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Normative Foundations for Well-Being Policy

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Abstract: This paper examines the normative principles that should guide policies aimed at promoting happiness or, more broadly, well-being. After arguing that well-being policy is both legitimate and necessary, we lay out a case for "pragmatic subjectivism": given widely accepted principles of respect for persons, well-being policy may not assume *any* view of well-being, subjectivist or objectivist. Rather it should promote what its intended beneficiaries see as good for them: pleasure for hedonists, excellence for Aristotelians, etc. Specifically, well-being policy should promote citizens' "personal welfare values": those values—and not mere preferences—that individuals' see as bearing on their well-being. We suggest a variety of means for determining what people value, but conclude that there is no canonical means of doing this: there will often be some indeterminacy about what people value. Finally, we consider how pragmatic subjectivism works in practice, arguing that headline measures of well-being should include subjective well-being—given that it is so widely and deeply valued—and perhaps other values as well.

1. Introduction

It is hard to escape the politics of happiness and well-being these days. Recent years have brought a growing chorus of scholars and policymakers calling for governments to move beyond traditional economic measures of societal conditions, directly monitoring—and promoting—the well-being of their citizenry.[2] Such calls have not, however, met with universal acclaim, and there remains considerable skepticism about efforts to bring well-being research into the policy arena.[3] One source of doubts concerns the scientific credentials of the measures: the science of well-being is quite young, and questions remain about the reliability of current measures, or even whether well-being could ever be measured with sufficient rigor to underwrite policy decisions. While we have expressed our own concerns of this nature elsewhere, we believe that the science has progressed sufficiently to play an informative role in assessing policies, and that it will continue to improve. At any rate, it is not our brief to assess the scientific merits of well-being research here, and we will simply assume that empirical studies of well-being can provide reliable data on human welfare.[4]

A second sort of objection takes aim at the efficacy of well-being-based policy: individuals know best what's good for them, and are best positioned to secure their own interests. Government efforts to assume this role, by contrast, are bound to be inefficient, if not downright counterproductive. While the objection plainly identifies a legitimate concern, we are uncon-

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[2] See for example Layard 2005, Diener, Lucas, et al. 2009, Bok 2010, Frey 2008, Stiglitz, Sen, et al. 2009, Dolan and White 2007, Loewenstein and Ubel 2008, Forgeard, Jayawickreme, et al. 2011, Fleurbaey 2011, Trout 2005, Trout 2009, Thaler and Sunstein 2008, Camerer, Issacharoff, et al. 2003, Loewenstein and Haisley 2008, Halpern 2009, Kahneman, Krueger, et al. 2004, Graham 2011, Diener and Seligman 2004, Kelman 2005, Michalos, Sharpe, et al. 2010, Bruni and Porta 2005, Thin 2012, Michaelson 2009, Hirata .
[3] E.g., Nussbaum 2008, Sen 2009, Mitchell 2004, White 2010, Barrotta 2008, Hausman and Welch 2009, DeBow and Lee 2006, Glaeser 2006, 2007, Badhwar 2006, Wilkinson 2007, Lebergott 1993. Not all of these authors wholly oppose well-being or happiness policy.
[4] For useful discussions of the science, see Eid and Larsen 2008 and Diener, Lucas, et al. 2009.

vinced that it entirely vitiates state efforts to promote well-being. But again, this is an empirical question that we intend to set aside, assuming for the sake of argument that well-being-based policy can sometimes be reasonably effective.

Our discussion concerns a third, deeper set of worries, which relates to the normative justification for well-being-based policy (henceforth WBP): effective or not, should governments be in the business of monitoring and directly promoting personal welfare at all? Perhaps policies should focus solely on the freedoms individuals enjoy, leaving well-being itself for the individual to manage, lest we become overly paternalistic. And if states should directly concern themselves with the well-being of their constituencies, what view about well-being ought to inform their efforts? Many commentators, for instance, advocate a subjectivist approach to well-being: roughly, what's good for a person depends entirely on how things are from his perspective. Others, by contrast, militate for objectivist views according to which certain things, such as knowledge, friendship or personal development simply are good for people, period. Oppressed individuals who content themselves with small mercies, for example, are worse off for their oppression, whether they see it that way or not.

These questions fall within the ambit of philosophical value theory, and how policymakers answer them will determine, in part, which sorts of measures they will seek, how they will use the information gleaned in setting policy, and indeed whether they will concern themselves with well-being measures at all. Yet relatively little philosophical attention has been paid to them in relation to the present debates over WBP. Our aim is to support the development of WBP by sketching a basic normative framework that both justifies it and sharpens the moral limits to it, with a particular focus on the conception of well-being that should inform WBP.

The centerpiece of our discussion is a view we will call *pragmatic subjectivism*, according to which well-being promoting policies are justified only when they are grounded in the values of those on whose behalf policy is being made.[5] The subjectivism in question is pragmatic, and not substantive, in that it remains neutral on whether value (well-being, morality, etc.) really *is* subjective: the point is that, *even if value is objective*, policymakers are not (in general) entitled to base policies on objective values; public decision-making procedures should be subjectivist *in practice*, whether or not values really are objective. Pragmatic subjectivism is pragmatic in its emphasis on practice, but also in part of its rationale: one reason to adopt pragmatic subjectivism for WBP is simply that it represents a workable approach given the diversity of values in modern democratic societies. Realistically, it will be difficult to get citizens to support policies that promote values they oppose. (It is hard enough to garner support for policies furthering values people actually *accept*.) Feasibility alone cannot of course justify a policy approach, and accordingly much of the rationale for pragmatic subjectivism is straightforwardly moral: deference to citizens' values in promoting their interests is proximately a requirement of democratic governance, and more fundamentally a requirement of respect for persons: we do not treat people with respect when we make decisions, on their behalf, according to ideals that are alien to them. Once we see that the kind of well-being that ought to be promoted in WBP is well-being by people's own lights, much of the resistance to WBP is undermined. When we take this together with the fact that procuring freedom is insufficient for securing the goods of citizens that all parties to this debate can agree ought to be secured, then we have a positive argument in favor of WBP. It bears remarking that only one of us is a (substantive) subjectivist about well-being; the other is an objectivist. A chief aim of this paper, accordingly, is to emphasize the distinction between

[5] This is a necessary condition only. There may be countervailing reasons not to promote well-being in particular cases. We are not assuming that well-being is the only appropriate goal of policy.

what we take to be the nature of well-being and the conception of well-being that we can appropriately use in the public policy arena.

2. The need for well-being policy

Some doubt that governments should be in the business of measuring and promoting well-being, as such, at all. People should be free to pursue their own good however they wish, and the state has no business getting mixed up in that endeavor, save to secure the freedoms people need to do so.[6] This is a large part of the rationale for making economic growth a central aim of policy: more money in your pocket means more freedom, and you can do with that what you like. Suggestions that governments go beyond this modest charge, and measure and promote their citizens' well-being directly, have met with substantial resistance. "Look out, the Happiness Police are on the way," according to one opinion piece on the British government's announcement of a simple effort to begin tracking, and bringing into policy deliberations, the well-being of its constituents.[7]

We will have much to say about the proper role of, and limits on, well-being measures in policy, but here we can swiftly dispatch the doubts about whether such measures may legitimately be used at all. Put simply, policymakers have a choice: they can either take account of the impacts of their policies on people's welfare, or ignore them. We take it to be obvious that policymakers should sometimes at least consider whether their decisions make people better or worse off. To disregard such information in all policy deliberations is, indeed, irresponsible and immoral. Deontologists, consequentialists, virtue ethicists and political theorists of all stripes can agree on this much.[8] And if reasonably reliable measures of well-being are available, then policymakers' refusing ever to avail themselves of such information is likewise irresponsible. Taking account of such information, if only for the purpose of avoiding policies that make people worse off, is all that well-being policy requires. The distance between this humble aspiration and a Huxleyan state unleashing legions of "happiness police" on its hapless citizenry is immense, and efforts to assimilate the former to the latter are, to put it mildly, ill-conceived. Well-being policy is, in principle, a perfectly respectable and legitimate, indeed morally necessary, enterprise.

Some will immediately object that well-being policy is not needed for policymakers to take seriously the ways in which their decisions make people better or worse off. They can, instead, attend simply to people's resources, capabilities, or opportunities—freedoms of certain sorts.[9] This won't do, for the simple reason that well-being is—putting it mildly—imperfectly correlated with any plausible metric of freedom. Exclusive reliance on such measures, then, will often deprive policymakers of important information about the well-being impacts of their decisions. Even if, say, economic growth is generally the single most reliable and effective means of promoting well-being, there may be numerous cases where growth fails to yield the usual dividends. It matters as well *which* freedoms we promote: some enhance well-being more than oth-

[6] A quick note on terminology. We follow the emerging consensus in using the term "well-being" for the most general kind of prudential value, or the good for a person. We use "happiness" in the nonevaluative psychological sense of the term, which could include life-satisfaction, domain satisfaction, positive affect, positive emotional condition, etc. We use the words "well-being" and "welfare" interchangeably.

