

SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE WELL-BEING IN RELATION TO ECONOMIC INPUTS: PUZZLES AND RESPONSES

Des Gasper¹

19 January 2005

A prefinal version of a paper which appeared in 2005 in *Review of Social Economy*, LXIII (2), pp. 177-206. An earlier version was Working Paper 09, ESRC Research Centre on Well-Being in Developing Countries, University of Bath, 2004: <http://www.welldev.org.uk/research/workingpaperpdf/wed09.pdf>

Introduction

I want to address the systematic and large discrepancies between direct well-being measures and the measures that economists largely concentrate on; for example the discrepancies between subjective well-being and income. I will primarily consider the significance and implications of such discrepancies and the range of possible responses. Amongst such responses, much economics has continued to focus overwhelmingly on income and expenditure, and I will consider some ways that it has managed to do so. To answer why economics has followed that questionable route requires another study.

In Section 1 we look at the allocation of attention across the various measures. Section 2 explores the issue of discrepancy between income measures and well-being measures, with special reference to subjective well-being (SWB). Section 3 rejects claims that income is satisfactorily correlated with well-being measures; the claims seem to misread the socio-economic significance of the many regression exercises that find weak even if statistically significant linkages, especially between income and SWB. Section 4 further clears the way, by deepening the conceptualization of well-being. Section 5 is then able to investigate a series of responses to the discrepancies, including some evasions or arguments that SWB is of little importance and that choice is what matters – having a choice, having more choice, getting one's choice – or else simply being active.

The terms SWB and, its partner, 'objective well-being' (OWB) have to be used with care. They refer here not to methods of measurement (self-report or non self-report), but to what is measured: whether feelings or non-feelings. The two labels are not perfect—for example, the concept of OWB is not value-free but depends on what aspects of being are considered as of value, while much research in recent decades indicates that SWB can

¹ Institute of Social Studies, The Hague – gasper@iss.nl. I express my thanks to Flavio Comim, Ian Gough, Irene van Staveren, and a journal referee for their very helpful comments.

be reliably, satisfactorily measured (e.g. Kahneman et al. 1999)—but they are well-established and hence used here.

1. Fields of attention in the study of well-being

Figure 1 presents a narrative sequence, from bottom to top: from resources through choices and activities to felt satisfaction and value fulfillment. The narrative is a proposed, incomplete, descriptive and explanatory framework; it does not imply that the level or levels with normative priority must be the final one or ones. It elaborates the chain of categories in Sen's capability approach (e.g. Sen 1984, 1985), which in turn elaborated the standard chain in micro-economics. The table divides the sequence into three domains: monetized inputs, intermediate events and conditions, and psychic outcomes. It tries in this way to compare the areas of attention in diverse disciplinary literatures.

Besides the monetizable inputs to life, economists traditionally referred to elements from domain III in the table, the presumed psychic outputs, notably as expressed in a mental currency of 'utility'. However while they study inputs empirically, they have imputed the psychic outputs, from acquisitions and choices.

Following Sen amongst others, the table highlights an intermediate domain concerning what happens between acquisition of goods and psychic outputs: how are goods actually used, what characteristics do they provide, what capacities and effective opportunities do they permit, and what behaviours and functionings arise. This territory was already occupied by psychology, anthropology and other disciplines. Sen's category of functionings, what people do and are, sometimes extends to cover mental functionings too, such as being happy or in pain. Figure 1's classification limits it to non-feelings types of behaviour and achievement, such as aspects of physical health, learning, mobility, social participation and so on. We can call this the level of objective well-being, subject to the earlier warning on terms.

The inputs domain specified in the table is limited to spheres of life covered by economics, as in national income measures and the 'money-metric' focus of economists' conventional studies of wealth and poverty. It does not measure achieved well-being in terms of actual functioning or satisfaction. Nor does it cover amongst inputs to well-being other types of interpersonal relations, for example.

Fig. 1: Alternative levels of focus in studies of well-being (Adapted from: Gasper 2004a)

PUTATIVE NARRATIVE SEQUENCE (from bottom to top)	WHO HAS STUDIED THE CATEGORY?
<i>III. FULFILLMENT / SATISFACTION INFORMATION</i>	
HUMAN FULFILLMENT as value fulfillment	Studied by humanistic psychologists and philosophers
‘Utility’ – as HAPPINESS &/OR SATISFACTION (this is, clearly, not a unitary category; different aspects can be distinguished)	Traditionally not measured by economics (instead presumed unitary and imputed via long chains of assumptions). Studied empirically in psychology, especially in SWB research, and by others.
‘Utility’ – as DESIRE FULFILLMENT	Imputed from choice, in much economics; if (choice → desire fulfillment) is presumed. Studied directly by some other scientists.
<i>II. NON-FULFILLMENT NON-MONEY-METRIC INFORMATION</i>	
FUNCTIONINGS (other than satisfaction)	Little studied by economics (health economics is one exception). Studied by functional specialisms, sociology, social statistics and psychology. in work on social indicators and objective quality of life.
CAPABILITY or POSITIVE FREEDOM (the range of valued lives which a person could attain)	Hard to measure; usually functionings are the proxy. But see e.g. medical measures of (dis)ability.
CAPABILITIES (people’s skills and capacities); and other characteristics of people	Measured by functional specialisms; see e.g. various psychological and health indicators.
CHARACTERISTICS OF GOODS, which are acquired through consumption.	Not much researched by economics, except e.g. in some basic needs work. Investigated by functional specialisms, such as in nutrition, health, education, transport, design, and in psychology.
CONSUMPTION proper – viz., actual <i>use</i> of purchases / acquisitions.	Not much researched by economics, except e.g. in some basic needs work. Left to psychology, anthropology, medicine, cultural studies, etc.
<i>I. INFORMATION ON INPUTS; MONEY-METRIC FOCUS</i>	
PURCHASES and other acquisitions	More researched by marketing, psychology, anthropology, sociology; less intensively by economics.
‘Utility’ as CHOICE, which is assumed to reflect preference, and (as the default case) is weighted according to purchasing power.	These assumptions have been normal in economics; including often ‘revealed preference’ as an <i>axiom</i> .
INCOME AND RESOURCES / POWER TO ACQUIRE GOODS / COMMODITIES	Researched by economics; not the power to acquire many other basic goods: political freedom, dignity, rewarding personal relations, satisfying meanings, ..

So, economics has concentrated on domain I, as seen in the money-metric approach to poverty and wealth, and imputed conclusions about use-values in domains II and III. The assumption is commonly made that use-values stand in stable, even constant, ratios to expenditure or purchasing power: for ‘the standard way of operationalizing well-being in empirical work [in economics remains as] a simple sum of expenditures on

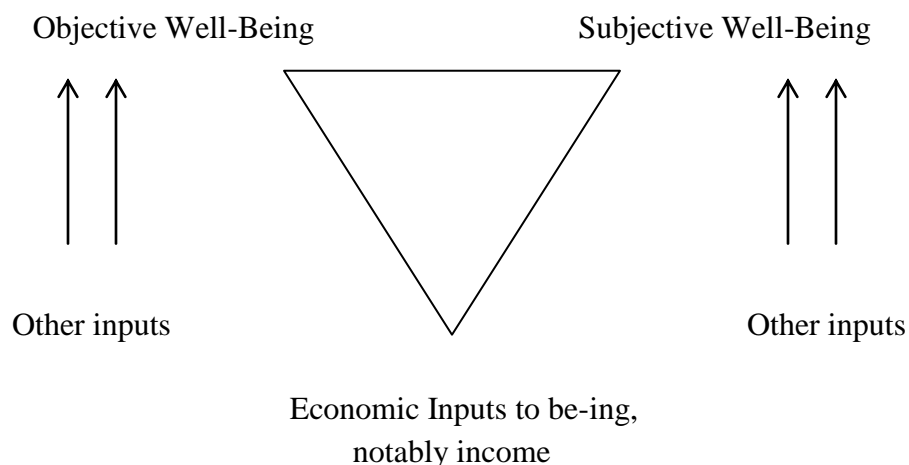
consumption goods’, or in terms of income (Kanbur 2003: 3). ‘Thus, for example, a *ceteris paribus* increase in alcohol expenditure would be counted as an increase in well-being despite any increase in domestic violence that it might lead to’ (ibid.). The conclusions about well-being which arise from direct investigations of domains II and III often diverge very significantly from those obtained by looking at income or expenditure.

