a requirement to measure it, and there are a wide range of methodologies employed to do so within the academic community and by governments and international organisations themselves. A key question underlying the choice of which methodologies to use is that of what it is, exactly, that one is seeking to measure. In other words, *what is* well-being: what is it for a person's life to go well for them. Unfortunately, this is a question on which the prospects of consensus seem remote, since there are a number of rival theories, and no obvious means of resolving the debate between them.

Philosophical theories of well-being can be divided broadly into two categories: subjective theories, according to which well-being is ultimately dependent in some way upon the subjective mental states of the individual; and objective theories,

which wholly or partly reject that dependence.[1] There are further divisions within these categories. Among subjective theories, the major divide is between, on the one hand, hedonist or mental-state theories which claim that it is the positive or negative valence of mental states themselves which determine how well someone's life goes for them; and on the other, theories which hold that what matters for well-being is the satisfaction of desires or preferences. Here, rather than being of value for the subject in their own right, mental states play a different role: that of marking out certain states of the world as having value. We can also see a further important division within mental-state theories, between classical hedonism, which sees well-being in terms of the overall balance between pleasures and pains in someone's life, and views which see a single, global state or attitude as crucial. This state is sometimes referred to as 'happiness', although happiness is a term that itself can be defined in various ways (some of which are consistent with classical hedonism). Others prefer to talk about 'life-satisfaction', the subject's attitude to his or her life as a whole.[2] We can describe classical hedonism as a 'bottom-up' approach, whereas the life-satisfaction approach is 'top-down'.

There are also different approaches within the 'objective' category. There is a family of theories influenced by Aristotle which define well-being in terms of the perfection of human excellences and/or the development and exercise of human capacities. Then there are various 'objective-list' accounts, which do not share the Aristotelians' central principles but attempt to specify various heterogeneous components which together make for a good human life (e.g. Finnis 1980, Chaps. III and IV).

There is also the so-called 'capability approach' associated in particular with Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, which sees well-being in terms of capabilities to achieve various valuable 'functionings'—things that a person is able to do or to be (Sen 1980; Sen and Nussbaum 1993; Nussbaum 2000). This could in principle be either an objective or a subjective theory, depending upon whether it aspires to specify which functionings and capabilities are valuable, or leaves this to be determined by the preferences of the individual subject. In practice, under the influence of Nussbaum, who is of a broadly Aristotelian persuasion (and does indeed specify what capabilities she regards as essential to well-being), it has tended to be seen more as an objective approach.[3]

Within these various categories and sub-categories, there are many different variants of each approach. Thus, for example, there are unrestricted desire-satisfaction theories and informed-desire theories, perfectionist and developmentalist theories within the Aristotelian camp, and a number of different objective lists.

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[1] Sometimes, following Parfit (1984, p. 493), a three-way classification is used: hedonism, desire-satisfaction theories, and objective-list theories (the first two would count as subjective theories, the third as objective on my classification). However, I think it is helpful to categorise the theories within a branching structure, with the subjective/objective distinction as the first decision point (Taylor 2012, pp. 19–35).

[2] For a philosophical exposition of the life-satisfaction approach, see Sumner (1996, pp. 138–183).

[3] But see Baber (2010) for a subjective version.

As in the philosophical community, social scientists also have different views, or make different assumptions, about the nature of well-being, which underlie the way they seek to measure it. These can be approximately mapped onto the taxonomy of different philosophical theories. Thus, for example, those who defend economic measures such as GDPas indicators of levels of well-being within society are likely to favour a desire-satisfaction approach to well-being (e.g. Angner 2011). On the other hand, the notion of Subjective Well-being, which has become a focus for much of the debate about measurement, seems to reflect a view of well-being combining life-satisfaction,[4] with a form of hedonism.[5] Different again is the UN Human Development Index, which is based explicitly upon the capability approach to well-being.

There does not seem to be any prospect that these differences concerning the nature of well-being will be resolved any time soon. But in the absence of consensus between the different camps, not only the validity but also the relevance of the various candidate measures of well-being will always be open to question. The worry is that, even as governments around the world begin to acknowledge the potential importance of well-being for public policy, there is no clear picture of what well-being consists in, and thus what should be measured and/or promoted. Governments can (and do) mitigate this problem by drawing upon a wide range of research which makes different assumptions about the nature of well-being. Nevertheless, the situation is far from ideal.

