CHAPTER 1

PRELIMINARIES FOR A FRAMEWORK

This first chapter is a bit like setting the table for the dinner: a necessary preparation for the meal that is waiting to be served, but it isn't the same as eating. Or a backroom strategic planning discussion prior to the board meeting. Nevertheless, the chapter is immensely important in defining the conceptual framework, agenda and direction of our later discussions. We wish that our readers might glance it over again after having completed the whole book because its agenda-setting nature becomes more apparent at the end. This part maybe the most essential for the book.

The fundamental tension that drives this chapter concerns evaluative claims. On the one hand, as we shall see, evaluative claims can be true or false, and they are so in virtue of some criteria that are empirically specifiable. On the other hand, we will reject theories that reduce well-being to empirical concepts such as preference, pleasure and self-reported happiness. Such reductive accounts fail to capture the multidimensional richness that well-being has an evaluative concept. The tension between these views needs resolution.

Some Misconceptions

This tension is set in the following context. While the idea of basing social policies on well-being and happiness is very welcome, currently, the new field of well-being studies thwarts a golden opportunity to transcend the severe limitations of society's understanding of value. We can break out of current misapprehensions of value that plague our lives and society, which we will document in this book. It is a pity to repeat those misunderstandings within the study of well-being. Here is why.

Our understanding of values is important for the critique and re-envisaging of society. Increasingly, governments determine social policies by using well-being and happiness indicators; similarly, social progress and development are being defined in these terms. Such changes make sense. Well-being indicators are more responsive to what matters than purely economic ones. They tend to tease out what matters more directly. If money and economic factors are valuable only as a means to well-being, then our policies and interventions should track changes in well-being. This more direct approach is especially welcome given two factors. First, there is increasing awareness of the importance of the diminishing marginal utility of monetary income. As we grow richer, after a point, money matters less (Easterlin, 1974; Easterlin et al., 2010). Second, because environmental concerns are pressing, there is a crying need to be more efficient in the "production" of well-being, i.e. to not squander precious natural resources for little or no gain in well-being,

and not to ruin our natural environment for minimal gains in utility. Thus, the shift towards economies of well-being is exciting and promising on several counts.

There is a danger lurking here. The shift from policies based on neoclassical economics towards those founded on well-being could be a truly liberating transformation. However, the opportunity for radical social improvement might be lost, depending on how we understand "well-being". The more we employ implicitly economic ideas to understand the core of human well-being, the more we miss the opportunity for radical transformation. Our understanding of well-being will merely echo the values accepted by society rather than becoming a way to critique them. This is not only a missed opportunity but also a profound misapprehension. Whilst economic thought is vitally necessary to evaluate the means to well-being, for instance, to assess efficiency and to weigh costs and benefits, standard economic concepts are inadequate to articulate the core nature of human well-being. Well-being itself is not an economic notion even though the means to well-being includes those that are economic. The more we understand well-being in human and evaluative terms, the more liberating the shift towards well-being-based policies will be. The book will make these ideas clear and vivid.

To begin, we will argue that there are four erroneous tendencies concerning the study of well-being.

(1) Distinguishing the Empirical and the Evaluative

In the social sciences, empirical and evaluative claims are often insufficiently distinguished. Empirical statements describe what is, while evaluative claims concern what ought to be the case or what is better or worse. Although social inquiry frequently gestures towards evaluative or normative concerns, dominant methodological frameworks prioritise empirical description, often favouring what is observable or measurable. As a result, evaluative questions about the good do not sit comfortably within these frameworks (Hollis, 2015).[1] As a result, claims about value are frequently reduced to empirical assertions about what individuals or groups happen to value, since such claims can be treated as measurable facts about attitudes or preferences.[2] *Supposedly*, in contrast, what is valuable seemingly isn't an empirical fact, at least not in a straightforward way. Therefore, within empirically oriented social sciences, it must be interpreted in terms of what someone values.