2. The puzzles of SWB-OWB-income discrepancies

Much research suggests that the domain of inputs which economics has studied in intense detail is weakly connected to the domain of ends, whether the OWB sphere of valued functionings or the SWB domain of satisfaction and felt fulfillment. (Fulfillment can be “felt”, but also “objective” in the sense of the realization of valued potentials.) Sometimes SWB and OWB appear not strongly connected to each other either. Clearly each has partly different determinants, and both partly or even largely depend on factors other than the inputs on which economists have focused. SWB can for example be affected by perceptions and beliefs and by the well-being of other people.

Figure 2a sketches the overall problematique. Unlike in Figure 1’s extension of the traditional micro-economics framework, it gives OWB the same status and attention as SWB, and highlights not only economic inputs. In addition, arrows are not shown along the sides of the triangle, from economic inputs to the other two and from OWB to SWB, even though such linkages will often be found. For whether economic inputs always promote OWB and SWB, and whether OWB always promotes SWB, are precisely the matters in question.

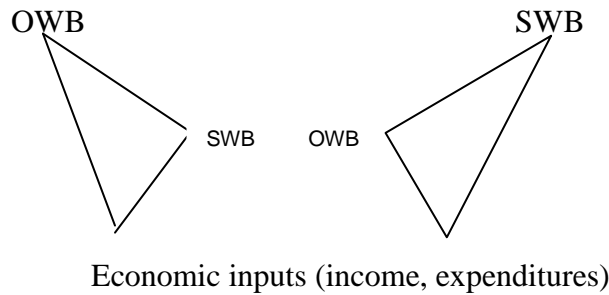
Figure 2a: The puzzle triangle



Our interest is thus in the relations between the three families of variables at the three corners of Figure 2a’s ‘puzzle triangle’. Particular theories of the relationships can be

reflected by particular types of triangle. The triangle on the left in Figure 2b presents SWB as largely a step on the road towards the more important category of OWB. The triangle on the right presents the opposite, OWB as a step towards the more important category of SWB. We will examine such stances in Section 5.

Figure 2b: Diverse interpretations of the puzzle triangle



Let us consider the possible relationships between subjective well-being and income per person. Figure 3 indicates possible scenarios for how SWB can change as income changes. We will read the table from left to right, looking at how SWB could change as per capita income moves from low to medium to high. (We take the standard international classification of countries into low-, medium-, and high- per capita income, and adopt a similar, though impressionistic, classification for SWB levels.)

Figure 3: Scenarios of how SWB could vary with income		INCOME		
		LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING	HIGH	7	4	[1]
	MEDIUM	8	[5]	2
	LOW	[9]	6	3

Twenty seven scenarios of what happens to SWB as income(s) move(s) from low through medium to high are possible within even this very simple formulation. If we consider plausible only those scenarios with no double-jumps in SWB level as income levels change, nineteen scenarios remain. Three deserve special attention. Two are often declared to be true, the scenarios of steady improvement and of steady decline; while a third better fits most of the evidence.

The first of the three scenarios is the Ladder of Progress, indicated in the table by square brackets. It proceeds across the cells 9→5→1. This pathway has been widely expected, for example by the Material Well-Being school of economics of Marshall,

Pigou and their myriad followers (Cooter and Rappaport 1984). Ladder of Progress remains the economics orthodoxy. In his plenary address to the World Bank's 2002 Annual Bank Conference for Development Economics held in Oslo, the Bank's Chief Economist, Nicholas Stern, declared that while development is multi-dimensional, income is the primary dimension. Rising incomes have been expected to deliver most good things, directly or indirectly. One might hazard that if income is not primary then neither will economists be so. The second scenario is the reverse, a Tunnel of Regress as incomes rise: $7 \rightarrow 5 \rightarrow 3$, as alleged by some from Post- and Anti-Development schools of thought. It is shown in bold in the table.

The third scenario embodies the so-called Easterlin Paradox: that SWB stops rising beyond middle income levels, as shown by the shaded cells $9 \rightarrow 5 \rightarrow 2$. It provides a crude summary of what has been observed both cross-nationally and intra-nationally (e.g. in Easterlin ed. 2002). Data on SWB shows little and sometimes no increase beyond middle-income level, as we track countries across time. In cross-country comparisons, the 1990 World Values Survey 'shows that subjective well-being increases with increases in GNP per capita, but then there is a marked levelling-off: beyond the level of \$6,000 (in 1991 dollars) there is virtually no relationship between the two' (Datta 2001: 136). Sub-scenario $5 \rightarrow 2$ is the Hedonic Treadmill (or Squirrel Cage): constant 'advance' in income terms that gets one nowhere in satisfaction terms.

For the USA, Jerome Segal (1998a) provides powerful argumentation for how the ratio of needs fulfillment to income substantially declined from the 1950s/60s to 1990s, consistent with sub-scenarios $5 \rightarrow 2$, $1 \rightarrow 2$, and even $4 \rightarrow 2$. Reported SWB did not increase and sometimes declined despite substantial rises in average purchasing power. The mechanisms he adduces fit a model in which rising or steady income is associated with declining OWB, which in turn produces declining SWB. The mechanisms include increased needs for expenditure in order simply to maintain one's level of physical security, to commute to work, to educate one's children to the same standards as before, to cope with stress, and to pay one's divorce lawyer.

Other scenarios are found in other cases. Jodha (1989) found considerable rises in self-reported (and therefore, I presume, felt) well-being in some Indian villages despite trustworthy official figures of stagnant or declining money-equivalent incomes (so this is a case of $9 \rightarrow 8$). Conversely, Janakarajan & Seabright (1999) in a study in Tamil Nadu (India) found a $9 \rightarrow 6$ scenario of stagnant SWB as incomes rose. Nor did they find good correlations between various other conventional 'objective' welfare indicators and the feelings about the changes.

So we encounter serious SWB-OWB and OWB-income discrepancies, not only SWB-income discrepancies. SWB-OWB discrepancies have been recorded and analysed by social scientists and philosophers such as Sen, Elster and Sunstein, and extensively in psychology by Argyle, Diener, and many others. Sen brought them emphatically to attention in welfare economics with the case of women in India who had considerably

worse objective health status than comparable men, yet who declared themselves more subjectively content with their situation than did the men for their situation (Sen 1985). SWB is an unreliable proxy for the content of a person's life, due to 'framing effects' (feelings depend on what one is used to / expects / perceives) and 'adaptive preference' (preferences often adjust to rationalize what one has). However, some other consistent linkages do appear: certain OWB factors or other specifiable functionings contribute both consistently and substantially to SWB – for example, good family life, friendship, recreation, health and religious belief, more than do market sources (Frey & Stutzer 2002; Lane 2000). Amongst the market sources, experiences during work time or unemployment can be more determinant for satisfaction than is the person's level of income or expenditure (Ackerman et al. 1997; Easterlin 2002). 'Expenditure' is a more relevant descriptor here than 'consumption', since economists rarely investigate the actual use (and non-use) of purchases.