[7] "Don't ask us how happy we are Mr. Cameron... it'll only make us feel miserable," by John Naish, *The Daily Mail*, November 16, 2010.

[8] Even strict libertarians wanting nothing more than a night watchman state should agree: we still need to decide how to deploy the night watchmen; other things equal, we should prefer arrangements that make people better off to those that leave them worse off.

[9] Resources are strictly means to freedom, but the difference is unimportant here.

ers. At any rate, other factors can quite obviously influence well-being in ways that freedom metrics won't effectively track. In the United States, for instance, there has been no detectable increase in happiness, and possibly a decline, despite spectacular economic growth and increases in many other freedoms over recent decades. Meanwhile, some Latin American countries appear to enjoy very high levels of happiness despite modest economic achievements. This sort of information is *patently* a relevant consideration for policy. And whatever one thinks of the measures used in these findings, the evidence will sometimes be reliable enough; citizens hanging themselves is a pretty good sign of unhappiness. It would be foolish to exclude such information entirely from policy deliberations, or to bar policymakers from gathering it.

Freedom metrics can fail to address concerns about well-being for at least three reasons. First, people make mistakes, often predictable mistakes, and these will diminish the benefits of their options, sometimes in ways that policymakers cannot responsibly ignore. Most Americans today enjoy unprecedented freedom to eat varied, healthy diets, for instance, and a great many have responded to this good fortune by eating their way to an early grave. An oft-noted possibility is that U.S. agricultural policies, by subsidizing unhealthy foods, have been a major contributor to the present epidemics of obesity and diabetes. It is hardly courting controversy to suggest that, should policymakers discover that their actions will have the effect of crippling or killing off a sizable proportion of the population—through their own mistakes or whatever—they ought to take that information on board.

Second, efforts to transmute such commonsensical advice into the language of freedom are seldom helpful, and frequently Byzantine. True, we *could* claim that our interest isn't in whether people die prematurely, but simply whether they have the freedom to be alive; and then go on to say that the 47-year-old office manager in the super-sized coffin didn't really have the freedom to keep himself alive, given the narrow range of options afforded by his limited willpower. But even if that were plausible, it is impractical to burden policymakers with the management of such delicate and recondite freedoms. Sometimes, at least, well-being policy is more straightforward.

Third, some clearly desirable policies for making people better off do not comfortably fit the "freedom" rubric, since they benefit people independently of their choices. Healthy communities, for instance, are an important source of well-being, and governments should at least try to avoid policies that weaken communities.[10] While there may be an abstruse sense in which promoting healthy communities advances the cause of freedom—it makes people free to enjoy the benefits of living in a healthy community—what it rather more relevantly promotes is *well-being*. It makes people's lives go better for them. (Note also that promoting community could involve *limiting* people's freedom according to the most natural way of thinking about the case, namely by limiting their options.) An exclusive focus on freedoms will sometimes blind policymakers to important goods that people don't choose. Putting it another way: people want, say, to be happy. But happiness might depend partly on things they can't meaningfully choose, but are simply either present, or not, like community. In such cases an increase in freedom won't help them achieve their goals, and might even frustrate them. If policy is going to be any help it needs to focus directly on those goals—in this case happiness, and the communities on which it depends.[11]

[10] Consider recent studies that show the dramatic effect of having obese friends on one's own weight (Hill et al. 2010).

[11] For an extended discussion of the issues raised in this section, see Haybron 2008.

3. Person-respecting welfarism

The goal of the previous section was to show that there are cases in which promoting well-being directly makes sense. (For simplicity, we will speak of "promoting" well-being broadly, so that it might involve nothing more than attempting to limit increases in ill-being.) Policy should, then, be in some sense *welfarist*.[12] As the preceding discussion suggests, however, we are not committed to *strong welfarism,* which, as we understand the notion here, takes the promotion of well-being to be the sole aim of policy.[13] We allow that other values, such as capabilities or social justice, may also be important, perhaps more so than well-being. Our claim is just that well-being should be among the values with which policy is directly concerned: policy-makers should, at least sometimes, consider the well-being impacts of their options. In such cases they should, other things being equal, prefer policies that better promote well-being, or have less deleterious effects on well-being. Call this view *weak welfarism*. Though little of what follows should hang on the question, we regard the promotion of well-being as a major, not minor, policy imperative.

One might wonder what distinguishes WBP from traditional economic approaches to policy, since welfarism is widely accepted in economics. Indeed, economists have long been concerned with well-being policy of a sort, the root idea being that policy should advance welfare understood as preference satisfaction. In practice, however, economic approaches have tended to eschew direct concern for well-being, which was thought to be both unmeasurable and incomparable between persons, in favor of an emphasis on resources or wealth, which in turn enables people to satisfy their preferences. On the standard revealed preference approach, for instance, there's simply no saying whether a person is better off unless you present her with an extra option and she chooses it. So increasing freedom, in the form of options, is the way to advance well-being. The allure of GDP is precisely that it seems a useful proxy for this kind of freedom. To distinguish our concern, WBP, from the traditional economic model, we will take "well-being policy" to refer only to *direct*, versus indirect, welfarism: taking well-being itself to be a fitting object of explicit deliberation in policy. The standard economic approach, by contrast, involves indirect welfarism: policies are ultimately justified by reference to well-being, but well-being itself plays little or no explicit role in policy deliberation. This is crude, but should serve well enough for present purposes.

Note that one traditional economic policy tool, cost-benefit analysis, actually does concern itself directly with well-being: costs and benefits understood via strength of preference, expressed for instance in terms of willingness to pay for an option, are summed and compared across individuals. Cost-benefit analysis, thus construed, is in fact a form of WBP in precisely the sense that concerns us here: in that sense, WBP has long been a fixture of traditional economic policy analysis. While we'll suggest later that traditional cost-benefit analyses are indefensible (in some contexts), certain forms of cost-benefit analysis might be fully compatible with our views. Notice that cost-benefit analysis is within economics a highly controversial procedure, not easily reconciled with the field's theoretical foundations.[14] In any event, we suspect that much of the animus toward WBP in some economic circles owes, not to the emphasis on well-being, but

[12] This term tends to be associated with economic notions of utility, but here we understand it broadly, using 'welfare' and cognates to denote matters of well-being, with no commitment to any view of well-being. A welfarist might think governments should promote Aristotelian or other objectivist views of well-being.

[13] See Sumner 1996, Adler and Posner 2006. Our distinction between strong and weak welfarism mirrors Adler and Posner's.

[14] Adler and Posner 2006, Hausman and McPherson 2006.

the particular *conceptions* or metrics of well-being endorsed by many promoters of "well-being" policy—the focus on promoting mental states like happiness, for instance. But WBP need not trade in any mentalistic notions; it need only concern itself with well-being, somehow understood.

A familiar worry about WBP is *paternalism*: governments that take it upon themselves to promote well-being, rather than simply promoting the freedoms or resources citizens might use to seek their own welfare, risk becoming unduly paternalistic. Thus, for instance, a capabilities approach is sometimes claimed to be superior on the grounds that it treats people with respect by simply giving them capabilities and not trying to impose desired outcomes on people.[15] Yet WBP hardly needs to infringe on personal liberty, as the examples discussed above should make clear. It is difficult to imagine what must be paternalistic about eliminating corn subsidies with the aim of promoting well-being, or emphasizing unemployment versus economic growth because the latter has less impact on people's happiness. WBP can be sharply constrained by strong limits on paternalistic meddling, and in fact we endorse such limits.

Accordingly, the variety of welfarism we favor is not only weak but also *person-respecting*. Persons must be treated with respect, in ways that acknowledge their status as autonomous agents having sovereign authority over their personal affairs. Well-being policy should, among other things, be nonpaternalistic, or embody only forms of paternalism that are consistent with respect for persons. Here we have in mind traditional liberal constraints on interference with personal liberty, which standardly reject "hard" forms of paternalism that try to push individuals to live better by some objective or otherwise external standard. Whereas many liberals endorse certain kinds of soft paternalism aimed at helping people overcome irrationality and other impediments to achieving their values. We are sympathetic to that view, but will not take a stand on it here: we will focus on nonpaternalistic forms of WBP, rejecting hard paternalism but leaving it open what the limits on soft paternalism might be.

The notion of respect in use here is not meant to be controversial, and is deliberately left somewhat vague. We take it to be part of commonsense morality, at least as found in modern liberal societies. Further, this notion corresponds to the sort of practical principles of rights and respect that liberal consequentialists and deontologists tend broadly to agree on, even if consequentialists are more prone to override them to promote the good than Kantians.

4. What conception of well-being should inform policy?

4.1 Pragmatic subjectivism

The question before us now is how can policy promote well-being while ensuring that the imperative to respect persons is met? We contend that, given any plausible understanding of individual sovereignty, *policies aimed at bettering people's lives must do so according to the beneficiaries' own standards; they must not impose some external standard of well-being on people*. We can state the point more broadly: insofar as the aim of a policy is to make individuals' own lives better, whether by promoting their well-being, their excellence, beauty or whatever, the standards of "better" employed must be those of the individuals themselves. Otherwise it is difficult to see how the persons remain sovereign concerning their personal affairs: someone else is deciding for them, in part, how their lives should go. As we will argue in this section, to promote

[15] E.g., Nussbaum 2000, Nussbaum 2011.

well-being while respecting persons we must promote well-being as people see it, and this means paying attention to the values that make up people's own conceptions of well-being.