Although this reductive error is understandable, it doesn't change the fact that it is a mistake. What is important for a person's life cannot be reduced merely to what they think is so. Nor can it be reduced to solely what they personally value.[3] The fact that someone values something or has a positive attitude towards it doesn't *ipso facto* render it valuable. Nor is it necessary.

The question of what is valuable might be outside the proper province of the social sciences, but this does not mean that such evaluative questions can be avoided. We cannot ignore the evaluative nature of the concept of well-being because that is what the concept is for: a multifaceted evaluation. 'Well-being' is roughly equivalent to 'being and living

well',[4] and 'well' is equivalent to 'in a good way'. 'Well-being' requires 'goodness'; it is an ineluctably normative concept.

We have found that there is resistance to and misunderstanding of this point. Many define happiness in terms of what a person values.[5] This ties a person's happiness to the values that they happen to accept or 'have'.[6] In opposition to this, there is the possibility that a person might *have* values that are not at all conducive to their happiness or which don't constitute it. In other words, a person may value the wrong kinds of things (Badhwar, 2014: 222). What they value doesn't necessarily track what is valuable as part of their well-being. In this regard, we are fallible; we can make mistakes and be ignorant. This implies that we cannot define well-being in terms of what one values at a personal level.[7]

Traditionally, well-being has been understood either in terms of feelings of happiness or the satisfaction of desires. These views match common sense, which suggests they aren't entirely wrong, and there are insights here worth preserving. Nevertheless, we will argue that both approaches are ultimately mistaken. Some contemporary psychological research relies on these ideas, and this, we suggest, is a significant limitation of those empirical studies.

One aim of the book is to show why these reductive or thin accounts fail. We can already discern the evaluative nature of the inquiry from the question 'How *should* one evaluate one's life?' We aren't asking 'How *do* people evaluate their lives?' but rather how they *should* or *ought* to. The enterprise is essentially evaluative. It concerns how we ought to live or be, albeit that the 'ought' is non-moral. This facet of the question already indicates that the answer is normative.[8]

Consequently, our study is already meant to focus on thick or value-rich conceptions of well-being. Thick conceptions of well-being employ evaluative concepts; whereas, in contrast, thin conceptions tend to avoid them. In short, well-being is not simply a question of happiness or of getting more of what one wants or having more pleasure because happiness, desire and pleasure are evaluatively thin concepts.

Claims made with thick evaluative concepts face the challenge of how they relate to empirical facts. This challenge is especially acute for the notion of well-being: if someone's well-being has improved, this must be in virtue of some other facts about their life. We always need some empirical criteria for what constitutes well-being. If the concept of well-being is evaluatively rich then how can we determine empirically what well-being is? Furthermore, how can we make such an evaluative concept operationalisable and quantitatively measurable? How can we make such a concept useful for social policy? Many social scientists ignore or evade the normative dimensions of the concept of well-being in part because they assume that such questions cannot be answered adequately within the framework of a rich theory. In this book, we embrace these challenges. The systematic study of human well-being requires that empirical investigations are directed towards the composition of well-being, as opposed to merely its causes and conditions. This demands a conceptual framework for understanding this composition. In this work,

we will show how this requirement can be satisfied without embracing the standard happiness, desire and pleasure theories of well-being.

(2) Instrumental and Non-Instrumental

The second error concerns the distinction between instrumental and non-instrumental value. We see this confusion everywhere: people tend to explain the value of things in purely instrumental terms, even when this leads to obvious absurdity. Consider the claim that happiness is good because happy people are more productive. True: happiness does make us more productive, and that adds to its value. However, the claim is deeply misleading because it ignores something important: productivity is only valuable as a means *to* happiness, not the other way around. The original claim suggests that happiness is valuable because it makes us productive, and in this way, it puts the cart before the horse. For the moment, suffice to note that this kind of misplaced instrumentalism is a common error in how our society thinks about value. The basic distinction between instrumental and non-instrumental values is important for our theory in several ways. The distinction between instrumental and non-instrumental value will be important throughout this book. We will explore its deeper significance in Chapter 2.