1.3 Explanatory and Enumerative Questions, and Markers of Well-Being

At first sight, the problem seems intractable. The nature of well-being is ultimately a philosophical issue, and consensus is something that philosophers are notoriously bad at. Nevertheless, I want to suggest that there is, despite appearances, a good prospect of finding a broad area of common ground between different theories. We can begin to see how this might be possible by distinguishing two key questions about well-being which, following Crisp (2006, pp. 102–103), I shall call the explanatory and enumerative questions. The enumerative question is about what sorts of things make a person's life go well for them, whereas the explanatory question concerns *what it is* about those things that *makes* them good for people and what it is for a life to go well for the person who lives it. This is a similar distinction to one made by Sumner (1996, p. 16) between the nature and sources of well being:

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[4] As measured by methods such as the Satisfaction With Life Scale—see Diener et al. (1985).

[5] As reflected in the use various measures of affective experience, such as the Day Reconstruction Method (Kahneman et al. 2004).

the explanatory question is concerned with the former and the enumerative question with the latter. It is, for the most part, the explanatory question that forms the battleground between the different philosophical accounts of well-being, but the enumerative question is of more importance for public policy. Policy makers want to know what the drivers of well-being are and how the policies they implement affect it. They are not so interested in the less tangible philosophical questions that underlie these issues.

There is likely to be a greater prospect of consensus if we are not concerned solely with the explanatory question. This is because something may be relevant to well-being in more than one way. It may be wholly or partly *constitutive* of well-being. It may also be *productive* of well-being: though not itself part of what well-being consists in, it may be something which is a reliable means to achieving well-being, or which otherwise serves to promote it. For the purposes of measurement, a third relationship is also relevant. Something might be neither constitutive nor productive of well-being, but might nevertheless serve as a good *indicator* of well-being, if it tends to vary in parallel with well-being. The explanatory question is concerned only with the first of these three relationships, the enumerative question with the first two. However, all three are potentially significant for the measurement of well-being: information on things which stand in any one of these relationships to well-being is likely to be useful to policy makers who wish to promote it. Something which is a constituent of well-being according to one theory may not be so according to another: nevertheless, it might still be productive of well-being, or an indicator of well-being, and thus proponents of both theories could accept that it is relevant for the purposes of measuring well-being, even though they would give different reasons for this.

It would be helpful to have a collective name for those things which bear one or other of these three relationships to well-being, and are therefore relevant for the purposes of measurement. We might perhaps say that something which is either constitutive, or productive, or an indicator of well-being is a *marker* of well-being.

In the next part of this paper I shall explore the extent to which theories which give different answers to the explanatory question may nevertheless find areas of common ground regarding the markers of well-being. In order to ascertain the extent of common ground between different explanatory theories, it would be necessary first to identify what each theory would imply regarding what sorts of things could be expected to be constitutive, productive or indicators of well-being, and then to compare the commitments of the different theories against each other. This might most easily be achieved by considering the theories initially in pairs, and then combining the results. To achieve a reasonably definitive verdict on the extent of common ground would, I suggest, require a good deal of work on both stages of this process. However, I offer below some preliminary thoughts on this issue, based on consideration of the main characteristics of the different types of theories.

1.4 Aristotelian Theories and Hedonism

I shall begin with two approaches which at first sight appear to be at opposite ends of the spectrum of well-being theories. Aristotle defined the Greek notion of eudaimonia (which is sometimes translated 'happiness', but is arguably closer to 'well-being') as 'activity of the soul in conformity with "arete"' (translated as "virtue" or "excellence"). This reflects his wider view that what is good for something is what perfects its distinctive function ('ergon') and the thought that the ergon of humans is what is unique to us and not shared (unlike other functions such as perception) with other animals: that is, rational activity (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1097-98: 1955, pp. 73–76). His influence can still be seen in the work of modern writers such as Phillipa Foot and Richard Kraut who define well-being in terms of the exercise, development and/or perfection of human capacities.[6]

Hedonism also began in ancient Greece, with the ideas of philosophers such as Aristippus and Epicurus, but takes a very different view of what makes a life go well. It has developed into various forms since then, but what these all share is the view that what matters is the quality of one's *mental* life: typically how much pleasure and pain (often defined in broad terms to include attitudinal as well as sensory pleasures and pains) it contains.

These two theories thus take a very different approach to the explanatory question.[7] Nevertheless, it is possible to find common ground on the enumerative question, between at least some versions of these rival accounts. Some moderate Aristotelians, including Kraut, incorporate an element of hedonism into their position by acknowledging that, for the development and exercise of human capabilities to contribute to well-being, it must also be enjoyed by the subject (Kraut 2007, pp. 127–128). They see no inconsistency here, pointing to Aristotle's own view that pleasure 'perfects' an activity, 'as a sort of supervening perfection, like the bloom that graces the flower of youth' (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1175: 1955, p. 321). It is not pleasure which plays the explanatory role, but nevertheless, pleasure is part of the enumerative story, and one of the markers of well-being.