One might think that this sounds like an endorsement of subjectivism about well-being. In the philosophical literature on well-being, theories tend to be divided into subjective theories and objective theories. According to the former, roughly, what items contribute to well-being always depends on the subjective mental states of the subject; according to the latter this is not so (Sumner 1996: 38). But person-respecting welfarism (henceforth PRW) entails nothing at all about the nature of well-being; it tells us only what governments may *promote* in seeking to better people's lives. For all we've said, the best arguments may well favor a stringently objectivist account of well-being; in fact one of us does favor objectivism about well-being. That governments may not permissibly impose that view of well-being on their citizens has no bearing at all on its correctness. What's good for you, and what others may do to advance your well-being, are completely different questions. While subjectivist accounts of well-being are sometimes defended on the grounds that they are allegedly less paternalistic than objectivist views, such arguments are spurious: there is no paternalism in the view that a person can be fundamentally mistaken about her interests.[16] Reality may just be like that. Anti-paternalistic scruples might counsel against imposing our views of well-being on others; or, perhaps, just telling them we think they're being foolish; or maybe even being silently judgmental about their beliefs or choices. But they do not counsel reality not to be objectivist; nor do they advise us to refrain from believing that reality might just be like that. Objectivism about well-being is entirely consistent with any plausible principles of respect for persons. At most, such principles might demand that, in practice, we adopt a stance of respectful humility, taking others' verdicts about their interests to be authoritative—even if we also believe that they might nonetheless turn out to be badly mistaken. So PRW offers no support for subjectivism about well-being.

There are good reasons, as well, *not* to assume a subjectivist account of welfare in policy. For starters, governments would be wise to steer clear of the long-running debate about the nature of well-being: for thousands of years hedonists, Aristotelians, and many others have failed to generate any sort of consensus about the right view of well-being. While there may be limited points of agreement, no theory of well-being commands a clear majority among ethical theorists. Perhaps the rejection of hedonism could be described as a consensus position, but even hedonism continues to command support from leading theorists (e.g., Feldman 2004, Crisp 2006a, b). It would be hubristic, and needlessly contentious, for policymakers simply to help themselves to a highly tendentious and sharply contested theoretical position in a field where they have no significant competence. At least, where there are more modest alternatives, as we will suggest is the case here.

A second concern is that not all people are subjectivists about well-being, and certainly not all agree on any particular variant of it. Governments that assume subjectivism are effectively taking the stance that many of their constituents—Aristotelians and Thomistic Catholics, for instance—are simply wrong about what's good for them; or, at the very least, that they are mistaken in their conceptions of well-being. For those drawn to subjectivist accounts on anti-paternalistic grounds, this would be a fairly ironic position to take. At any rate, it is not clear that governments should be in the business of endorsing particular conceptions of the human good. Doing so might reasonably be deemed inherently paternalistic, even if it does not strictly infringe individuals' pursuit of the good as they see it: "We think your Aristotelian conception of well-

[16] For detailed discussion on the way in which people can be mistaken in matters of personal welfare, see Haybron 2007a, 2008.

being a groundless superstition, but since we think well-being is actually just a matter of getting whatever you happen to want—however stupid the reasons for it—we will indulge your preferences anyway." Of greater concern is the likelihood that such an attitude toward constituents' values will, in practice, encourage governments to adopt more clearly paternalistic policies that effectively steamroll those values. As a practical matter, policymakers who officially pronounce the personal ideals of many constituents to be mistaken are unlikely to respond to those values in a sensitive and discerning manner. "Reasonable people don't think that way, so we're sure those farmers will be glad to end up in better-paying factory jobs."

Third: even if not strictly paternalistic, for governments to assume subjectivism or any other theory of well-being may be undemocratic. On whose behalf are they declaring subjectivism to be the correct theory of the human good? Who indeed is in charge of such a regime? Not, apparently, the benighted citizens whose nonsubjectivist ideals of living the government officially repudiates.

In short, PRW offers no support for grounding policy in a subjectivist theory of well-being, and in fact counsels against it. What person-respecting welfarism does favor is what we will call *pragmatic subjectivism*, which is neutral between subjective and objective theories of well-being. According to pragmatic subjectivism, governments must be neutral regarding the nature of well-being, deferring entirely to individuals' own conceptions of well-being in promoting their interests.[17] Insofar as policy aims to make people better off, it must do so according their own view of what's good for them. As we elaborate in the next section, WBP seeks to promote what people value for themselves. This is a kind of subjectivism, but it differs from what we might call *substantive subjectivism*—subjectivism about the nature of well-being—in that it makes no claim about what really is good for people. Pragmatic subjectivism is compatible with all theories of well-being—Aristotelian, hedonistic, preference satisfaction, etc. It thus largely insulates policy from needing to take a stand on philosophical debates about the character of well-being. As noted earlier, the view is pragmatic in that it concerns how, in practice, well-being should be conceived, as well as in part of its justification: as a practical matter, governments would be wise to avoid taking a stand on contentious matters of value where possible.

Pragmatic differs from substantive subjectivism as well in the kinds of factors that shape the theory. Both sorts of subjectivist might agree that policy should defer to people's values, for instance, yet understand this in different ways. For the purpose of an informed-preference theory of well-being, say, a high level of idealization may be warranted, since the goal is to yield the right verdicts about well-being for all cases. Pragmatic subjectivists may insist on less idealization, since their goal is not to give the criteria for well-being but to specify the values that should drive policy given, inter alia, the demands of respect for persons. Perhaps governments must hew more closely to people's express preferences, even if those often fail to track well-being adequately. We will examine this question in some detail later; for now it suffices to note how the theoretical demands driving pragmatic subjectivism differ from those driving theories of well-being.

It may seem as though pragmatic subjectivism actually *rejects* well-being policy: what it tells governments to promote is, not well-being per se, but what people *take* to be well-being. If the citizenry uniformly embraces a mistaken theory of well-being, then WBP in that polity will not in fact aim at their well-being. In principle, if they are mistaken enough, it could even be disastrous for their welfare. In practice, however, this will be highly unlikely, partly because the right kind of pragmatic subjectivism will correct for certain kinds of mistakes, and partly because

[17] For a related view, see Fleurbaey 2011.

prevailing theories of well-being tend roughly to agree on which outcomes are disastrous. Further, prevailing theories tend to overlap significantly on the list of ingredients of well-being, even if they don't agree on the fundamental explanations for why these ingredients are on the list (Tiberius, forthcoming). At any rate, the practical situation facing policymakers makes this a merely notional worry: in trying to promote well-being, they cannot appeal directly to the facts about well-being, as against what their constituents wrongly believe about well-being. For they themselves have imperfect epistemic access to those facts. They can only make their best guess about what's good for people, and question is where they should look for that information. On our view, the answer is that they must look to the ostensible beneficiaries and what they care about. If some remain unsatisfied by this response, we see little loss in allowing that WBP is actually "well-being" policy: policy aimed at what people take to be good for them. The normative force of this sort of policy seems little diminished: that states should be concerned to promote better lives for people, as they see things, seems quite compelling enough.

Pragmatic subjectivism resembles liberal neutrality in enjoining governments not to take sides regarding ideals of the good life, and may indeed be a corollary of the neutrality doctrine. However, note that pragmatic subjectivism does not rule out government efforts to promote certain welfare values, even controversial "objective" values like, say, achievement. If enough of your constituents are Aristotelians, then WBP may well include the promotion of distinctively Aristotelian values. So pragmatic subjectivism does not require governments to promote only shared values, or goods that all people must want.

Of course, it will be important for such efforts not to burden others unduly in their pursuit of their own values—an important issue since any policy regime will in practice favor some ideals of living over others, and it will be essential for minorities not to be excessively disadvantaged in the pursuit of their ideals. In the United States, for instance, New Yorkers might tend more to value lives of striving, whereas New Orleanians may value enjoyment more. WBP may accordingly take different forms in the two locales, with one set of policies for the "strivers," another for the "enjoyers." Minorities—say, enjoyers living in Manhattan—may find their own pursuits burdened by such policies even when their interests are given equal weight. At what point such burdens become unacceptable is a question we will not try to settle here; in general it is a question of what liberal principles of respect for persons demand.

4.2 The importance of values

Well-being policy, then, must focus on well-being as people themselves see it. We have so far assumed that the way to understand people's conceptions of well-being is in terms of their standards or values. But this requires some explanation. We have not said why the emphasis should be on *values* rather than, say, preferences. Nor have we said anything about what values are or how to identify them. We turn now to these questions.