First, in conversation, typically, people switch from talking about well-being to *feelings of* well(-being). This shift is in danger of confusing happiness and well-being, which we need to separate. It also threatens to conflate well-being with a person's perception of it, which again are distinct. More importantly, though, we need to separate two types of question. 'What typically causes or contributes to X?' is distinct from 'What does X consist in?' For example, asking what kinds of things causally contribute to good health is different from seeking the definition of good health itself. Similarly, 'What causes harm?' is different from 'What does harm consist in?' We are concerned with the question 'What does well-being consist in?' which is different from and prior to 'What sort of things causally contribute to well-being? There is a systematic tendency to ignore the former question by replacing it with the second. For example, 'What role does friendship play in well-being?' becomes wholly assimilated by the question 'How does friendship contribute to our sense of well-being?' (Graham 2011: 122). The constitutive question has been ignored, in lieu of the causal one. Both kinds of question are important, that is both a better understanding of what constitutes well-being and empirical causal studies of well-being.

Second, we need to distinguish instrumental and non-instrumental values. It is obviously in our individual self-interest to earn more money, all other things being equal. *Ceteris paribus*, it is to our benefit and in our self-interest to acquire means of purely instrumental value, and harmful to lose and waste them. However, the idea of obtaining such benefits does not take us beyond instrumental value, which is purely derivative, and because of this, an explanation of well-being cannot be couched entirely in such terms. Because of this, the idea that well-being consists in acquiring more benefits is mistaken. It is erroneous even if it were true that such benefits always contribute to well-being. It is flawed as an account of well-being because such a theory must specify the kinds of non-instrumental values that constitute well-being.

To underline the point: benefits don't always contribute to well-being. Consider someone who is deeply depressed. They might acquire many goods, such as money, things, opportunities, resources, yet find themselves unable to use or appreciate any of them. That person's life may not actually improve despite these benefits. This tells us something important: merely *possessing* something of value is not the same as *living* its value. The goods need to be integrated into a life, taken up, appreciated as part of living a better life, which may require a change in the person, not just a change in their circumstances.

This important point: The acquiring of such benefits may *lead* to a better life, but it does not *constitute* such a life. Likewise, losing wealth may *cause* us harm, but it does not *constitute* harm. In other words, we must distinguish what leads to or facilitates well-being and what it consists in. This point also applies to allied concepts such as happiness, welfare and quality of life; in each case, cause and constitution are distinct.

To understand well-being, it is necessary to first elucidate what it is, which is in part a conceptual or philosophical exercise, rather than to start by trying to discover what causes or facilitates it, which is an empirical investigation. If we are not clear what it is, then we cannot determine what causes it.

What constitutes well-being is only *partly* a conceptual question. The relevant concepts will provide the framework, the types of distinctions and classifications that we need to investigate human well-being empirically. So, we need a conceptual framework for an account of well-being. But such a framework needs to be filled by empirical studies that show us what well-being consists in. In other words, empirical research shouldn't be solely directed towards the causes of well-being. They can also help us understand its nature.

Let's explore the distinction between instrumental and non-instrumental values further by considering the value of work. It is a well-known limit of purely economic analyses of work that they treat it purely instrumentally as a means of production and of personal income (Elster 1989; Ventegodt & Merrick 2009; White 1998). One response is to widen the frame: what other benefits does work bring us beyond financial reward? But even this improved view doesn't quite get things right. It still treats work as merely a means to something else. While work *is* productive, it is much more than that. It is also a lived experience and a way of understanding who we are. In other words, work has non-instrumental value: it matters in itself, not only for what it produces. But what does it mean for something to be valuable in itself? We cannot simply answer by pointing to what people happen to enjoy or value in their work.[9] This is because we can make mistakes and be ignorant. There may be aspects of work we enjoy that are actually contrary to our well-being, and aspects we fail to appreciate that genuinely matter. This leaves us with an important question: how do we identify which aspects of work are non-instrumentally valuable?