The relationships between measures of OWB and of income are treated in a now huge literature, especially from quality-of-life and social indicators research. (See also the annex in Kuklys & Robeyns 2004 that surveys work on these relationships that has used the capability approach.) Marked disparities exist in both income-rich and income-poor countries (UNDP 2001; Baulch & Masset 2003). Some major indicators of objective well-being show little or no improvement beyond middle-income level. People cannot become literate twice or, at present, live ever longer. And in some respects there can be deterioration: mobility can decline in megalopoli, and stress levels, suicide and mental illness levels appear often to grow. Input levels are not reliable proxies for describing or valuing the contents of a life. The input-output relationships vary greatly, according to users' skills and needs and according to the conditions in the particular time and place.

The literatures which reveal discrepancies draw from each of the following: cross-country data, where inter-country differences of culture and temperament have to be allowed for (in one recent study Nigerians top the list for declared subjective well-being); single-country time-series data; single-locality time-series data, such as in the cases reported by Jodha, Janakarajan and Seabright; and cross-individual intra-country data, as in the case reported by Sen. That on the whole the rich in each country are reportedly clearly happier than the poor, even if not dramatically and uniformly so, yet rich countries are little or no happier than middle-income ones, together suggests that richer people enjoy their relative position in their country, and also that felt satisfaction is relative to the extent of desires and recurrently undermined as ever new desires emerge.

The purposes of this paper do not require, nor do its constraints allow, fuller documentation of the various discrepancies and their exact extent and locations. These are extensively presented by Argyle, Ekins & Max-Neef, Frey & Stutzer, Kahneman & Diener, Lane, Robeyns, Ryan & Deci, Sen, Veenhoven, and the UNDP Human Development Reports, amongst others. Sufficient here has been to note main varieties and their commonplace rather than curiosity status. Before examining intellectual

responses to the discrepancies, in Section 5, we need to further clarify what sort of ‘discrepancies’ they are and what people mean by ‘well-being’. First, Section 3 argues that even the presence of a general correlation between broad categories could not justify preoccupation with only one subset of them, income and expenditure. We must take seriously the huge divergences in some cases, and consider slope coefficients not only correlation coefficients. Section 4 then tries to clarify the complex and confused language of well-being. Just as economists have focused on activity levels, specifically on flows of income and expenditure, more than on stocks of substantive (non-monetary) values, so their operational conception of well-being may, behind utility language, have been closer to an activist, productivist philosophy of perpetual striving and demonstrative acquisition than to one of balanced fulfillment.

3. The issues of scale and slope in well-being/income comparisons

Whereas SWB measures can rise or fall, and are perhaps subject to an upper bound, economists’ main measure of well-being increases by factors of up to 200,000% or more. Purchasing power per individual in a country like India might range between say \$200 p.a. and \$400,000 p.a., i.e. by factors of up to 2000, indeed more. Even an income increase of ‘just’ 200 times to \$40,000 p.a. looks fiercely impressive in percentage terms: 19,900 %. It looks less impressive if we use a logarithmic scale: $\log 40,000 / \log 200 = 4.6 / 2.3 = 2$, a mere doubling. But what would be the social science significance of using a logarithmic scale? Does it not convey that extra income gradually becomes mightily trivial?

Income per capita might in principle increase forever. Some authors, including proponents of the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare, suggest to the contrary that there is a threshold beyond which levels of production are or will be no longer sustainable. But suppose they were wrong, thanks to ever new technological wizardry. Contrast then a supposed measure or rather proxy for well-being, which is infinite in range: income per capita; and the variable(s) for which it is being used as a proxy, human well-being, whether objective well-being or subjective well-being, which is/are finite in range and not merely in some notional remote future but already visibly or foreseeably so. This is manifest when we consider the data on SWB (Frey & Stutzer 2002), and is plausible also for OWB if we, correctly, interpret it not as the level of commodity inputs to WB but in terms of outputs like life-years, health-quality-adjusted life years, or happiness-quality-adjusted life years (Veenhoven’s measure).

Very many economists and politicians still insist, or presume, that all other indicators are sufficiently well reflected by per capita GDP / national income. For Tony Blair, celebrating his political creed before the U.S. Congress after the occupation of Iraq in 2003, the self-congratulatory vision of threefold increase of the standard of living in Britain and America since World War Two relied on the equation of standard of living to

per capita national income. ('.. in the last 50 years countries like yours and mine have trebled their growth and standard of living', Blair 2003.)

For many economists the rationale appears to be that we can find a line with a fairly 'good fit' whenever we plot performance in terms of GDP per capita against performance in terms of some other indicator. The fit is often in reality not good enough, when socio-economic significance is the criterion. We find enormously important outlier cases: low-income countries with strong human development achievements, and middle and high-income countries with deplorable human development shortcomings (see e.g. Anand & Sen 2000). The meaning of good fit must depend on the meanings associated with the variables concerned. McGillivray (2003) notes that five years of life is the standard deviation when GDP per capita is plotted against life expectancy. Given the existential meaning of five years of life one cannot call this a good fit (cf. McCloskey 1986; McCloskey & Zilliak 1996; Zilliak & McCloskey 2004).

Busy focusing on correlation coefficients, we can also fail to look at slopes and the fact that we move from a phase of relatively rapid gains to a phase of small, tiny or even zero gains – and in some cases retrogression. Suppose that we have perfect fit when we plot GDP per capita against SWB. Can we then say that the GDP curve is a perfect predictor of the level of SWB, so that we have no need to use SWB indicators? Consider the following cases, which are little or no different from most of the data: a) the SWB curve is flat after point P which has already been attained in some cases; b) it is asymptotic to a ceiling to which some cases are already very close; c) it increases at only a negligible rate. How satisfied can we be with an indicator which moves up by say 100% or more when important direct measures of well-being, such as life expectancy, move up by say 3-4% ? In some cases the indicator moves up by 1000%, yet the direct measures of SWB appear nearly untouched. The main finding in such cases would be not that some function of GDP per capita perfectly predicts SWB but instead that GDP per capita has little or no impact on SWB. The same point applies for many OWB indicators.

To sum up: expectations have not been met for the impact of income and consumption on SWB and on many OWB dimensions. We saw that this is not because there are no factors with substantial impact. Intra-country cross-sectional comparisons indicate some other more clearly influential determinants of SWB.

4. Concepts of well-being

We have so far used the term 'well-being' in a commonsensical way, roughly distinguishing between 'subjective' aspects (feelings) and 'objective' aspects (valued functionings, typically identified by an authoritative other, but who arguably might be the person herself in calm, reflective and well-informed mode). We need to extend the range of interpretations of well-being, as prelude to understanding how people may perceive and respond to, or ignore, the issue of discrepancies between different measures.

The concept of well-being indicates an evaluation of a person's situation, or, more fittingly, an evaluation which is focused on the quality of the person's 'being'. Well-being is thus a vague concept that can span various aspects of life and is subject to normative debate, rather than a sharply and consensually defined single thing. Possibly 'well-living' and 'life going well' would be better labels -- more active and indicating that there are diverse relevant aspects so that the label is an umbrella for a variety of matters.

Much utilitarian philosophy and utilitarian-influenced economics approached well-being as a single entity or a set of commensurables: 'utility', a sort of mental money. Well-being was reduced to well-feeling, typically seen as pleasure; well-feeling was assumed to be one-dimensional; and a component of it ('welfare', sometimes called 'material welfare') was assumed to be separable, derived from economic goods and services, and of central importance. So income became treated as the key measure of well-being in conventional 'welfare economics' and economic policy, including in much development economics. Even the capability approach may in practical work, such as in specifying the Human Development Index (HDI), adopt a position that 'adjusted real GDP per capita...should serve as a proxy for the material aspects of welfare' (Kuklys & Robeyns 2004: 2). But we should remember that the HDI uses not GDP per capita but a transformation thereof that gives progressively much less weight to marginal income beyond average global per capita income; and claims only that this reflects the 'command over resources needed for a decent living' (HDR 1990: 12), not the actual content of living.