Conversely, there is also scope for hedonists to make some movement towards the Aristotelian position. Mill's (1993) utilitarianism, with its distinction between 'higher' and 'lower' pleasures, can be seen as an attempt to accommodate aspects of Aristotle's thought into a value system based upon hedonism. More widely, it would seem perfectly consistent for a hedonist, without compromising her view that it is pleasure that plays the explanatory role, to consider the question of what sorts

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[6] See, for example, Foot (2001), Kraut (2007).

[7] Here I am taking hedonism, in the strictest sense, to be a theory that gives a hedonist answer to the explanatory question: that is, it not only regards pleasure and pain as what make someone's life go well or badly, but holds that they do so *in virtue of being pleasant or painful*. One could also hold that pleasure and pain are what matter in terms of the enumerative question, whilst giving a non-hedonist answer to the explanatory question. For example, one might say that pleasure and pain are what matter because they are what we desire.

of lives, and what sorts of activities, environments and resources, tend to be most productive of a positive balance of pleasure over pain for human beings. The answer to that question will depend in part on what particular variant of hedonism has been espoused. The most plausible and prevalent forms of hedonism focus less on sensory pleasure and more on what Fred Feldman has called 'attitudinal pleasure': the sort of pleasure we feel when we are pleased *about* something (Feldman 2004, Chap. 4). It is plausible that the development and exercise of human capabilities (defined reasonably broadly) is a reliable source of profound and lasting attitudinal pleasure. Of course, a hedonist will want to insist that this can only be a generalisation: that the principal sources of pleasure and pain will vary between individuals and contexts, and that what may be true for most human beings will not be true in all cases. But if we are looking for common ground, rather than a perfect fit, then generalisations may be sufficient.

Thus, there is good reason to expect that there will be a broad area of common ground between moderate Aristotelians and sophisticated hedonists. Of course, the overlap will by no means be complete. Not all Aristotelians—even moderate ones —are prepared to concede as much to hedonism as Kraut. Even on Kraut's view, although everything it counts as having value would also count for a hedonist, the reverse does not hold. Aristotelians would deny that pleasure which is *not* linked to the development and exercise of human capabilities contributes to well-being. However, moderate Aristotelians who allow a role for pleasure tend also to have a fairly broad conception of what counts as the development or exercise of human capabilities. This may include, not only intellectual flourishing but also physical, social, aesthetic and even sexual flourishing. This broad approach would seem to encompass much of what a moderate hedonist would be likely to acknowledge as standard sources of pleasure. On any variant, there will still be certain pleasures that would be accepted by a hedonist, but rejected by Aristotelians, as contributing to well-being. These might include sensory pleasures not associated with the development or exercise of human capacities (the pleasures of loafing around, perhaps), and perhaps certain abstract attitudinal pleasures concerned with remote states of affairs. Nevertheless, it is plausible that the area of overlap would include the greater part of what a moderate hedonist would acknowledge as standard sources of attitudinal pleasure in human life, and all or most of what a moderate Aristotelian would regard as contributing to well-being.

There are variants of the Aristotelian approach that would not share an overlap with hedonism. Some views do not acknowledge any role for pleasures, such as the pure perfectionism mooted by Hurka (1993, p. 190), which defines the human good in terms of physical, theoretical and practical perfection and 'does not find intrinsic value in pleasure, not even pleasure in what is good, nor does it find intrinsic disvalue in pain'. However, as Hurka himself acknowledges, this feature of his theory may diminish its plausibility (he also considers the possibility of a pluralist theory which includes perfectionist values alongside others). The more moderate versions of the Aristotelian approach are also the ones which are more likely to find wide acceptance.

1.5 Desire-Satisfaction Theories

We have identified a likely area of common ground on the enumerative question between moderate versions of two theories which offer quite different answers to the explanatory question. What, then of desire-satisfaction theories, which give a third answer, again distinct from the other two? As with the others, this approach comes in different variants, and the extent of common ground with the others is likely to depend on which version is considered. It is arguable that unrestricted desire-satisfactionism, which holds that the satisfaction of *any* desire counts towards well-being may be unlikely to share much common ground with the Aristotelian approach[8]: though we do have desires related to the development and exercise of human capabilities, most of our desires, in practice, are likely to be for other things. It may have somewhat more overlap with hedonism, since plausibly many of our desires can be seen as aimed at pleasure and the avoidance of pain, in the broad senses of those words. Others are not, however, so here too there is an area that is likely to be excluded from any common ground.