Before we can explain the focus on values, we need to understand what values are. Values are relatively robust pro-attitudes, or clusters of pro-attitudes, that we take to generate reasons for action and furnish standards for evaluating how our lives are going.[18] For example, if Paula values being a parent, then she is relatively robustly disposed to feel proud when she takes her child to lessons he enjoys, ashamed when she forgets to pick him up from school, and so on. Further, she takes her being a parent to justify certain decisions and plans she makes for her life,

[18] For a more detailed version of the account on which we are relying see Tiberius 2000, Tiberius 2008. For similar views see Schmuck and Sheldon 2001, Raibley 2010, Anderson 1995.

including decisions that require sacrificing other things she wants, and she takes 'being a good parent' to be highly relevant to how well her life is going. Because they play this role in deliberation, planning and action, values are "robust" in the sense that they are relatively stable and do not evaporate under moderate reflection. A person might *like* something or judge it to be valuable, but do so only very briefly, or in a casual, unreflective manner that would evaporate under the merest scrutiny, or plays virtually no role in his psychic economy. Such whimsical attitudes do not plausibly reflect what a person genuinely cares about, who he is, where he stands, or what he thinks it is to live well.

Values may be a subset of desires if we understand 'desire' broadly enough, but there is an important difference between values and mere preferences or desires.[19] To value something, and not merely prefer it, is to see it as generating *reasons* for you—as tending to justify responding in certain ways to it, and limiting how you might reasonably respond to it. Perhaps you want a flat screen TV. You may think you have reason to want it, not because it has intrinsic value, not even simply because you want it; you might see the TV as having purely instrumental value, and your wanting something as, in itself, providing no reason at all to seek it (you also, regrettably, want a cigarette). Rather, you think it makes sense to want it because you will enjoy watching it, and the resulting pleasure seems to you valuable. You value pleasure, but merely want a TV; and the difference plays out in the fact that you see pleasure, but not the TV itself, or your wanting one, as grounding your reasons to act. And what matters to you in this case, ultimately, is getting pleasure; the TV is merely a vehicle for promoting that value. Should the TV somehow fail to provide enjoyment, then your having gotten the TV that you (merely) wanted would not, from your perspective, have any value at all. It did not, as you see things, make you better off.

To distinguish values from mere preferences, we might refer to them, rather clumsily, as *Robust Subjective Reason-Grounding Preferences*: robust preferences that the agent sees as grounding reasons for her.[20] They are "subjectively" reason-grounding because, at least on some views of reasons, a person's values may not always ground genuine reasons for her. (A sadist might value the suffering of her victims, but one might coherently deny that this gives her any reason at all to seek it.)

Values are not the same as priorities.[21] Whereas values embody what you care about, your priorities constitute a working ordering of where to put your efforts. A person could have good values but—as even she may recognize in a more reflective moment—bad priorities; some workaholics fit this pattern, for instance. Sometimes divergence between values and priorities reflects a mistake, as may often happen when people are too "materialistic": their values may not be materialistic, though their priorities are, as they lose track of what really matters to them and devote their efforts to trivia. But divergence can be perfectly reasonable as well. Work may sometimes have to take priority even when it isn't more important to you than your family. But when someone in your family is in trouble, your priorities shift. These are cases where your values aren't shifting, but your priorities are.

Finally, on this view of values, we can see that (for most people) values themselves will exhibit certain patterns of mutual reinforcement and coherence. Some values will be more "core"

[19] We will treat preference and desire interchangeably in this paper.

[20] Or, alternatively, preferences whose *objects* the agent sees as grounding reasons for her; we won't distinguish these readings here. To value something is not necessarily to see it as intrinsically valuable; it is merely to see it as grounding reasons or justifications. You might value health, and take health to be what justifies your efforts to quit smoking, without valuing health intrinsically, or having any view at all about why health ultimately matters.

[21] Here we follow Schmidtz 1996.

than others in the sense that they are used more often in explanations of the importance of other values. For example, the value of happiness is likely to be a core value for many because it will be appealed to in explaining what is important about other values such as sports, hobbies, and friendships. We do not assume that values occupy a rigid hierarchy (though they may for some people); rather, we think that values are more likely to be arranged in a web of mutual support with some values more centrally located than others. Notice another feature of this web: the centrality or "core-ness" of a value does not necessarily track its motivational strength, since there is more to being a value than being a pro-attitude. Notice also that some values will be merely instrumental (the value of money is usually like this), but even intrinsic values can vary in degrees of centrality; happiness may explain the value of more instrumental values than, say, a particular friendship though both are valued (in part) for their own sakes.

With this view of values in mind, we can now consider the question: why the focus on values in pragmatic subjectivism? The reason is that values represent what agents care about—what they see as giving them practical reasons. Mere desires or preferences, by contrast, may have no intrinsic normative force from the agent's perspective; as he sees things, they aren't worth pursuing at all, save to the extent that they relate to his values. (Some people may value the satisfaction of their every desire or whim, but not everyone must be like that.) Ordinary consumer preferences may typically be like this: getting the commodities you want may strictly be of no worth to you at all, *unless doing so furthers your values*. You want a TV, a computer, a car, or whatever, not because you value these things, but because you expect them to promote things you do value—pleasure, work, etc. Alternatively, you simply have a brute inclination to seek them, say because you've seen the ads—in which case you may see no reason to go for them: to your mind, those desires aren't worth fulfilling at all. *And if you genuinely regard those preferences as having no rational force, then governments aiming to treat you with respect must also do so*. To give such preferences weight that the agents themselves firmly reject is to impose an external set of values on them, contra PRW. People's values, then, determine the appropriate standard of well-being for WBP.

4.3 Personal welfare values

Having narrowed our concern to values, the question now before us is which values count. We've already argued that WBP must focus on well-being as people see it, so a natural thought is to focus on the values implicated in people's conceptions of well-being. Yet directing policymakers to attend to what people think about "well-being" is problematic in several ways. First, people may think nothing about well-being *per se*. 'Well-being' is not a commonly used word and, when it is used, it is rarely used with much clarity. Indeed, frequently it functions simply as a term for good health. Therefore, while we think that people do have more or less determinate views about what it is for their lives to go well, these views may not be thought of by the people who hold them as conceptions of "well-being." For this reason, policymakers cannot sensibly rely on people's explicit views about their own well-being, as such. Second, insofar as people do have thoughts that they might express to a pollster, these thoughts might not faithfully or fully represent their views about their lives, what they care about, and what they want done on their behalf. How, then, do we determine which values belong to people's conceptions of well-being?

A permissive approach would counsel us not to bother, and simply include all values: WBP should promote whatever it is that people care about, period. If a policy furthers the achievement of your values, then it succeeds as WBP. The permissive approach won't do, partly

because it will frequently misrepresent people's views about their own welfare: it is perfectly ordinary for individuals to care about things they see as having little or no direct, positive bearing on their well-being. Artists, teachers, and dissidents, for instance, sometimes choose paths in life that will leave them, in their eyes, *worse* off than other options before them. Such individuals—and perhaps most people—care about things other than their own well-being, even in their own lives: doing something worthwhile, realizing their potential, giving back to society, combating injustice, etc. From their perspective, they've *sacrificed* their well-being to do what they do. Call this the problem of self-sacrifice.

Similarly, people care about things having no relation at all to their own lives, much less well-being: the future welfare of a stranger one briefly met, the state of the world's ecosystems a thousand years hence, or the health of children in a distant land. Call this the problem of disinterested values. Less commonly, persons may be depressed, detest themselves, or hold religious doctrines on which they actually value their own *ill-being*. These are standard worries for preference satisfaction theories of well-being, and whatever one may think of their resolution, the pragmatic subjectivist is compelled to respect these features of commonsense thinking about well-being. (At least, insofar as they genuinely reflect individuals' values, a question we take up later.) WBP needs to focus, not just on citizens' values, but what we will call their *personal welfare values*.

Another reason for WBP to focus specifically on individuals' personal welfare values, and not just their values *tout court*, is that considerations of well-being plausibly have normative force that other values lack. It is one thing, for instance, to burden some citizens to help others lead what they see as better lives, and quite another to burden them to satisfy others' completely disinterested preferences for, say, a monument in a far-off city.

Having established personal welfare values as the proper basis of WBP, the question remains how to distinguish these from other values. In the easiest case, individuals will explicitly and wholeheartedly endorse well-defined conceptions of well-being, having a clear notion of which among their values figure into those conceptions. Further, their emotions, moods, desires and choices will accord with those views of well-being. This will not, however, be a common event, and actual citizens will tend to depart in various ways from this schema. Yet in practice a great many values, such as health, pleasure, and freedom from suffering, will not be hard to classify (more on this in section 5), and it is not clear how serious a problem this will be. In less obvious cases, well-designed surveys or experiments may be able to tease out whether people see the achievement of a given value as benefiting them, or as being choiceworthy for some other reason.