We need to answer the above question to be able to combine the productive and human aspects of work into one overall vision of well-being. This is harder than it sounds. Simply saying "we need balance" won't do it. The challenge is not to weigh the two equally, but

to understand how they relate. For instance, on the side of economic rationalism, it is right and important to systematically and rationally weigh expected costs and benefits. However, on the side of the human life, not every decision can be reduced to cost-benefit analysis because some things matter in ways that resist such framing. We need different ideas for different contexts, but it is not immediately clear how to combine both. A theory of well-being ought to provide the insights that will allow us to do that.[10]

(3) Value and Measurement

There is an endemic failure to separate what is valuable from the measurement of that value. There are three common errors. Let's examine them.

First is the error of confusing between the indicators of X and X itself. A rise in temperature isn't the same as its measurement with a thermometer. We could have the one without the other. Likewise, performing better on an IQ test does not constitute an increase in intelligence. Even though the first is usually a reliable indicator of the second, we can imagine situations in which it isn't. In practice, we disregard this difference at our peril. We do so, for instance, when we define our goals in terms of performance outcomes that are supposed to be measures (Gill and Thomson, 2013).

Second is the error of conflating value with its measurement. This conflation runs deep in economics and philosophy, particularly in debates about 'utility'. The term is used in two quite different ways: sometimes it refers to what is valuable or desirable; sometimes it refers merely to a measure of preference or satisfaction. Consider: when economists say a policy "maximises utility", do they mean it produces what is good for people, or simply that it gives people more of what they happen to prefer? These aren't the same, and the slippage between them causes real confusion. This distinction is important for understanding the claim that traditional aggregative utility theory omits aspects of what counts as an improved quality of life (see Chapter 3). Does 'utility' measure what is valuable or constitute it? The difference is also crucial for the evaluation of the idea that desirable aspects of life can be ranked in a quantitative manner (see Chapter 7). In short, the claim that utility is a measure of well-being isn't the same as the theory that utility is well-being.

Third is the error of defining well-being through how it is measured or quantified. The point that we are making is a simple one: how one measures well-being doesn't define what it is. The two are distinct. This implies that the process of trying to understand what well-being is, and the process of figuring out how to measure it are separate. Thus, we shall explain what well-being is without the constraining requirement that it should be measurable or quantifiable. This doesn't mean that well-being isn't measurable or quantifiable. Nor does it mean that well-being shouldn't be measured. It means that understanding well-being is a distinct enterprise from measuring it. We shall discuss these issues later in the book (see Chapter 7).

Sometimes, the three mentioned errors are innocuous fallacies. However, they can constitute grave mistakes that lead us to misidentify what really matters in practically significant ways: they can damage our understanding of well-being. As we shall see, to

avoid this requires a relentless determination to separate means and ends, and instrumental and non-instrumental values (Chapter 2), and a constant keen eye to distinguish the measurement of value from the value considerations themselves (Chapter 7).

Let us affirm the three points positively. We are advocating a strategy for well-being studies that conforms to the following principles:

1) We should develop a full and complex account of what well-being is, resisting the temptation to simplify it for the sake of measurement. This means keeping two tasks clearly separate: explaining what well-being is, and working out how to measure it.

2) We need a good understanding of what well-being *is,* not just what causes or facilitates it. This requires empirical studies that are informed by conceptual work and that investigate the nature of well-being.

3) We should develop an understanding of well-being that shows how a substantive, evaluatively rich conception can still be studied empirically without reducing it to merely what can be measurable or quantifiable.

Subjective vs Objective

Earlier we mentioned four erroneous tendencies, but so far, we have discussed only three. Let us add the tendency to ignore the subjectivity of experience as the fourth. Contemporary science has difficulties acknowledging the subjectivity of experience on its own terms (see Chapter 4), and tends to acknowledge it in objective terms instead. Yet, how one experiences the living of one's life from the first-person point of view is a necessary and important part of one's being, and hence of one's well-being. This subjectivity, vital to our well-being, cannot be understood *as such* in purely objective terms.