In terms of the following list of conceptions of well-being, economics has largely employed the first four. It may start by talking of personal satisfaction but usually ends in practice with monetary income, wealth and expenditure.

(1) Well-being as pleasure or satisfaction. In this conception well-being means SWB. It has two variants: (1a) WB as unitary, a utilitarian conception that is used rhetorically in economic discourse; and (1b) a plural conception that is empirically investigated in SWB research in medicine, sociology and psychology, which distinguish at least positive affect, negative affect, and contentment/life satisfaction, as clearly separate non-substitutable phenomena. Economics has had little connection to this research. The normative weight of SWB is admittedly limited by the range of factors that mould feelings, and by the presence of perverse pleasures, such as pleasure in others' suffering, or masochism; but probably greater criticisms can be made of monetary measures of income and consumption.

(2) Well-being as preference fulfillment. This is the conception of 'utility' which emerged amongst economic theorists in the mid-20th century. It faces some of the same normative objections as the first conception. They can be reduced but not eliminated by reference to a variant that concerns fulfillment of informed preferences or, better, informed and well reasoned preferences. Such variants are hard to measure but still helpful (Brandt 1979).

(3) *Well-being as free choice*. Choices might be simply asserted to fulfil preferences, as in the doctrine of ‘revealed preference’, but that reduces to a questionable operationalization of the preference fulfillment conception. Given the weakness of the assumption that choices automatically fulfil preferences, a focus on choice reduces in reality to a libertarian stance that free choice is what really matters.

(4) *Well-being as opulence*. Material wealth is here assumed to be the key to choice, preference fulfillment and/or satisfaction. While strictly speaking just a proxy for those other conceptions, in practice opulence has often displaced them, as seen in the widespread preoccupation with per capita national income.

The second, third and fourth conceptions are those active in economics practice, while the first, of favourable mental states, remains in the background providing (via the ‘utility’ language shared by all four) a set of everyday associations which politicians and others employ, even though economics theory and measures have no serious connection to it. The fifth and sixth conceptions are also outside conventional economics practice: they are from work on OWB and from Sen’s complex hybrid, the capability approach.

(5) *Well-being as the attainment of certain values which can be specified independently of the individual concerned* (e.g. good health, physical and mental). There are many such ‘objective list’ (Parfit 1984) or ‘substantive good’ (Scanlon 1993) theories, usually with great overlaps, and a huge body of quality-of-life research on these various aspects or interpretations of OWB. Lists are set by direct stipulation (e.g. by religions or intuition), by theorized derivation and philosophical argumentation (e.g. Doyal & Gough 1991), by political deliberation and negotiation, or some mix thereof.

(6) *Well-being (or ‘advantage’) as possession of favourable capability*, a favourable range of opportunities to achieve valued functioning-sets. This conception comes from Sen’s capability approach. Sen appears ambivalent over making capability, potential, the sole element of well-being, without reference to achievement as well; and relatedly, over calling what capability provides ‘well-being’ or instead ‘advantage’. To say that capability provides advantage, and that valued functionings provide well-being, could fit better with the normal associations of the term ‘well-being’, where ‘being’ is about what you are rather than about what you could be.

Who judges advantage? In Sen’s own formulation it is the agent herself, but in terms not of whim or unconsidered habit but of reasoned values or at least ‘reasons to value’. His conception may thus lie in an SWB-OWB condominium. Not all users of his capability language are equally fastidious.

Sen draws out further dimensions of plurality in the concept of well-being, which could be applied to the earlier conceptions too. He thus adds a family of categories, not a singular conception of well-being (Sen 1995).

- ‘Well-Being Achievement’ matches OWB but can also refer to achieved pleasure (SWB) or achieved preference fulfillment or achieved wealth, if we work with those conceptions of well-being.

- ‘Well-Being Freedom’ refers to the range of attainable valued lives for the agent: ‘capability’ in the sense just used.

Sen then brings in a new dimension with his term ‘agency’, which recognises that our values concern not only (and sometimes not even primarily) ourselves.²

- Agency Achievement concerns the degree of attainment of our (reasoned) values, whether those concern benefits for ourselves or others or for more general causes.
- Agency Freedom concerns our range of attainable opportunities for the fulfillment of our reasoned values.
- Quality of Life seems to represent an evaluative summation of the previous four categories.
- Standard of Living corresponds to an agent’s Well-Being Achievement that derives only from ‘the nature of his own life, rather than from “other-regarding” objectives or impersonal concerns’ (Sen 1993: 37).

Do Sen’s distinctions cast extra light on the discrepancies between measures that derive from different approaches to well-being? We consider this in section 5, amongst other attempts to interpret and respond to the discrepancies.

Conception (5) and most variants of (6) have connections to the Aristotelian tradition. This views human well-being as not just a single type of sensation or action but as the fulfillment of a deep and various nature, central to which is that people are reasoning social actors (Segal 1991). Conceptions of well-being as happiness or pleasure are called hedonic, in contrast to eudaimonic conceptions of well-being as a more complex and reflective fulfillment.

5. Responses to discrepancies between reported SWB, reported income and/or reported OWB

Let us group responses as follows. The heads partly overlap, but not problematically.

- A. Ignore the discrepancies – between reported SWB, reported income and/or reported OWB – and remain loyal to income and expenditure indicators.
- B. Check the specification of income, and/or OWB, and/or SWB: what was included, what was excluded, and what were the circumstances of measurement. In the case of SWB for example, various conditions may be imposed for the acceptability of measures.
- C. Look for other causal factors; for example, aspects of OWB that are unreflected in income measures, ‘crowding-out’, and preferences and their moulding.

² In Sen’s set of usages, Agency Freedom and Agency Achievement are not part of ‘well-being’. With a broader usage of ‘well-being’, as was introduced earlier, to mean an evaluation of a person’s situation or life, then both fall within it as particular types of evaluation. For criticisms of Sen’s, in this respect narrow, usage of ‘well-being’, see for example Nussbaum (2000) and Giri (2000).

- D. Opt for OWB or income for explicit reasons; e.g., that people do not know what is good for them, or that happiness is misleading and relatively unimportant.
- E. Opt for SWB for explicit reasons; e.g. perhaps libertarian or other value reasons.
- F. Use a different conception of well-being (neither objective-list nor satisfaction).
We will see that this response is, tacitly, very common, and must be construed to underlie some of the loyalty to income. There is however no plausible theory of well-being which justifies income as lead indicator.
- G. Accept plurality/complexity. This for example seems to be Sen's position.

Response A: Ignore the discrepancies

To ignore the problem is the simplest response, and the most common one amongst economists. It offers freedom from puzzlement, freedom from tension with respect to disciplinary norms, and a high psychic benefit-to-cost ratio for the mainstream economist. Ignorance is bliss. One continues using income and expenditure as the supposedly self-evident ways to measure ('economic') welfare. Leave puzzlement for the philosophers.

The response 'look at the cross-country regressions' is an indirect way to ignore discrepancies. Humanly significant deviations are drowned out in a generalized picture, and socio-economic significance is ignored thanks to preoccupation with finding a conventional degree of goodness/badness of statistically significant fit. Sometimes this in effect argues that ordinal ranking is all that we need; we don't have to consider the incongruity of a soaring indicator (income) and the virtually stagnant supposed dependent variable (subjective or objective well-being) for which the indicator is supposed to act as proxy. Sometimes the dependent variable is completely stagnant or even in decline. Intellectually, if not considered to be evasion or incompetence, this stance may reduce to the treatment of well-being as choice, which we consider further later.