Should that not suffice, a plausible default position is simply to identify personal welfare values with the values that a person takes to be the relevant basis for evaluating her life, for instance when forming judgments of life satisfaction. Call these *life evaluation-relevant values*. (Or, alternatively, just "personal values.") This strategy correctly rules out disinterested preferences, but—regrettably—fails to do so for values implicated in self-sacrifice. While less than optimal, this approach may be relatively easy to operationalize, and it is not clear that either the beneficiaries or the citizens burdened by WBP, so conceived, should have much reason to object, at least given the difficulties of identifying personal conceptions of well-being. Helping people to succeed in self-sacrificial projects that they see as important to their lives, while perhaps not as compelling as making them better off, still seems to have considerably more normative force than promoting their completely disinterested values, which even they see as making no difference to their lives. Indeed, if there's a problem here, it is already shared by widespread views

taking life satisfaction to be a major indicator or constituent of well-being: people may sometimes be satisfied with their lives, not because they are doing well, but because their lives are simply worthwhile or admirable. You may see yourself as unfortunate and doing poorly, yet be satisfied with your life because you have conducted yourself well and done a lot of good. If there is a problem with the fallback approach to identifying personal welfare values, then, it is a problem already shared by some very common approaches to well-being. At any rate, the approach may yield results that are close enough for government work.

5. Objections, replies, and clarifications

We are not proposing that governments aim to maximize indices of value fulfillment. We are claiming only that *insofar as policy aims to promote well-being, the ultimate standard of well-being is the beneficiary's own values.* As noted earlier, we doubt that governments should aim to maximize anything, much less well-being; well-being is one important goal of policy among others, and its promotion must be constrained by principles of respect for persons. This includes respecting persons as agents, leaving them free to promote or frustrate their values, wittingly or unwittingly, as they see fit. That you regularly dine on super-sized fast food meals, for instance, may reflect weakness of will more than your values. In such a case treating you with respect might mean leaving you utterly free to continue doing so, while also following your judgment in refusing to treat those choices as reliable indicators of your best interests.

Still, some will object to government efforts to base policy on people's values, where these can differ from, or go beyond, the "preferences" revealed by their choices. Who are we to say that a monster burger isn't the best choice for you—that it isn't really in accord with your values—if in fact that's what you choose to eat? Even if policymakers don't restrict your freedom to make that choice, you might consider it paternalistic for them to use some inferred "values" of yours as the metric of what's good for you, rather than the choices you actually make. The first thing to notice is that if officials in a distant capital are sitting around pondering the meaning of what you ate for lunch today, they are probably watching a little too closely. But yes, if one wishes to scrutinize citizens' choices at that level of detail, it would probably be best to adopt a highly deferential attitude toward them.

But most policymaking takes place at a much higher level of generality. So: policymakers have no idea if you made a mistake in eating that particular monster burger. But if you and millions more have grown morbidly obese from eating billions of such burgers; if doing so has left many of you sick or dead; if there's no evidence you're getting more than average pleasure from your diet—then policymakers have a decision to make. They could take the pattern of choices to reveal some very exotic priorities: "Hey, what do you know, these guys value monster burgers more than they value their health or their lives. The next thing you know they'll be eating their own feet." Or they could note one of those universally known universals of human nature, namely that people have a weakness for gluttony, and deduce that folks are probably making some bad choices *by their own standards*. Perhaps they should stop subsiding monster burgers then, or even shift subsidies toward healthier foods. Whatever they do, they should probably not let their devotion to behaviorist psychology or other tendentious doctrines drive them to make bizarre inferences about people's values. Suppose they learn that people tend later to regret eating like that; that they keep trying out new diets to lose weight; that, when someone bothers to ask them, they vehemently *say* they wish they ate a healthier diet so they might live to see their grandchildren; and that those who do improve their diets regret nothing but having not done so earlier.

Would it be paternalistic, then, to suppose that their shopping behavior at the burger joint wasn't very representative of their values?

What would be profoundly paternalistic, it seems to us, would be willfully to disregard the mountains of non-choice evidence about their values, including their own testimony, and simply insist that their choice behavior *must* be the sole indicator of what's good for them. In general, no one values unhappiness, loneliness, bankruptcy, poverty, sickness, or death, and it is hardly intrusive for policymakers to assume as much. Where people's choices systematically lead to such results, and where there is good reason to suspect weakness of will or other mistakes, there need hardly be any paternalism in going beyond the choice behavior to consider other evidence of what people value. On the contrary.

At any rate, the idea that values determine the ultimate standard of well-being leaves entirely open what we should take as *evidence* of people's values. You could accept pragmatic subjectivism, and our focus on values, while still maintaining that choice behavior is the only reliable or acceptable evidence of people's values. But this is an epistemic problem, which we take up in Section 6.1.

From a very different direction, some will object that WBP could legitimately involve, not only the use of some determinate conception of well-being, but *any* conception of well-being, subjective or objective. If policymakers believe in some objective account of well-being, they should employ that in their deliberations. So long as people aren't forced to accept the putative benefits and can freely choose to pursue their own conceptions of the good, agent sovereignty is respected—even when governments try to promote, say, objectively worthwhile lives of accomplishment. But this sort of effort will either burden individuals' pursuit of good lives as they see things, thus violating agent sovereignty by imposing an external standard on them for their own sake; or else have no meaningful effect but to enable those who value the goods in question to better secure them; in which case the standard of welfare effectively being promoted is *not* external, but the individuals' own. Insofar as the objector proposes something defensible, it is because the policy promotes a given conception of well-being only for those who share it.

Perhaps governments might simply try to persuade people to care about certain goods, without burdening their pursuit of well-being as they see it. For instance, they might publicize arguments for the value of accomplishment. State efforts at rational persuasion, at least, may not infringe personal autonomy, at least in citizens' capacities as beneficiaries.[22] An obvious concern here is that policies advocating certain ideals of living, even if only aimed at rational persuasion, can easily generate social pressures and nonrational influences that do subvert personal autonomy. (Attempts to shape citizens' values by nonrational means would, we take it, infringe objectionably on individuals' sovereignty over their lives.) At any rate this is a marginal case of well-being policy, so we will not try to settle the issues here.

Some may worry that pragmatic subjectivism fails to yield plausible results about the relative *urgency* of different values for policy purposes:[23] you might tie your welfare to success in building a monument to Elvis, and value this more than your health or happiness. WBP, as such, will need to defer to these values in determining the proper metric of well-being for you. But this is consistent with treating certain welfare values as more urgent than others in setting policy, say because people have more stringent obligations to assist in matters of basic need, or because jus-

[22] If citizens are taxed to pay for policies aimed at persuading them to change their own values, however, the measures might be unjustified. On the other hand, citizens might reasonably consider it a legitimate function of government to expose them to other viewpoints.

[23] Scanlon 1975.

tice demands that states give priority to certain goods. Pragmatic subjectivism requires only that states regard beneficiaries' own ordering of values as the metric of well-being. In the monument-builder's case, providing healthcare may need to be seen as less beneficial to him than helping him in his project would be, even if it is a higher priority for policy.

A related objection holds that pragmatic subjectivism, or for that matter any subjectivist approach to WBP, lacks critical power. Women in oppressive societies, for instance, might content themselves with poor nutrition, education, work opportunities, and little control over their lives. They might even value some of these things, or fail to have values that militate for different living conditions. On our view, WBP has to take their values as definitive: WBP will sometimes furnish no grounds for seeking what most of us would consider an improvement in people's lot. Is this a problem for pragmatic subjectivism? We don't believe so, for two reasons. First, progressive policies might be defended on non-welfarist grounds, for instance as a requirement of justice, or because (again) certain basic needs have special moral urgency. The capabilities approach pioneered by Sen and Nussbaum offers one natural avenue for such measures. While we have argued that capabilities theories cannot displace WBP, there is no reason that policy could not be concerned with both capabilities and well-being (and, for that matter, other values). We note only, *pace* the principle of respect for persons endorsed here, that efforts to "improve" the lot of deprived people must respect their sovereignty over their lives. If the goal is simply to improve their well-being or reduce their ill-being—and not, say, to secure their basic human rights—we do not see how any standards of well-being other than their own can satisfy the demands of respect. If that leaves policy helpless to prevent some people from choosing the lives of pigs, then so it must: the responsibility of choosing a good life is ultimately the individual's.

Second, what people are willing to put up with and what they value are often rather different things. Women who tolerate malnutrition without complaint may yet value health for themselves; perhaps they just don't make it a priority, given the realities they face. As well, people often have a variety of values that bear on a given deprivation. A woman who doesn't value paid work for herself may have other values that do favor it: perhaps such work would be more fulfilling, if she tried it, and that is something she does value very much. By her own standards, she would be better off in paid work. Finally, people's values are not always transparent, and what a person claims to want may not actually express her values. We will return to this possibility in the next section. For now it suffices to note that pragmatic subjectivism does not counsel policymakers to take all signs of contentment, resignation, or desire as definitive of people's values and interests.

One might wonder how pragmatic subjectivism differs, in practice, from a substantive subjectivist view, such as a preference satisfaction theory of well-being. Could not the latter issue the same policy recommendations as the former? Perhaps, but only if the theory of well-being is understood in an utterly nonstandard way. And even then, as we've already seen, it will do so for the wrong reasons.