This topic is potentially confusing because the key words 'objective' and 'subjective' are employed in many different ways. What matters in a person's well-being seems to have both subjective and objective aspects.[11] Therefore, as a preliminary, we might distinguish four distinct uses of the terms 'objective' and 'subjective'.

(1) Meta-Ethics

In meta-ethical theory, subjectivism is roughly the view that evaluative claims cannot be true or false.[12] This is usually taken to be equivalent to the claim that they are subjective because they are merely a matter of opinion or an expression of a positive attitude (Thomson, 2002b).[13] In this book, we shall assume that evaluative claims *can* be true or false. They are assertions and not merely a matter of opinion, and in this sense, they are not purely subjective. This assumption is important because it determines the shape of the project to be completed. It means that we are fallible about evaluative claims and that we

can be ignorant about them (McDowell, 1998). It also means that we need to discover the relevant criteria. Let us go through these points one-by-one.

If evaluative-claims can be true or false, then it is possible for a person to make mistakes in their judgment about what is good or bad. For instance, a person might judge that their well-being is best served by forming a life-plan and trying to fulfil their ambition. But this whole approach might be an error. The specific life-plan might be quite unsuited to their character and tempt them into making sacrifices that would not be psychologically healthy. Furthermore, having a life-plan might be a formula for disappointment and a recipe for self-instrumentalising. In short, this person might be making a mistake.

Not only are mistakes possible, so is ignorance. One might be ignorant of alternative ways of life that would be more fitting to one's well-being. In such a case, it may be that one isn't making mistaken judgments about those life-styles; it may be rather that one isn't even making judgments about them at all. One's horizons can be restricted, and because of this, one's practical conception of well-being. The space of value possibilities of human life is largely unexplored (May, 2005). Consider the different ways that people around the planet live now, in comparison with our ways of living throughout our collective human history. Despite this variety, there may well be ways of life and social arrangements that humans have not imagined that are much more conducive to our well-being.

A value theory that permits both errors and ignorance in our judgments about well-being requires criteria. Our project of understanding well-being in a non-reductive way will be a search for the relevant constitutive criteria. We ask: in accordance with what criteria, is the judgment that my well-being is best served, for instance, by having many friends? What are the pertinent criteria constitutive of well-being? Objective accounts of well-being require the discovery of criteria. This is one of the main quests of this book, to seek evaluative criteria that are empirically specifiable without being thin or reductive.

(b) Pertaining to Subjects

There is second kind of subjectivity. Something is subjective if it pertains to the subject as such. In this sense, pain is subjective and physical mass is not. The first depends on the subject of experience as such, and the second does not. Well-being is clearly subjective in this second sense. Well-being requires that there is a subject/person who is well.

(c) Intentionality

We can extend this second use. Often when theoreticians discuss the subjectivity of experience, they refer to its intentional and/or its self-conscious nature. The idea that experience is intentional is important for this study, and we explain it in detail later (in Chapter 4). We can explicate it provisionally as follows: many mental phenomena have the characteristic of having content or being about something. For example, when we think, our thinking has a content, which is usually expressed with a sentence, and our thinking is about something, such as tonight's dinner. Furthermore, mental states are intentional in a way that embodies a point of view on the world.

d) Objective and Subjective Methodology

The assertion that the natural sciences have an objective methodology means roughly that experiments in the natural sciences shouldn't depend on the psychological state of the experimenter. Experimental results should be reproducible by any experimenter in the same conditions, and this requires that the experiment be conducted with controls. The methodology is repeatable, impersonal and supposedly neutral.