Responses B: Check the specification of the categories which are directly involved

Response B1: Check the specification of income: the 'sanitize-GNP' response

GNP is grossly flawed as a welfare measure, even as a measure of valued opportunities. It includes much which should be excluded—notably, many costs are recorded as benefits—and weights inequitably whatever is included, since it weights monetarily expressed preferences by the amount of purchasing power behind them. It excludes much which should be included: it ignores the most important things, such as life duration, health, time use, the (felt) quality of worktime and personal relationships, and dignity; and, if used as a general welfare measure, it misleadingly presumes that growth of whatever it includes has no (negative) feedbacks on those excluded aspects.

Attempts exist to 'sanitize' GNP, to convert it to a defensible measure of welfare; for example, Daly and Cobb's Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare (Daly & Cobb 1994).

These attempts seem insufficient. They largely respond only to the first set of objections, against illegitimate inclusion. The issue of scale incongruity might still apply. Sanitized GNP might still keep climbing indefinitely, and the likelihood remains of important, even though reduced, discrepancies between recorded income, recorded satisfaction, and (other) recorded valued functionings.

Response B2: Check the specification of SWB

Faced with an SWB-income or SWB-OWB discrepancy, one relevant type of probing of SWB is to check whether conditions for the normative acceptability of SWB data are met, particularly the requirement that the agent is both well-informed and capable. For example, Janakarajan & Seabright's study in Tamil Nadu villages found 'a striking difference between the answers given to questions about respondents' own families and questions about the fortunes of the village as a whole. The latter are markedly more positive' (pp.339-40). Respondents were much more positive about matters on which they knew less. The grass seems greener on the other side of the hill, especially if the residents there secretly spray it green for outsiders to see.

Response B3: Check the specification of OWB

In cases of reported SWB-OWB discrepancy, one can investigate what is included and what excluded in the measures of OWB. Janakarajan & Seabright were led to query the shifts to higher-status foods as a measure of improved welfare in their study villages. The dietary shifts were found instead to 'owe a good deal to social and life style pressures and are not necessarily perceived as bringing benefits to the household' (1999: 342).

They similarly investigated cases of discrepancies between women's and men's perceptions of progress, and between women's perceptions and the data on income and on various OWB variables. Women in a locality with sharp income growth were 'noticeably less positive' (p.341) than men about changes in their family's situation. This became explicable once men's substantial alcohol consumption and growing alcohol abuse entered the assessment. That alcohol is frequently a 'private bad' rather than 'a private good' has been acknowledged by for example Ravi Kanbur (2003), but remains outside the field of vision of most economic measurement of welfare.

Responses C: Look for other causal factors

Response C1: Given an SWB-income discrepancy, check for OWB dimensions and unrecorded non-income sources of SWB

Faced with an SWB-income discrepancy one should check for other sources of SWB. Some are factors that might be called aspects of OWB; for example, rest. 'Being poor is being always tired', says a report from Kenya (cited in the Norwegian Government's Development Action Plan 2002). Jodha found divergence between the stagnant real

income figures in his set of Rajasthan villages and the self-reports of improved well-being by the majority of villagers, and traced them to distinct improvements in various aspects of OWB, including greater ability to send children to school, greater variety of diet and security in access to food, and access to life-transforming technology such as transistor radios. Segal (1998a) followed the same strategy to illuminate the opposite paradox: rising real income figures for many American families but self-reports of decline in felt well-being. We saw that he documented a series of key areas of life in which people now had to devote much more time and effort in order to achieve the same functional results: the same quality of education for their children, the same levels of physical security, and so on. We saw Janakarajan & Seabright follow a similar explanatory path.

Other sources/determinants of SWB are the ‘other inputs’ in Fig. 2 above; such as particular belief systems, even any which are illusory yet sustaining. Many studies show that poor people’s lists of priorities include both material and non-material aspects, with the latter aspects including dignity, voice and autonomy (e.g. Narayan et al. 2000). One factor stressed by Jodha’s villagers was that over time many of them had felt able to afford to stop working as agricultural labourers. Their income had not increased, indeed it had often declined, but their SWB, their felt quality of life, improved.

Response C2: Examine the possibility of ‘crowding-out’

In examining sources of SWB besides income, we should be aware that sources may be competitive rather than additive. Segal, Lane and others provide evidence that not merely are extra income and consumption sometimes insignificant or very low return routes to SWB, they can undermine or replace more rewarding routes, by undermining some aspects of OWB which contribute to SWB, or some of the ‘other inputs’ in Figure 2; for example by undermining the quality (and quantity) of family life and other personal relationships.

Response C3: Look for possible fallacies of composition in relation to positional goods

Crowding-out can apply between lives, as well as within individual lives. ‘For a single individual, income growth can, in many instances, result in greater levels of functioning. But what works for a given individual may not work for all of us collectively. When we all stand on tiptoe, not only does no one see the parade any better, but we all end up less comfortable.’ (Segal 1998b: 361)

Response C4: For SWB-income or SWB-OWB discrepancies examine preferences and their moulding

Looking at reported SWB-OWB discrepancies for men and women in South Asia, Sen raised the question of the moulding of preferences. Were women socialized to have lower expectations, or to find their fulfillment proportionately more in the flourishing of

others than in their own direct gain? Agarwal (1997) disputes the general relevance of this scenario, pointing to for example diverse ways in which women seek gains and express dissent, and how they might see their own gain as consistent with promotion of the interests of others in the family. However for the main case that Sen raised, the contrasting relations of objective and subjective health status for men and women, and in certain other cases, the hypothesis of different socially moulded attitudes seems appropriate. Mainstream economics closed itself off from this central issue by its treatment of preferences as exogenous.

Responses D: Give priority to OWB for explicit reasons

Concern for people's actual state, not just their self-perception, could move one to adopt Sen's concept of Well-Being Achievement, WBA. Specific reasons for this type of move can include doubts about people's judgements of their own well-being and doubts about the importance of feelings.

Response D1: 'People don't know what's good for them'.

One might downgrade the status of SWB by pointing to adaptive expectations, 'framing' effects like the tendency to judge one's own situation by comparing it with that of other people, envy, insatiability and the continual emergence of new desires. When we consider the implications of those possible causes, however, these could lead in various directions.

- a) Why is there comparison with the position of other people? Is income perhaps not a direct source of satisfaction but a proxy for self-esteem, which might be attained more reliably and effectively in other ways? The divergence of SWB from income is then well based.
- b) Why do new desires continually emerge? Are they mere surface symptoms, foci for attention when some deeper needs are not fulfilled? Low SWB may then again not be a misleading indicator.
- c) Why do expectations adapt to the current situation? That they adapt to hardship is understandable as a coping mechanism. That they adapt also to luxury may suggest the relative insignificance of material luxury.

So, examination of causes can sometimes give counterarguments to the rejection of WB-as-pleasure/satisfaction. The next response proposes more fundamental grounds for rejecting SWB.

Response D2:- 'Life is not centrally about happiness.'

'We are built to be effective animals, not happy ones' proposed Wright (1994: 298, cited by Lane 2000: 39). Happiness is arguably just an evolved mental signal to motivate us in certain directions at certain times; too much happiness would demotivate us from action. Indeed developmental psychology indicates that personal growth and learning

necessarily involve some pain. An adult-child analogy and attempted justification of pain (for others) were evident in the comments on aboriginal peoples by European philosophers such as John Locke, Immanuel Kant and J.S. Mill. They disapproved of the lives of ‘primitive’ leisure enjoyed by many of these peoples (Parekh 1997).

The objective-list claim is that people’s lives should be judged instead in terms of some well-grounded plausible set of normative criteria concerning observable features of their lives. Authors like Sen stress the criterion of extent of freedom, but this goes rather beyond the usual specifications of OWB and will be discussed separately.

Response E: Give priority to SWB for explicit reasons

One reason for prioritizing SWB as criterion might be the adoption of libertarian values. But the reverse would not hold true: priority to SWB need not bring a libertarian stance. On the contrary, the many mistakes that people make in pursuing their SWB might lead to a choice instead for massive social engineering interventions, as in Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* and B. F. Skinner’s *Walden Two*.