Suppose, for instance, a government takes up a preference-satisfaction view of well-being, as many policymakers, economists and other social scientists do (despite, again, the highly controversial nature of this position within ethical theory). This is a paradigm subjectivist view. How does such a regime deal with the very different views of (say) its eudaimonist citizens, who take well-being to consist in a life of achievement and excellent activity? Quite handily, one might think: their values are simply preferences, and good policy will weight their (presumably strong) preferences for goods like achievement accordingly—just like any other prefer-

ences. If they care more about achievement than happiness, the preference-satisfaction view can accommodate that.

Perhaps some kind of preference-satisfaction account could accomplish this. But it will have to look very different from extant versions of the theory.[24] Notice, first, that Aristotelians (and perhaps most others!) don't just have a strong preference for virtue: they regard it as a non-fungible, cherished *value* commitment, not to be traded against mere preferences. An artist might ordinarily be unwilling to compromise her artistic integrity for any amount of money, because she regards that integrity as incomparably more important than ordinary commodities. Of course, she might be gotten to do so in the right circumstances, namely to protect other cherished values, like her child's welfare. But such trades do nothing to establish the comparability of such values with ordinary preferences, such as a wish for a flat screen TV. In short, certain values—call them *value commitments*—function as *constraints* on the satisfaction of other preferences and values, and cannot simply be treated as strong preferences.[25] How well is the Aristotelian who wants a flat screen TV doing? There seems to be no univocal answer to the question, because the status of that preference cannot be compared to the status of her preference for artistic integrity. If there is a preferentialist solution to this problem, it will have to look quite different from extant versions of the theory.[26]

Second, and relatedly, people's value commitments constrain what they are willing to have done for their sake. You may want a convenient new store nearby, but think that preference has zero weight in deciding whether to force Granny out of her home to build it. Your convenience preference is not just minor in comparison with her property rights; in your view, it should receive no weight whatsoever in public deliberations about whether to invoke eminent domain against Granny. It is, in that instance, no reason at all even to contemplate forcing someone from her home. In this case, your commitment to property rights *silences* your convenience preferences. On a preference satisfaction view, we must say either that your well-being consists in the satisfaction of incomparable preferences; or, if we wish to maintain the appearance that your preferences for Granny's rights have no bearing on your well-being, that governments wishing to respect the wishes of their constituents must consider people's preferences for how, and when, their well-being is to be promoted.

Third, people frequently adopt a somewhat skeptical attitude toward many of their *own* preferences, as even a casual acquaintance with country music should make plain. An obvious reason for this is that we are frequently irrational, uninformed, unreflective, or otherwise simply mistaken in our preferences, as we ourselves may later realize. A less obvious reason again concerns values: to value something, as we've said, is partly to see it as *worth* wanting—as making a claim on our desires. Implicit in the notion of valuing something is the idea that one can get it wrong: you might want what isn't worth wanting. Because of this, people might not always want all their preferences catered to, and may wish at times to defer to other sources. Entering college, you may have lots of preferences about what to study; but you also know why you're there:

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[24] For further discussion, and critique of standard economic policy approaches, see Alexandrova and Haybron forthcoming and Haybron and Alexandrova forthcoming. The latter paper argues that such approaches, contrary to common opinion, actually face grave concerns about paternalism.

[25] The authors have used 'value commitments' differently in other work. While Tiberius and others have used the term broadly for values, here we follow the narrower usage introduced in forthcoming.

[26] For those who have meta-ethical reasons for favoring desire theories one solution would be to count values as a species of desire and abandon the assumption that all desires are commensurable. We do not mean to argue against this possibility. Our point is that this would result in a theory that does not resemble current preference theories; indeed, it would result in a view very much like the one we are proposing.

among other things, because you don't even know what you don't know, or what you need to know. As a result, you may have a further preference that the university faculty take your wants with a large grain of salt: you believe they know some things about your interests better than you, and you want them to take that knowledge into account, to some extent overriding your other wishes. It is not clear that treating you with respect requires the university to treat you like a consumer, leaving you completely free to study whatever you feel like. Indeed, you may regard such treatment as patronizing: at bottom, what you really want—call it a meta-preference if you like—is for them to take their expertise into account and place some judicious constraints on what you will study.

Fourth, people may have "global" preferences about the shape, structure, or overall quality of their lives. These in turn may shape their attitudes toward more "local" preferences, which the individual may wish, when they conflict with his global priorities, to get little or no weight. Returning to the college example, students may have myriad disappointments and frustrations that, in more reflective moments, they themselves regard as trivial or even beneficial—essential parts of the process of personal development. Probably few college graduates wish the preferences they had while enrolled had been fully indulged. This sort of phenomenon is probably not a fringe case; for Aristotelians, in fact, the global perspective is the *central* case in thinking about well-being: what fundamentally matters is the character of one's life as a whole. Indeed, it may be impossible truly to assess well-being for a person until the end of her life.

It seems clear that policies based on the simple preference satisfaction views favored in traditional economic analyses, and many policy circles, will often fail to treat citizens with respect. By treating all preferences—including value commitments—as commensurable, differing only in strength, and by disregarding the way higher-order preferences bear on agents' views of many of their preferences, such accounts of well-being run roughshod over people's concerns and aspirations for their lives.

6. Putting pragmatic subjectivism to work

6.1 Discerning people's values: the fragmentation of subjectivity

Pragmatic subjectivism enjoins policymakers to undertake empirical investigations of (a) what people value and (b) how policies would affect this.[27] As philosophers, we are not in a position to say exactly how empirical studies of values and well-being should be conducted, but we can make some suggestions.

On the first task, one might think we could simply ask people. Unfortunately, though, individuals do not always have a clear notion of whether they merely want something, or value it. A fame-seeker might sincerely report that he values fame, and perhaps he does. But maybe he conflates values with desires, and in fact merely wants to be famous as a means to happiness. If he discovered that fame wouldn't bring happiness, he might cease to see any point in pursuing it. In short, people have limited insight into the structure of their values.

What about looking indiscriminately at desires or preferences, or perhaps choices? We've already seen that desires and choices can easily diverge from values, as when people are weak-

[27] A third question, noted earlier, is what people wish to have done on their behalf: we have views, not just about what's good for us, but about how our interests are to be promoted. For instance, you might object to having someone's property rights infringed just to furnish you with a minor convenience. It would be paternalistic for governments to ignore that attitude when deciding policy on your behalf. We will largely set this question aside here, however.

willed or otherwise irrational, or simply have bad or incomplete information. A less familiar problem is that individual choices might be locally rational—making sense in isolation—yet globally irrational, in the sense that a person's overall pattern of choices conflicts with what she judges to be important in her life. Each new gadget might make sense on its own, but over time the pattern of acquisitions may end up crowding out other, more important priorities and leaving you with endless maintenance headaches. This is just an intrapersonal variant of the tragedy of the commons, wherein individually rational decisions add up to an irrational whole. These are not merely notional worries: researchers have amassed abundant evidence of systematically imprudent behavior in recent decades, and complaints about misplaced priorities and rampant materialism are hoary clichés in many societies—and probably not without foundation. In many cases, the concern is not so much that people have rotten values, but that they've lost sight of their values. Indeed, the idea that people frequently live out of step with their own values is itself a cliché; consider how often one hears funeral-goers remark, "It reminds you what's really important." If our actions rarely failed to reflect our values, reminders would not be needed. (It may in fact be a sign of societal pathology that such clichés exist in one's polity: how do you forget something like that?)

Fortunately, our notion of values contains some constraints that can help guide us to better ways of ascertaining what people value. Recall that values (unlike mere preferences) have some stability or robustness; they tend to be pursued over time and to form the basis of long term plans that are sustained by emotional dispositions, and are not prone to disappear under even light scrutiny. Further, values (as opposed to mere preferences) are thought by those who have them to track what is important and to constrain the pursuit of other desired ends. Therefore, they are subject to standards of success to which mere preferences are not: values are sustainable in the face of a moderate dose of reflection on their origins, the consequences of their pursuit, and the role they play in a whole life. Given this feature of values, it makes sense to look for patterns of attitudes that are relatively affectively and cognitively stable.

One way to do this in practice would be to employ *reflective polling* methods, inducing people to engage in moderate reflection before they report what they value. A particularly instructive example of a technique like this for policy purposes is deliberative polling. According to the Center for Deliberative Democracy:

> Deliberative Polling® is an attempt to use television and public opinion research in a new and constructive way. A random, representative sample is first polled on the targeted issues. After this baseline poll, members of the sample are invited to gather at a single place for a weekend in order to discuss the issues. Carefully balanced briefing materials are sent to the participants and are also made publicly available. The participants engage in dialogue with competing experts and political leaders based on questions they develop in small group discussions with trained moderators.... After the deliberations, the sample is again asked the original questions. The resulting changes in opinion represent the conclusions the public would reach, if people had opportunity to become more informed and more engaged by the issues.[28]

Deliberative polling has been used to assess public opinion about such issues as climate change and health care choices. The judgments that result from deliberative polling embody more informed empirical beliefs, because participants' opinions are corrected through the process, but it is reasonable to think that the process would also help to clarify a person's values: the resulting judgments tend more accurately to reflect participants' values. This is obviously so when atti-

[28] http://cdd.stanford.edu/polls/docs/summary/. Accessed November 2, 2009

tudes are based on empirical beliefs as, for example, the value of "going green" might be based on facts about whether lifestyle changes can make any difference to environmental outcomes. We think engagement in discussion about how values are related to each other and what role they play in planning and deliberation could result in better judgments about what values really do guide a person's life. When it comes to individual values, in other words, deliberative polling or similar methods could be used to ascertain reflective sustainability. This process could rule out some ostensible values that are held lightly or on the basis of misinformation, to the extent that we should doubt whether they are really values at all, while bringing to light some genuine values that would otherwise be obscured.