We might contrast the natural sciences in this regard with interpretation. How a text should be interpreted may depend on the state of the interpreter. Because of this, interpreting a text is often regarded a process of dialogue between the reader and the text. Notice that whilst interpretation is subjective in this third sense, this doesn't mean that it is subjective in sense a). Even though interpretation is not impersonally repeatable, nevertheless there can be better and worse interpretations. Despite there isn't one true interpretation of a text, there can be more true or more false ones (Gadamer, 1989).

Bringing together these four senses of the objective/subjective contrast. (a) First, subjective claims are merely a matter of opinion if that they don't have a truth-value. (b) Second, claims are subjective when they are about a subject as such, and (c) third, when they describe the intentional content of a person's experience or psychological states. (d) Fourth, a methodology is subjective if it isn't suitably impersonal and repeatable.[14]

These senses of 'objective' and 'subjective' are independent of each other. To see this, consider the following: we can have true claims about the subjectivity of a person's experience, which are investigated with objective methodology. Here is an example "John believes that there are beings living on the moon." This judgment is objective in the sense of being true or false; there is some fact of the matter: subjective psychological claims are objective because it is not merely a matter of opinion what John's beliefs are. Additionally, we can gain evidence about those opinions through objective methodology. We can have behavioural evidence for or against the assertion regarding John's belief. So, in this case, "John believes that there are beings living on the moon." is objective in senses (a) and (d) but it is subjective in senses (b) and (c). In short, we can have objective claims about subjective experience that are investigated objectively.

Returning now to the main point, a framework for well-being must include the subjectivity of experience. There is a difference between one's inner life as constituted by one's awareness and shifts in one's attention, and one's outer life as others might observe it.[15] One's inner life is something that one experiences for oneself, and this phenomenology of consciousness will need to be part of the framework of well-being. This requires the third sense of subjectivity, namely intentionality: how one experiences the world. This point will be elaborated in Chapter 4.

Perhaps due to their positivist lineage and to their proclivity for numerical results, some approaches in the social sciences exclude the subjectivity of experience from accounts of well-being. There are epistemological reasons for this. There are notorious difficulties in knowing the inner life of others (and of oneself). There are also indeterminacies in our psychological lives. For example, in certain circumstances it will be indeterminate whether

a person is experiencing the same taste that they previously liked and now dislike or whether they are experiencing a different taste altogether (Dennett, 1992, and 1998). We should not take our experiences from the first-person view to be given or transparent or determinate. Nevertheless, despite these and other difficulties, the way in which one experiences or is aware of one's life from the first-person point of view is a necessary facet of well-being.

Readers might protest that contemporary psychology does not ignore the subjective aspects of well-being. Indeed, current psychological literature on well-being is often focused on so-called 'theories of subjective well-being'. There is a vast literature on this topic. However, such theories use the term 'subjective' in a way that needs clarification and once clarified, we will see that 'theories of subjective well-being' tend not to take subjectivity seriously in the sense that we mean. This is because, in such theories, the subjective element is usually conceived either as a feeling of pleasure or in terms of so-called "subjective" life-satisfaction. Accordingly, to judge a person's subjective well-being is to discover either how often and how much the person reports experiences of feelings of pleasure, or second, how a person would rate their life: how satisfied the person is with their life overall.[16]

Neither of these two theories allow us to understand how and why the phenomenology of experience partly constitutes well-being. They tend not to be not concerned with the content of how the person experiences their life except insofar as this provides a set of external measures. In the first instance, subjective well-being is understood as a function of individual moments of pleasure or happiness (Kahneman, 1999 and 2006). However, as we shall argue in Chapter 4, this kind of account treats pleasure as a mental occurrence that doesn't have a content beyond being pleasurable. It overlooks the intentionality of such experiences, which is to say that it ignores what it is like for the subject to have the experience in question. It gets radically wrong what pleasurable experience is. We can have a preliminary glimpse of the importance of this point by considering the variety of kinds of pleasures that a good life might contain. How can one account for this variety within a purely quantitative frame consisting of units of pleasure?