However, unrestricted desire-satisfactionism is vulnerable to criticism on the grounds that it allows the satisfaction of even crazy, whimsical or badly-informed desires to count towards well-being. The most prevalent forms of the desire-satisfaction approach are informed- or rational-desire theories, which are based upon idealised desires or filtered actual desires (e.g. Griffin 1986, pp. 21–38; Railton 1986). These accounts seem likely to have a greater potential for overlap with the other approaches. They lend themselves to consideration of what sorts of things would tend to be the subject of appropriately informed or rational desires for typical human beings. It seems likely that this process would lead to a significant area of overlap with Aristotelian theories, as in the case of the analogous process we considered for hedonism. Again, there would nevertheless be certain things that an informed-desire theory would count as contributing to well-being that even a moderate Aristotelian theory would not. The reverse might also be true in some cases.

It also seems likely that there would be overlap on the enumerative question between informed desire theories and hedonism. The things that are the subject of well—rather than ill—informed desires are also likely to be those that the subject finds rewarding when the desire is satisfied. If the subject gains no pleasure from the satisfaction of a desire, that may well be because the desire was not well-informed. Once again, the overlap will not be complete. Most informed-desire theories would count the satisfaction of a (well-informed) desire, even if it is satisfied without the subject's knowledge, but hedonists would not. And sometimes, even the satisfaction of a well-informed desire may prove disappointing, or conversely, pleasure may not correspond with any well-informed desire. But it seems likely that such cases would be the exception rather than the rule.

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[8] For a recent defence of unrestricted desire-satisfactionism, see Lukas (2010).

We might also note in this context a relatively new variant of the desire approach which employs an extended sense of desire emphasising 'desires' focused upon the present rather than on the future. As has been pointed out by Heathwood (2006), this approach tends towards convergence between desire-satisfactionism and hedonism: a 'desire' focused on a state of affairs that the subject believes to obtain seems to be much the same as an attitudinal pleasure.[9]

1.6 Likely Areas of Common Ground

We can envisage, therefore, a process whereby, from very different starting points, and for different reasons, proponents of moderate Aristotelianism, sophisticated forms of hedonism and informed-desire theories might nevertheless find common ground regarding the markers of well-being. I suggest that this common ground might comprise two elements:

(a) A recognition that what contributes to a person's well-being will, in general (perhaps with exceptions), elicit a positive attitudinal and/or affective response from that person.
  For hedonists, the affective response itself will be what constitutes well-being; for desire-satisfactionists attitudinal states will determine what contributes to a person's well-being. For Aristotelians neither will be the case, though positive attitudinal and/or affective responses are likely to beindicators of well-being, and on some views may be a necessary condition for well-being.
(b) A list of goods that, in general, can be expected to contribute to well-being for most human beings.
  On the moderate Aristotelian approach, these will be examples of the development or exercise of human capabilities, interpreted in a broad sense, which in themselves are regarded as contributing directly to well-being. On the hedonistic and desire-satisfaction approaches, these same things will be regarded as contributing to well-being *indirectly*, by being (typically) productive of a positive balance of pleasure over pain, or the object of informed (or present-focused) desires.

A list of goods, of course, is precisely what is offered by the fourth of the main contenders for a theory of well-being, the objective-list approach, and it seems likely that the goods which are most often endorsed by the other three approaches will also be those that tend to crop up regularly on objective lists. However, this should not be seen as a vindication of the objective-list approach over the others. For objective-list theorists, it is usually the list itself, and the intuitions that underlie it, that determine the constituents of well-being, which is why critics such as Wayne

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[9] I have argued for a theory along similar lines in Taylor (2012), although I argue that 'desire', with its focus on the future, is no longer an appropriate label for the attitudinal states involved.

Sumner argue that it fails to do justice to the explanatory question (Sumner 1996, pp. 45–46). However, to the extent that hedonists and desire-satisfactionists can endorse a list of goods, it will have a more modest status, as a generalisation about the sorts of things that will *tend* to contribute to human well-being, defined in subjective terms—a subjective, rather than an objective list. Aristotelians too will have a rationale for what is on the list that lies outside the list itself.

1.7 How Broad Is the Consensus?

The question of how broad, and how widely shared, the area of common ground is between the different theories requires further study. We can, however, make some initial observations at this stage.