Lay hedonism is illustrative here: many people may believe, or at least sincerely report, that (subjective) happiness is the only thing they ultimately value, even though a few minutes' reflection on experience machine cases or science fiction films like *The Matrix* handily causes them to revise this judgment. Observation of people's choices in life, as well as their judgments about myriad actual cases, may reinforce this finding: many, perhaps most, of those who espouse hedonistic views of well-being do not in fact have hedonistic values: they care about happiness, but also about other things. ("Be all you can be," "Don't be a couch potato…")

The standard of robustness also helps to diminish common worries about adaptive preferences and the like, where people content themselves with terrible conditions. Such contentment may often conceal profound failures to achieve what those individuals themselves already value. One possibility is that, while wishing to do well by more demanding standards, they see no point in dwelling on their oppressive circumstances, and make the best of what they see as a bad situation. But another is that their express opinions about their situations reflect, not their values, but rationalization or ignorance: a modest course of reflection might reveal that they actually value happiness and personal development for themselves, even if they presently settle for much less. Nussbaum (2000), for instance, discusses women in India who evince no interest in what they see as the "man's work" of running businesses—until they see a film showing women like them doing just that, and immediately acquire more ambitious aspirations. What had seemed to be their values collapsed under the slightest pressure; perhaps those weren't their values after all, and the women subsequently were empowered to achieve what they really cared about.

In practice, of course, reflective polling methods will not always be feasible, and their results will rarely give us a definitive picture of what people value for themselves. Sometimes getting people to reflect transforms their values, other times it yields unrepresentative judgments (e.g., more "respectable"), and often people lack clearly defined values to begin with. As well, people's judgments about abstract principles may conflict with their judgments about concrete cases; which do we take as authoritative? *Ex ante* and *ex post* judgments can conflict, particularly when the latter occur significantly later in life; which do we count? And would it be respectful to ignore completely the actual preferences people report, or the choices they make, even if those appear to conflict with the values they affirm on reflection?

It is not clear, in short, that any single indicator can definitively establish what a person values, even in principle. The problem is that subjectivity itself is a highly fragmented affair. Within the broad realm of "how things seem" to a person there is the brute phenomenal character of her experience, her feelings and inclinations, her intuitive take on things, her spontaneous judgments about things, her considered or reflective judgments about things, the judgments that best represent who she is, etc.

As a result, there will often be no canonical representation of what a person truly values or wants. In different contexts we will rely on different kinds of information, making the best

judgment we can about what position most accurately reflects the agent's standpoint. The problem is familiar to many of those who have had to make decisions for sick family members: Dad said this a while ago, but that really seems to fit his character more, etc. In such cases, the lingering sense that you've failed adequately to respect your loved one's wishes can be hard to avoid.[29]

6.2 What measures of well-being?

Such difficulties suggest that figuring out what people value, much less how they are faring relative to their values, can never be done with much precision. Yet we think it fairly apparent that certain values, such as health and happiness, have central importance for the great majority of people. Accordingly, certain sorts of well-being measures stand out as obvious candidates for "headline measures" deserving special prominence in public assessments of well-being. We will not make the case for these measures at length here, but will briefly touch on it to illustrate how pragmatic subjectivism works in practice.

First, consider some approaches to WBP that pragmatic subjectivism rules out. We have already explained why the standard economic approach, which takes preference satisfaction (most often understood in terms of revealed preference) to be the appropriate metric of well-being, is incompatible with pragmatic subjectivism. Pragmatic subjectivism also rules out Benthamite strains of happiness policy, which urge governments to base policy on maximizing aggregate happiness, understood in hedonistic terms. Even if we grant the utilitarianism, the insistence on a purely hedonistic metric of well-being is inconsistent with pragmatic subjectivism, because many if not most people aren't hedonists about well-being. They ultimately value things other than just pleasure for themselves, so this approach imposes an alien standard of well-being on many of its ostensible beneficiaries. This is arguably paternalistic, and at any rate incompatible with the position defended here.

This may seem to leave little room for WBP, but it does not, largely because certain metrics command widespread support as important aspects or indicators of well-being. Hedonism may be a minority view, but it survives for a reason: everyone cares, perhaps deeply, about the hedonic quality of their lives, even if it isn't the only thing they care about. (See how much you'd have to pay to get even New Yorkers to take an everlasting nausea pill.) People also agree on the importance of health, and indeed governments have long been conducting WBP in the guise of public health programs. This is perfectly acceptable, since no one is likely to complain about the government keeping malaria out of their neighborhood.

Could certain metrics serve as "headline" indicators of well-being, playing a role in policy similar to GDP (which they would presumably complement, rather than supplant)? We suggest that subjective well-being (SWB) measures, broadly conceived, may be well-suited to play this role: tracking goods that are overwhelmingly believed to be central to well-being, even if not sufficient for it. SWB is commonly understood to have roughly two components: a *life evaluation* component such as life satisfaction that tracks people's judgments about their lives, and an *affect* component tracking people's feelings or emotions. The life evaluation aspect of SWB usually involves overall life satisfaction or, less frequently, domain satisfaction attitudes concerning specific domains of people's lives, like work, family, or health. It is easy to see how domain satisfaction is relevant to assessing how people's lives are going with respect to their values, because the domains standardly assessed tend to correspond to important values for most people.[30]

[29] See also Haybron and Alexandrova forthcoming.
[30] See Tiberius and Plakias 2010 for a discussion.

Moreover, life satisfaction reports are strongly correlated with domain satisfaction, which makes life evaluations relevant at least as indirect indicators of how we are doing with respect to our values (Schimmack, Diener et al. 2002, Schimmack and Oishi 2005). Intuitively, it is plausible that people tend, at least when reflective, to evaluate their lives in terms of their values. If life evaluation measures reliably tracked how well people's lives are going for them relative to their values, they might actually serve as comprehensive metrics of well-being.

But while they might usefully provide such information, life evaluation measures have significant limitations. As noted earlier, they may not be able to distinguish welfare values from other values, thus contradicting the well-being judgments of those who see themselves as fittingly sacrificing their well-being. A more serious concern is that life evaluations need either to assess global judgments about agents' lives or aggregate local judgments that they make about features of their lives. In either case, important information is likely to be obscured or lost, for instance because global life evaluations are both difficult to make and typically involve incommensurable values that cannot be nonarbitrarily summed, whereas local judgments are liable to miss important values, and themselves need to be summed in some way that may or may not fit the agent's perspective. These difficulties are explained in much greater detail elsewhere.[31] It is possible that improved life evaluation instruments can reduce these difficulties; a "D-index" for instance, could assess the importance and severity of people's chief dissatisfactions with their lives, perhaps avoiding the information loss that adaptation processes often incur for global life satisfaction reports (which, e.g., may suggest no loss in well-being for dialysis patients, who report normal life satisfaction yet have extremely strong preferences for improved kidney function). Still, no set of life evaluation instruments can wholly overcome the difficulties. At any rate, here we simply assert that life evaluation measures are bound to offer highly imperfect measures of how people's lives are going for them relative to their values.

The affect component of SWB is very different, and does not enjoy the same formal connection with individuals' values. Conceivably, some people might not value positive affect, or relative freedom from negative affect, in which case affect measures won't (directly) assess well-being as they see things. But, as we recently noted, probably no one is really like that, and in practice even Aristotelians, Stoics, and other opponents of "smiley-face" politics care a great deal about the affective quality of their lives. Depression is almost universally viewed in strongly negative terms, for instance. Most people want very much to be happy, and lead pleasant lives, to the extent that happiness may typically be regarded as a decent proxy for well-being: if someone is happy, she is likely doing well; if unhappy, badly. Accordingly, it makes sense for the leading well-being indicators in the literature to include measures of positive versus negative affect. Insofar as they are reliable, such measures provide important information about how people are doing. We would further distinguish here between emotional well-being—"happiness"—and pleasure; to see the difference, consider the difference between being depressed and being in pain. Possibly, unemployed persons are less happy than the employed—having less positive emotional conditions—but have more pleasant lives because they get to watch TV instead of dealing with the boss. We will not press the distinction here, however, but see both types of affect indicator as important.

Should WBP employ measures beyond SWB? We see no reason why it should not, and every reason for it to take seriously the important values held by significant portions of the population. Health, presumably, is an existing aspect of WBP that governments should continue to

[31] Haybron 2005, 2007b, 2008, 2011.

concern themselves with. (Note that even if health matters solely to the extent that it promotes SWB, the latter is far too crude an instrument to adequately assess health concerns.)