In the second case, subjective well-being is understood in terms of self-reported life satisfaction, as answers to questions such as 'How satisfied are you with your life?' Again, this approach is limited to providing a set of measures but without specifying how lived experience constitutes well-being. This is because such self-reported life satisfaction claims don't have any criteria determining their truth-value beyond the person's avowal. Given this, they count merely as an *expression* of feeling rather than a true or false claim about the person's life. They are expressions of a feeling (like 'Yes!' 'Great!') rather than statements with a truth-value about the person's life. The person is expressing a positive attitude towards their life rather than making an assertion about the positives in their life. Without relevant criteria that could make such a claim false, nothing could constitute an error (see Chapter 4).

Following the initial clarification, we can see that contemporary theories of subjective well-being tend to *not* be concerned with how the subjective experiences of a person constitute

inter alia their well-being. Rather their interest is with self-reports insofar as these yield a measure of well-being. This amounts to a huge difference that has several implications. First, theories of subjective well-being do not answer our earlier complaint that contemporary accounts tend to ignore the subjectivity of experience. How one lives one's life from the first-person point of view is a necessary constituent of well-being. We need to understand how consciousness defines well-being: what is most basically relevant and why? For example, how is depression relevant? How is a person's insecurities and self-image pertinent? Subjective measures presuppose that what is to be measured is already defined.

Second, methodologically, the theoretical need for greater understanding of a person's subjectivity isn't satisfied by self-reported measures, or by compiling scores. It needs a fresh approach. Partly for this reason, we undertook life-narrative interviews with 50 persons regarding their well-being. The idea wasn't to try to confirm or disconfirm the theoretical framework offered in this book empirically. It was rather mainly to illustrate it with real-life examples. The aim was also to set up an interrogative dialogue between the empirical study and the development of a conceptual framework. Third, the goal was to help escape the positivist lineage that suggests that the only way to study well-being is through quantifiable correlations. Thus, we wanted to show life-narrative interviews might provide a fruitful complimentary method. This is a thread that we pick up in Chapter 7 when we discuss measurement. Also in the appendix of that chapter, we elaborate how life-narrative interviews can provide an alternative and complementary methodology. Finally, throughout the book, we employ examples from our case studies to illuminate the theoretical framework we develop.

In conclusion, we have tried to draw attention to three important high-level theoretical errors in studies of well-being. To these we added a contentious fourth: insufficient attention to the subjectivity of experience. We noted some issues and confusions regarding this point and indicated that this will be a major theme of Chapter 4. We suggested that life-narrative interviews can provide an alternative to the statistically correlations that tend to dominate the field.

Evaluative Claims

Well-being is an evaluative concept. This study is driven by a tension between two claims about evaluation. On the one hand, evaluative claims can be true or false, and if so, there must be criteria that make them so. For well-being, these criteria will be at least partly empirical, shaped by cultural and psychological facts about human beings. On the other hand, evaluative claims are not reducible to value-free empirical claims. We should resist thin accounts that reduce well-being to a simple empirical criterion, such as a feeling of happiness or a set of ranked preferences, even if acknowledging that such concepts may be important for understanding well-being. These two claims seem to pull against each other. The first insists on empirical grounding; the second insists that empirical facts alone cannot capture what well-being is. Holding both together is the challenge we take up.

This tension is alleviated, but not resolved, by the claim that there is no one single value criterion for well-being. If well-being is, crudely speaking, in the living of certain values and if these values are multifarious, then they cannot be reduced to a single common factor such as pleasure, happiness, desire or preference. For a full resolution of the antinomy, we require a non-reductive account of what is non-instrumentally valuable given in empirical terms, with the now added idea that the criteria will be plural.

This resolution will require empirical research. Well-being is not the same for a human and a monkey. It is not the same for a child and an old person. It will vary between cultures and temperaments. In short, this means that judgments about well-being must specify for whom: X is better *for A's* well-being than Y. This doesn't make judgments about well-being subjective (in the first sense above); we can still make mistakes. It doesn't mean that one can decide for oneself what will constitute one's well-being; there are criteria at play.[17] However, the empirical content of these criteria may vary between people, cultures, societies and species. This means that there will be something about the nature of the being in question that makes the difference. Here the word 'nature' should be taken as a promissory note to be redeemed in Chapters 3 and 7. Simply, there must be some varying facts about people in virtue of which their well-being is differently constituted. We need conceptual effort to uncover the framework, and empirical study to discover the variations.