Sen’s categories suggest another reason for priority to SWB. His agency-versus-WB distinction might explain some SWB-OWB discrepancies, insofar as people pursue their ideals not their own gains, and report their SWB on the basis not of their own Well Being Achievement but instead of their Agency Achievement, their success in fulfilling their goals, some of which concern others and not themselves, and which may even involve sacrifice to themselves. Whether external judges adopt these self-reports of SWB as the indicator of people’s well-being (in the broad sense used in this paper, not in Sen’s sense) will depend then on, for example, whether they discern harmful ideals.

Responses F: Use a conception of well-being that is neither satisfaction nor an objective-list

Adoption of a well-being conception that is neither SWB nor OWB eliminates or drastically reduces interest in their discrepancies with each other or income. This response has several important variants. It would be incongruous to claim that they are OWB stances in which the only valued functionings on the list happen to be, for example, free choice and/or fulfillment of preference. What odd conceptions of OWB those would be, blind to the evidence on outcomes.³

Response F1: The desire-fulfillment response: ‘what’s good for people is whatever they want’

In this view, well-being is not about satisfaction or pleasure, but about preference/desire fulfillment. The view is highly vulnerable for reasons mentioned earlier: adaptive preferences and perverse desires. A discussion agenda opens concerning: what are the

³ Mixed, multi-dimensional measures, which include both OWB and SWB, are a very different matter, and are common.

desires? how are they produced and maintained? and what of freedom from desire? Economists typically ignore those criticisms and/or adopt a libertarian line, to buttress a focus on income and expenditure levels as well-being measures. They are in practice not very interested in the informed-desire interpretation of WB and make little attempt to operationalize it, unlike lawyers or physicians.

Response F2: The revealed preference response: 'people do it, so they must prefer it'

This stance rests on an absurdly crude model of persons. We saw that it in practice reduces instead to a libertarian response.

Response F3: the libertarian response

This gives overriding weight to freedom to make one's own choices, including freedom to make one's own mistakes. Such a response steps outside the chain-narrative in Fig.1 above, to prioritize freedom as a process-value, not any outcomes. One might alternatively or in addition hold that one's own mistakes are usually less than the mistakes that would result if others decided for one; but that position can also match a priority to SWB, OWB or desire fulfillment. The next stance goes even further in the direction of asserting values which diverge from the well-being image of a well balanced end-state, by denying the very category of mistakes.

Response F4: The activist response - 'I am therefore I do' and 'I do therefore I am'

Well-being, the values for being, involves in this stance not comfort and rest but restless striving; even striving for causes which one knows will not bring satisfaction and instead risk conflict, dissatisfaction and destruction, but which avoid boredom, provide excitement and drive forward experimentation and the selection of the fittest. Well-being is interpreted not as much-having, as in an opulence perspective, but as much-doing: an endless dance of creating and destroying and creating again. Busy-ness and busi-ness are close to godliness in one embodiment of this eschatology. For Dutt, what drives our busy-ness is 'the essential human characteristic...to compete with others' (2001: 151). Max Weber expounded a different embodiment: 'It is not peace and human happiness that we have to pass on to our descendants, but the eternal struggle for the maintenance and upbreeding of our national kind' (quoted by Lichtheim 1974: 78-9). For Nietzsche, dismissing utilitarianism: 'Man does *not* strive for happiness; only the English do that' (1998: section 1.9).

In the modern world, striving has centrally been channelled into the production, acquisition and disposal of commodities. Counter-arguments include critique of what produces such striving:- is it because important other needs are neglected? how far are desires for commodities promoted and fanned for commercial reasons? is preoccupation with income and GNP an adult equivalent of a desire to have the biggest collection of marbles? One can go on to ask about results and alternatives. Are there alternative and

perhaps more effective ways of expressing such ‘animal spirits’ than through commerce, consumption and resource use? How far does people’s more informed and reflective consideration, including retrospectively, endorse the chase for commodities? Many, perhaps most, people’s ‘life of my dreams’ seems to have a content different from that chase.

Response G: Accept plurality/complexity - and hopefully do not drown in it

Work on the capability approach grew out of reflection on both SWB-OWB and OWB-income disparities. It began by prioritizing the category of reflectively and rationally scrutinized valued functionings, OWB. It then qualified or even subordinated this emphasis in a series of ways. I will itemize seven ways, some of them not adopted by Sen but followed by various authors who believe that they are applying the capability approach.

Sen has provided a complex package that can be used in diverse ways. The trend in much of his own work has been to increasingly emphasise the role of public deliberation in weighing and prioritizing the plural considerations. In contrast, in one extreme but observable pattern of application of the capability approach, use of a conventional economics style of operationalization leads to income being revalidated as a fully acceptable welfare measure for much of life, and to income-SWB-OWB disparities becoming treated as marginal curiosities, not as central puzzles with fundamental implications.

1. We might include SWB as one valued functioning (see e.g. Clark 2002, who also cites Sen as adopting this step) or set of functionings, especially insofar as the indicator or indicators of affect are derived in reflective, reasoned fashion. Many multi-faceted measures of quality-of-life implicitly adopt this approach
2. Difficulties, including political difficulties, in operationalizing the concept of ‘having reason to value’ can lead in practice to tacit use of the conventional, hedonic concept of SWB (where felt well-being means happiness or pleasure); and not only for the specification of SWB itself as one type of valued functioning but as the method in specification of all valued functionings. (It is possible, however, for specification of valued functionings to be done in a more reflective, reasoned manner by individuals or groups; as illustrated by Alkire 2002 and Robeyns 2002.)
3. The stress on agency might, as we saw when discussing response E, lead likewise to re-emphasis of SWB. People’s commitment to goals other than their own health, comfort and convenience—other people’s welfare plus wider causes—is arguably a reason to take their self-stated well-being as a key indicator, insofar as it may reflect the degree of fulfillment of those other goals, rather than to focus on their degree of flourishing in terms of purely self-referential criteria.
4. Normative priority was soon given in the capability approach to capability—defined as the range of reasoned, valued opportunities—above achievement.

Sometimes it even displaces achievement altogether, although as we saw capability is questionable as a concept of well-being rather than of ‘advantage’, and although virtually all the relevant empirical work has proceeded in terms of functionings not capabilities.

5. A shift to defining well-being purely in terms of capability/opportunity might be a key slippage on a road that takes the capability approach away from a critical stance to become a tolerated hobby-interest which need not be taken very seriously by most economists since it doesn’t, supposedly, make a great difference in practice when compared to a mainstream that has for long stressed purchasing power as the provider of opportunity and the measure of welfare. The reason is that the capability notion links deceptively easily to the economics concept of opportunity set, though it in fact concerns opportunities which we have ‘[good] reason to value’. Expansion of choice-range does not always expand well-being; for example, large-scale expansion of commodity choice can bring the unstated price of crowding-out other, more important, types of opportunity. As Sen notes, we sometimes want to be free from (trivial) choices. But in practice there is great danger that the more workable, measured concept that will become used will be the sheer range of opportunities rather than the range of reasoningly valued opportunities.
6. The next step in potential conceptual slippage is that opportunity is partitioned into ‘social’ and ‘economic’ spheres, and that within the latter the notion of ‘command over resources needed for a decent living’ becomes reduced, drastically, to monetary command over commoditized resources. These conventional economic presumptions can easily slip in during operationalization for measurement.
7. A further step occurs when the HDI’s use of a drastic mathematical transformation of real GDP per capita, in order to get a more relevant measure of the ability to achieve a decent living, is overlooked. People might then interpret the position that ‘adjusted real GDP per capita...should serve as a proxy for the material aspects of welfare’ (Kuklys & Robeyns, 2004:2) as merely calling for correction for purchasing power parity or at most the removal of defensive expenditures and so on, without querying the incongruity of a well-being proxy that increases by factors of tens and hundreds. Sometimes people see GDP per capita, even more problematically, as a proxy for the range of choice in much more of a person’s life than only markets.