We have already noted that certain approaches would not participate in the consensus at all: in particular, a thoroughgoing Aristotelian perfectionism that allows no room for subjective reactions would reject (a) [though it might accept (b) in some form]. Perhaps some objective-list theorists might also reject (a), although many include enjoyment in their list of goods. It is possible that certain subjective theorists would reject (b), refusing to generalise about the sorts of things that may occasion pleasure or be the subject of desires. However, I suggest that the majority of widely-held theories would accept some version of both (a) and (b).

A more complex question is that of how good the fit is between the different approaches *within* elements (a) and (b). It is helpful to look at each of these in turn. On (a), I suggest that the core area of overlap involves subjects' *ex post*, or contemporaneous, responses to what happens in their lives, rather than their *ex ante* attitudes. To the extent that Aristotelians can allow a role for pleasure, it is likely to be pleasure primarily as an *ex post* or contemporaneous reaction to some activity, event or state of affairs related to the development or exercise of human capacities: for example, the enjoyment of an activity, or the satisfaction one feels having completed it. Hedonists will not wish to exclude *ex ante* pleasures of anticipation or *ex ante* pains, like fear. Nevertheless, most pleasures and pains in general seem to be either *ex post* or contemporaneous with their sources.

Desire, on the other hand, is essentially an *ex ante* attitude. Nevertheless, desire-satisfaction theorists are likely to acknowledge that if the subject's *ex post* reaction when a desire has been satisfied is negative rather than positive, that may suggest that the satisfaction of the desire does not, after all, enhance her well-being. On informed-desire theories, the *ex post* reaction may be treated as evidence that the original desire was in some way ill-informed or otherwise defective. Those versions of this approach which use an extended sense of desire that includes 'desires' focused upon the present and past as well as the future may acknowledge the primacy of the latter (Heathwood 2006). Even for desire-satisfaction theorists, it seems, *ex post* reactions tend to trump *ex ante* desires when the two conflict.

Most desire-satisfaction theories, however, will want to include the satisfaction of (well-informed) desires as contributing to well-being even when this occurs

without the knowledge of the subject, and therefore cannot be validated by *ex post* reactions. There is no obvious overlap here with the other explanatory theories. However, for public policy purposes, this limitation on consensus may not be too serious a problem. Cases where a desire is satisfied but the subject remains unaware of this do occur, but I suggest that these are not the norm. In most cases the subject will be aware when the desire is satisfied, and will thus have an *ex post* reaction to this.[10]

Another issue on which there will be differences between the various explanatory theories (and indeed, between different variants of those theories) is the question of whether the fact that something elicits a positive attitudinal response of an appropriate kind is sufficient for it to be regarded as enhancing the subject's well-being, or whether certain other conditions must be met. A related issue on which there will also be differences is that of whether it is necessary that there be an actual positive response, or whether it is sufficient that the subject *would* have responded positively under appropriate conditions.

On the first of these points, we have already seen a significant divergence between Aristotelian theories and hedonism. I acknowledge that this is a substantial difference, even in terms of the enumerative question. Yet the implications for public policy may be less than this suggests. The sorts of pleasures that Aristotelians would reject, such as whimsical, idiosyncratic, or culpable ones, tend for other reasons, to be the kinds that it would not be practicable for a government interested in well-being to target even if it adopted a hedonist account of well-being. They are likely to be less easy to predict and thus promote, and in the case of culpable pleasures, may lead to countervailing displeasure for others. Some hedonists would also include deluded pleasures that many desire-satisfactionists would reject. But again, it seems unlikely that deluded pleasures are the norm, though they do exist. Nor does it seem likely to be the norm that something to which a subject would respond positively under appropriate conditions would fail to elicit such a response under actual conditions. The common thought underlying these points is that if public policy is to concern itself with well-being, it must concern itself with the well-being of large numbers of people, and thus, to the extent that well-being is seen as something to be promoted rather than merely facilitated, it must rely to a large extent upon generalisations: on standard rather than exceptional cases.[11] And I suggest that the standard cases are in general likely to fall within the area of overlap between the different explanatory theories.

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[10] Desires satisfied after the subject's death are perhaps a special case. I concede that these are unlikely to be an area of common ground between the different explanatory theories.

[11] That is not to say, of course, that generalisations should be used when decisions are made that affect the well-being of specific individuals who may differ from the standard case. It might, for example, be the case that vaccination against a particular pathogen would benefit the well-being of an overwhelming majority of individuals. There would thus be good reason for procuring the vaccine on the grounds of improving general well-being, though not for forcibly vaccinating particular individuals whose well-being would not be improved by this.