Another obvious candidate is "eudaimonic" measures, which tend to focus more on ideals of personal development and self-realization, often taking Aristotle as their model (perhaps with dubious historical accuracy). Such measures are increasingly popular in the literature, and while more controversial than SWB metrics may yet comport with the values of a majority in many places.[32] Confronted with Plato's example of a man who leads a pleasant life doing nothing but scratching an itch, very many people share the feeling that there's something impoverished about such a life. And even those unwilling to assert such a value judgment about another person might well apply such standards to themselves. Possibly, even measures of personal development, meaning, autonomy and the like track widely enough shared values to warrant a place among the headline indicators of well-being. But if not, they probably deserve at least a role on a "dash-board" of diverse well-being indicators that policymakers and citizens can draw on, as needed, to inform their deliberations about how to proceed.[33]

It is important to recognize that well-being measures can be put to many different uses in policy, some requiring more precision and reliability than others. In some cases, they need only to identify some of the variables that tend to have large impacts on well-being, like trust or social capital. Even if this information does not inform policymaking in any quantifiable way, it can alert policymakers to factors that must be taken into account. You don't need to know exactly how much a doubling of traffic in a residential neighborhood would reduce subjective well-being to know that the impact would likely be significant, and that this gives you good reason to avoid it if you can. And that reason will go into the balance along with the other factors real-world policymakers must consider, like the vocal business constituency demanding that traffic be increased, or the nearby school that needs safe streets, or, yes, the cost-benefit analysis suggesting that increasing traffic flows might be a good idea. The numbers are helpful but not the end of the story, and sometimes it is enough to apply a "happiness lens" to policy without performing an exacting net-happiness analysis.[34] Good politics, and rational policymaking, has probably never been done by spreadsheet alone.

6.3 Policy examples

We conclude with a couple of examples to illustrate some forms that WBP as we envision it might take, focusing on the case of happiness. First, consider one widely cited finding that women's happiness in the United States and other countries has declined in recent decades, even as women's lives seem in crucial respects to have gotten better.[35] Suppose the research is correct, and that women have indeed gotten less happy while gaining greater equality and other goods. Benthamites might take this to show that women are now worse off. Others, however, would disagree, taking the happiness data to reveal only part of the story; perhaps losses there have been outweighed by gains elsewhere. Policymakers are in no position to resolve this dispute, though in shaping WBP they will at least want to consider what women themselves care about, and how the changes in their lives relate to their values. In so doing they may well find—indeed they certainly will find, for many women—that they value things for themselves other than happiness;

[32] For an anthology that provides an overview of available eudaimonic measures see Waterman forthcoming.
[33] On the dashboard approach, see Forgeard, Jayawickreme, et al. 2011, Stiglitz, Sen, et al. 2009, Michalos, Sharpe, et al. 2010.
[34] Thin 2012.
[35] Stevenson and Wolfers 2009.

the happiness data give policymakers an incomplete picture of well-being for those women. The question is whether different policy arrangements would better advance women's well-being, as they see it. We take it to be obvious that looking only at economic indicators would leave policymakers with an impoverished information base; other well-being indicators must also come into play.

Not least of these are the happiness indicators themselves: it is obtuse to suggest that, when a society makes women's lives less pleasant or less fulfilling, this information should be ignored out of hand in policy deliberation. It is at least potentially relevant, and probably quite important. We cannot fathom what objection there could possibly be to bringing such information into the policy arena. And, quite possibly, doing something about it: perhaps we shall want to make changes in policies regarding family leave, child care, work hours, etc. to lessen the burdens on women.

Another case: suppose a city planning commission is deliberating about how to develop a residential area. Looking to the research, they learn (let us suppose) that traffic flows have surprisingly powerful effects on people's interactions with their neighbors; in high-traffic areas neighbors are largely cut off from each other, whereas similar low-traffic neighborhoods fosters a much stronger sense of community, with a far higher density of social networks and friendships among neighbors. Other research strongly suggests that this will have a major positive impact on well-being, since people are known to strongly value community, friendship and happiness, and the denser social interactions anticipated from a low-traffic zoning tend to promote all of those values. (And, let us suppose, such zoning has been found not to cancel those benefits by frustrating happiness or other values elsewhere, for instance by making driving less convenient.) Looking further, they discover that trees, green spaces, and walkable neighborhoods also pay substantial happiness and health dividends. Mixed-use residential and commercial districts within walking distance, as well as interconnected streets instead of cul-de-sacs, also tend to promote social capital and happiness.

Accordingly, the planners encourage development with all these features, on the grounds that such a community would better advance well-being as its residents see it. Well-being would be promoted because people who value happiness would likely be happier in such a community, and it is doubtful that their other values would be compromised sufficiently to make that a poor bargain. This is one form well-being policy can take, and it is difficult to see what one might object to. Note that this example did not have policymakers striving to maximize some measure of happiness, well-being or whatever. They need not have attempted to directly measure well-being in their municipality at all, as it might suffice simply to consider the general evidence about the effects of certain variables on happiness.

Importantly, the planners do not base their decision solely on revealed preference data, or on contingent valuation surveys, which may well give the wrong impression: many of the benefits of such an urban design may be opaque to buyers, and fail to be reflected in either market prices or willingness to pay assessments. People know that less traffic in their neighborhood is better, but perhaps they grossly underestimate how much happier they'd be in the low-traffic residence, distorting market prices and causing traditional cost-benefit analyses to get the benefits wrong. Similarly for the effects of trees, walkability, and more subtle effects of good urban design. In some cases, like cul-de-sacs, people might completely get things wrong, thinking them a benefit when they actually make life worse. People buy homes as rank amateurs on the well-being effects of urban architecture, with the result that their choices may often diverge substantially from their values. Likewise for many other choices.

For policy to disregard obvious facts about people's values, focusing only on their choice behavior in assessing their interests, is not obviously for it to treat people with respect. Good WBP, informed by pragmatic subjectivism, promises a more respectful approach to citizens, and a better fit between people's values and their lives.

We are not sure how many commentators genuinely believe that policymakers must wholly disregard well-being, or for that matter happiness, information when making decisions. We certainly doubt many actual policymakers, or elected officials at any rate, hew to such an extreme position in practice.[37] More likely, the basic legitimacy of WBP will generally be granted, skeptics tending rather to relegate it to the margins, perhaps denying it any systematic role in governance. For instance, WBP might be dismissed as a minor endeavor on the grounds that it has no bearing on constitutional fundamentals, or basic principles of social justice.[38] Such advice may indeed be helpful on those occasions when policymakers are called upon to write constitutions, or are chiefly concerned to ensure that basic social institutions and arrangements are just. But we suspect that most policy deliberation centers on less exalted tasks.

Less exalted, perhaps, but not exactly unimportant: protecting and promoting the public health and weal, for instance. Fostering conditions in which citizens lead more, rather than less, fulfilling and enjoyable lives. Making the most efficient use of resources given environmental constraints: it is remarkable that happiness seems not to have increased since 1950 in the United States despite massive increases in wealth and consumption, with potentially grave environmental consequences. Whatever benefits we might have gained beyond happiness, it is not unreasonable to wonder whether we are getting our money's worth. Finding more efficient ways to promote human well-being may indeed be one of the chief tasks of governments in the next century. These are not, we take it, trivial concerns.

7. Conclusion

We have argued that public policy may aim to promote well-being directly, as one among other policy goals, when what is promoted is "well-being as people see it." Well-being policy grounded in *pragmatic subjectivism* is person-respecting and compatible with liberal political principles. Further, WBP driven by pragmatic subjectivism is better placed than policy based on preference satisfaction theory to promote what really matters to people. It also does better than policy targeted solely at promoting resources or freedoms in certain cases.

We have also argued that subjective well-being-type indicators can be used to inform WBP, but not without some attention to how these indicators relate to people's values. Attention to values should cause those interested in WBP to pay attention to other measures such as eudaimonic and health measures, given that many people value those goods as well.

We hope to have made a supportive case for policymakers who are looking for ways to measure success beyond GDP and other traditional economic metrics, but we hope also to have shown that the right way to do this is going to be complicated. Given the fragmented nature of subjectivity and valuing, well-being policy will need to rely on a diverse set of indicators of what people value. There will be no straightforward formula for determining personal welfare values; policymakers will have to use their best judgment. And governments will probably not want to

[37] We allow that there may be some policy contexts in which WBP is inappropriate. For instance, if happiness metrics pose serious risks of abuse, say by making it easier for policymakers to avoid dealing with extreme poverty in some region, a government might even want to forbid their use. We see no reason at all to think that will hold as a general point.

[38] See, e.g., Nussbaum 2008.

cut things too finely in this domain, given the obstacles to precision: where possible, policy should focus broadly on things people clearly value—health, happiness, friendship, employment—with no pretense at being able to measure overall costs and benefits to people, save (at best) in very crude terms. This might be disappointing to those who thought a simple happiness index could provide a single criterion for assessing policies. But on reflection it should not be surprising that the matter of the human good and how to procure it is, well, complicated.

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