Steps 1-3 can in practice increase the attention to hedonic SWB. Steps 4 and 5 shift attention to sheer potential not achievement. Steps 6 and 7 then operationalize a focus on income per capita as a supposedly acceptable proxy for potential attainment of hedonic SWB, or at least its supposedly separate ‘material aspects’.

Such a version of the capability approach—not Sen’s prescribed version but a version seen sometimes in current practice—has by then lost most of its distinctiveness and potential to interest. It has drifted back towards conventional economics, including the rather problematic notion of ‘material aspects of welfare’ and the presumption that monetary means are the centrally important routes to those ends. Yet independent measures of OWB do not match well with measures of income. To declare command over commodities to be a separate sphere of welfare is an ungrounded stipulation: convenient for those who are not interested to look beyond, but ungrounded since it is simply an asserted definition, not well backed by what we know of OWB and SWB. Many conventional economists are not interested in more than this stipulated territory of ‘the material aspects of welfare’ and, having reassured themselves of a statistically significant even though often socio-economically insignificant correlation in general between a GDP measure and some other measure or measures of well-being, see no reason to engage further with Sen’s complex and hard to measure concepts.

At the end of Section 4 we asked whether Sen’s conceptual distinctions cast extra light on discrepancies between measures that derive from different approaches to well-being. In response E we saw that in one way they importantly do so: people’s orientation to goals other than their own benefit could be a significant source of SWB-OWB divergences. Insofar as the capability concept is meant to concern well reasoned valuations it concerns OWB; however, we saw that the OWB and SWB categories overlap for well reasoned valuations concerning oneself, and this overlap can create an ambiguity which leads some users of the capability approach away from attention to OWB, especially when making choices in how to operationalize the approach, and back to the hedonic SWB category familiar to economists thanks to the legacy of utilitarianism.

A complex conception of well-being will have various reduced forms which can be adopted in different circumstances, according to requirements. No single reduced form is canonical. However, the main points of the conception should not be lost in the reduced forms. The intended audience is otherwise likely to conclude not only that there is little operational difference made by the new conception, but also that it is not conceptually distinct either. Sen’s subtle system with its multiple distinctions—including between whether key dimensions of functioning (the elements of OWB) are identified by public reasoning or not, and whether self-judgements within those dimensions are made spontaneously or reflectively—can become crudened to an assertion that the measure of well-being reduces to the range of choice.

Sen’s choice of the reduced label ‘the capability approach’ for an approach that attended to well-being as valued functioning, as well as to capability, has increased the risk of excessive reductions by other users (Segal 1998b). His later heavy use of freedom language increased the risks of equation of freedom with range of choice, as opposed to the freedom to live simply and avoid distraction; and the risk that others will neglect the

need to apply criteria of reasoned value to freedoms and will stay with a scientifically spurious ('revealed preference') or pure libertarian approach (Gasper 2000, Gasper & van Staveren 2003). While justly trying to reach and influence mainstream economics audiences, simplified versions and labels for Sen's approach concede too much, which contributes to its as yet very limited impact in practical economics (as reported by Kuklys & Robeyns 2004). More emphatic attention to OWB-SWB-income disparities, with the style of a Mahbub ul Haq, founder of the *Human Development Reports*, could bring more effect.

6. Conclusion

We looked first at the range of relevant fields of attention in the study of well-being, and at how different fields are to a large extent studied by different disciplines (Section 1 of the paper). We noted the major discrepancies between the findings concerning people's feelings, their objective state of welfare, and their command over monetizable resources (Section 2). Reflection on these discrepancies is restricted, due to the divisions between disciplines and to certain philosophical and methodological stances. These include a widespread but mistaken preoccupation with only the statistical significance of correlations between income and (other) well-being measures, rather than with the socio-economic significance of the slope coefficients and degrees of dispersion (Section 3).

Too many economists have in practice ignored well-being, whether as satisfaction (SWB) or in terms of an 'objective list' conception (OWB), except trivially as a list with a single item, namely monetary income or expenditure. This has been a remarkable phenomenon, in both explanatory work and normative and policy work. As Segal notes (1998b: 361), the most fundamental of reasons for pursuing economic growth, the hypothesis that it improves human lives, seems to have received, relatively speaking, oddly little—and certainly insufficient—direct systematic attention in economics. Only in the past few years has this begun to change.

Economists typically treat WB instead as: i) desire fulfillment, but in a libertarian way, without requiring informed desire; or ii) freedom, e.g. via a revealed preference doctrine, but without Sen's requirement of reasoned valued freedoms; or iii) sheer activity. The adequacy, let alone sufficiency, of those three conceptions of well-being, individually or in combination, is very questionable.

A possible implication arises from this combination of a remarkable gap and questionable substitute conceptions, as well as from the common but morally egregious aggregation of measures of individual well-being according to agents' purchasing power (Gasper 2004b). We require investigations in the politics, psychology and sociology of economic studies in this field, in the same way as for economists' frequent misuse of statistical regression (McCloskey & Ziliak 1996; Ziliak & McCloskey 2004). There is more behind economics' stances on well-being than simply choice of a certain set of

philosophical positions, for few economists have ever directly considered such issues or consciously made such choices. Patterns of influence and interests need to be examined; likewise the possible inherited presumptions about human personality and human salvation (Nelson 1991, Buarque 1993).

There remains scope for influence through better evidence, counter-theorization and ethical examination. Widespread continuing adherence to the presumptions of the Material Well-Being school, for example, has rested in part on genuine belief and idealism: the hope to use economics to contribute to (an underconsidered notion of) well-being. Similarly, in Louis Brandeis’s words, the founders of the United States ‘believed liberty to be the secret of happiness’ (*Oxford Dictionary of Political Quotations*). As Isaiah Berlin explained, unfortunately ‘liberty is liberty, not equality or fairness or justice or human happiness...’ (*Two Concepts of Liberty*, 1958). But debunking a belief-system may not have much impact unless an alternative channel for hope is provided. The modern commitment to unending material production as a secular quasi-religion arose in part as a re-channelling of the ‘passions’ into the ‘interests’, to move out of a long era of violent religious and sectarian conflicts in Europe (Hirschman 1977). Are there alternatives available for further re-direction, not back to the thrills of violence and demonization of other groups or the self-righteousness and obsessiveness of some older belief-systems? The fascinating, growing evidence on human well-being and its sources offers elements of hope that there can be.

The main part of the paper, Section 5, tried to identify and order some of the intellectual options that arise in the face of the discrepancies between reported SWB, reported income, and/or reported OWB. Figure 4 summarizes the argument. It links the response options identified in Section 5 to the concepts of well-being that were specified in Section 4. One additional concept of well-being emerged, beyond even the extended list in Section 4: well-being as activity per se, as much-doing. It is highlighted in italics, since it is usually hidden and yet in reality enormously influential.

Figure 4: Responses to discrepancies between movements in the apex variables

RESPONSE	CONCEPT OF WELL-BEING	ASSESSMENT OF RESPONSE
A. Ignore the discrepancies, focus on income	4. Opulence	Inadequate
B. Check specifications of the apex variables		Valuable
C. Look at other inputs, and the other apex		Valuable
D. Opt for Objective Well-Being	5. Objective list	Often defensible
E. Opt for Subjective Well-Being	1. Pleasure or satisfaction	Sometimes defensible
F. Reject OWB and SWB – adopt another conception of well-being	2 / F1. Preference fulfillment 3 / F3. Choice - / F4. <i>Activity/hedonic treadmill</i>	Usually questionable
G. Complex synthesis	6. E.g. capability approach	To be strengthened

Neither Response A, to ignore the discrepancies, nor Response F, to drastically downgrade their significance by adoption of a well-being conception that is neither SWB nor OWB, appears to me adequate. Economists should join other social scientists in examining the specifications used for income, SWB and OWB (Response B), and in looking for other causal factors (such as diverse and endogenous preferences) and their possible competitive relations with economic inputs to well-being (Response C). Social scientists must join the philosophers in thinking about the profound choices of priority between SWB and OWB (Responses D and E); and engage with the unfinished projects of Amartya Sen and others to try to build well-argued syntheses (Response G) and prevent them from being sanitized or co-opted by simplistic responses. The interdisciplinary terrain of well-being studies promises great intellectual and practical rewards.

References

- Ackerman, Frank, and David Kiron, Neva R. Goodwin, Jonathan M. Harris, & Kevin Gallagher (eds.), 1997. *Human Well-Being and Economic Goals*, Washington, DC: Island Press.
- Agarwal, Bina, 1997. 'Bargaining' and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household. *Feminist Economics*, 3(1), 1-51.
- Alkire, Sabina, 2002. *Valuing Freedoms*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.
- Argyle, Michael, 1987. *The Psychology of Happiness*. London: Methuen.
- Anand, Sudhir, & Sen, Amartya, 2000. The Income Component of the Human Development Index. *J. of Human Development*, 1(1), 83-106.
- Baulch, Bob, & Edoardo Masset, 2003. Do Monetary and Nonmonetary Indicators Tell the Same Story About Chronic Poverty?. *World Development*, 31(3), 441-53.
- Blair, Tony, 2003. Transcript of Blair's speech to Congress, 17 July 2003. www.cnn.com/2003/US/07/17/blair.transcript.
- Brandt, Richard, 1979. *A Theory of the Good and the Right*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Buarque, Cristovam (1993), *The End of Economics? Ethics and the Disorder of Progress*, London: Zed Books.
- Clark, David A., 2002. *Visions of Development – A Study of Human Values*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Cooter, Robert, & Peter Rappoport, 1984. Were the Ordinalists Wrong about Welfare Economics? *J. of Economic Literature*, XXII, 507-30.
- Crocker, David, & Toby Linden (eds.), 1998. *Ethics of Consumption*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Daly, Herman, & John Cobb, 1994. *For the Common Good* (2nd edn.). Boston: Beacon.
- Dutt, Amitava K., 2001. Consumption, Happiness and Religion. In Dutt, Amitava K., & Kenneth P. Jameson (eds.), 2001. In *Crossing the Mainstream – Ethical and Methodological Issues in Economics*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, pp.133-169.
- Doyal, Len, & Ian Gough, 1991. *A Theory of Human Need*. London: Macmillan.
- Easterlin, Richard, ed., 2002. *Happiness in Economics*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

- Ekins, Paul, & Manfred Max-Neef (eds.), 1992. *Real Life Economics*. London: Routledge.
- Frey, Bruno, & Alois Stutzer, 2002. What Can Economists Learn from Happiness Research? *J. of Econ. Literature*, XL, 402-435.
- Gasper, Des, 2000. 'Development as Freedom: Moving Economics Beyond Commodities – The Cautious Boldness of Amartya Sen', *J. of International Development*, 12(7), 989-1001.
- , 2004a. Human Well-Being: Concepts and Conceptualizations. Paper for WIDER project on Measuring Well-Being. Working Paper 388, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague; iss.www.nl.
- , 2004b. *The Ethics of Development: From economism to human development*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- & van Staveren, Irene, 2003. Development as Freedom – and as What Else? *Feminist Economics*, 9(2-3), 137-161.
- Giri, Ananta, 2000. Rethinking Human Well-Being: A Dialogue with Amartya Sen. *J. of International Development*, 12(7), 1003-18.
- Hirschman, Albert (1977), *The Passions and the Interests*, Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press.
- Janakarajan, S., and Seabright, P., 1999. Subjective and Objective Indicators of Welfare Change over Time. In B. Harriss-White & S. Subramaniam (eds., 1998), *Illfare in India*, Delhi: Sage.
- Jodha, N.S., 1989. Social Science Research on Rural Change: Some gaps. In K. Basu (ed.), *Conversations Between Economists and Anthropologists*, Delhi: Oxford U.P.
- Kahneman, Daniel, Robert Diener & Norbert Schwartz (eds., 1999). *Foundations of Hedonic Psychology: Scientific Perspectives on Enjoyment and Suffering*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Kanbur, Ravi, 2003. Conceptual Challenges in Poverty and Inequality: One Development Economist's Perspective. *WIDER Angle*, 1/2003.
- Kuklys, Wiebke, & Robeyns, Ingrid, 2004. Sen's Capability Approach to Welfare Economics. Cambridge Working Paper in Economics 0415.
- Lane, Robert, 2000. *The Loss of Happiness in Market Democracies*. New Haven: Yale U.P.
- Lichtheim, George, 1974. *Europe in the Twentieth Century*. London: Sphere Books.
- McCloskey, Donald, 1986. *The Rhetoric of Economics*, Brighton: Wheatsheaf.
- McCloskey, Deirdre & Stephen Ziliak, 1996. The Standard Error of Regression. *J. of Economic Literature*, vol. 34, 97-114.
- McGillivray, Mark, 2003. Measuring Non-Economic Well-Being Achievement. Project paper, Helsinki: WIDER. Due in *Review of Income and Wealth*.
- Narayan, Deepa, et al. (2000). *Voices of the Poor* (3 vols.), New York: Oxford Univ. Press; and <http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/voices/reports.htm>.
- Nelson, R.H., 1991. *Reaching for Heaven on Earth: The theological meaning of economics*. Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich, 1998. *Twilight of the Idols*, transl. Duncan Large, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press. Cited by Alain de Botton, in *The Consolations of Philosophy*, 2001, London: Penguin.
- Nussbaum, Martha, 2000. *Women and Human Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Parekh, Bhikhu (1997), 'The West and its others', in K. Ansell-Pearson, B. Parry & J. Squires (eds), *Cultural Readings of Imperialism*, London: Lawrence & Wishart, pp. 173-193.
- Parfit, Derek, 1984. *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Clarendon.

- Robeyns, Ingrid, 2003. Sen's Capability Approach and Gender Inequality: Selecting Relevant Capabilities. *Feminist Economics*, 9(2-3), 61-92.
- Ryan, Richard M., & Edward L. Deci, 2001. On Happiness and Human Potentials: A Review of Research on Hedonic and Eudaimonic Well-Being. *Annu. Rev. Psychol.*, 52, 141-66.
- Scanlon, Thomas, 1993. Value, Desire and Quality of Life. In M. Nussbaum & A. Sen (eds.), *The Quality of Life*, Oxford: Clarendon, pp. 184-200.
- Segal, Jerome, 1991. Alternative Conceptions of the Economic Realm. Summary in Ackerman et al. (eds.), pp.15-18.
- Segal, Jerome, 1998a. Consumer Expenditures and the Growth of Need-Required Income. In Crocker & Linden (eds.), pp. 176-197.
- , 1998b. Living at a High Economic Standard: A Functionings Analysis. In Crocker & Linden (eds.), pp. 342-365.
- Sen, Amartya, 1984 *Resources, Values and Development*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- , 1985. *Commodities and Capabilities*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- , 1995. *Inequality Reexamined*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- UNDP, 2001. *Human Development Report 2001*. New York: Oxford U.P.
- Veenhoven, Ruut, 1993. *Happiness in Nations*. Rotterdam: Erasmus University, RISBO, 127.
- Wright, Robert, 1994. *The Moral Animal*. New York: Vintage.
- Zilliak, Stephen, & McCloskey, Deirdre, 2004. Size Matters: The Standard Error of Regressions in the American Economic Review. *J. of Socio-Economics*, 33(4).