We also need empirical investigation into the breadth of human possibilities. There may be modes of life, or ways of living and being, that enable far greater well-being than those prevalent in contemporary industrialised societies. Many cultures can offer visions of flourishing that differ substantially from dominant Western models in terms of, for example, relationships to time, community, labour, and the natural world. We simple don't yet know how well humans might live, and what forms of life would allow us to flourish *more* fully. This remains an open question, one that well-being studies must engage imaginatively, drawing on the widest possible range of human experience while remaining grounded in sound understanding and evidence.

This point remains significant. Evaluative judgments are implicitly comparative: one thing is better or worse than another. Even when we say that X is good or bad, there is an implicit comparison at work. A good hammer is good not only relative to its function, but also the judgment is implicitly comparative: it is at least as good as most other hammers. Likewise, when we judge a person's well-being, there is an implied comparison (as well as a set of criteria). If we claim that a person has well-being then we are making a tacit contrast with some group. This implies that claims about a person's well-being will depend on what implicit comparison is being made. A person may feel better than they did yesterday and report their well-being positively based on that comparison. The same person could have made a judgment based on how happy, healthy, and wealthy some other people feel, and reported their own well-being as negative based on this other comparison. There is no contradiction here so long as one makes the comparison explicit.

Comparison is important when we employ the concept of well-being in social critique. For example, one might claim that contemporary western society in general emphasizes consumerism to the detriment of the quality of work or personal relationships. Such a claim

would be comparative. But what is the relevant comparison? To test such claims empirically, we would need empirical research of the alternatives so that the comparison class is specifiable. We need research directed towards mapping the field of human possibilities.

This is closely allied to a slightly different point. Evaluations presuppose an implicit scope that is defined by what one takes for granted. For example, one might ask 'How can I improve my well-being concerning my work?' assuming one will stay in one's current employment. The scope is narrow. We could ask for a wider evaluation 'What sort of work should I seek?' but assuming implicitly the limitations of one's current qualifications, and employment possibilities in the region. One could make the scope of the question even wider and more idealized by removing these limitations and asking: "What sort of work would be ideally suited to my abilities, talents and temperament?". One could widen the scope of evaluation even more by asking about how the institution of work might be redesigned for the sake of human well-being. In each case, the evaluative question (and its answer) takes something for granted or as a given. A wider question submits one or more of these assumed elements to interrogation; it no longer takes it as a given. In this way, the scope of the question is broadened.

In our everyday lives, we usually take socially accepted views of well-being for granted and tend to only ask causal questions about how to improve that well-being as and when they arise practically. When we are ill, we want to know how to get better. When we are poor, we want to know how to earn more. When we are insulted, we want to recover our dignity. When we are bereaved, we want to know how we can carry on. We want our children to do well and worry about them when there are problems. We want things to go smoothly at work and worry about it only when things are awry. This indicates the narrow scope of our everyday evaluations about well-being. At the most practical level, one might want to evaluate one's personal well-being within the confines of one's circumstances and culture or social conditions. Thus, one would ask: "In this kind of society, and given my basic character and my specific context, what would constitute an improvement in my well-being and what can I do to achieve that?"

In such cases, the considered field of possibilities is circumscribed. Thus, so are the implicit comparisons in our judgments about well-being. For example, we tend to not worry about how we can improve our character for the sake of a better life: "This is a long-term issue for another day." We usually don't concern ourselves with the kind of society and civilization that are conducive to human well-being. We take a lot for granted in our everyday judgments about well-being. Perhaps too much.

At a broader level, we can abstract from our culture and from the institutions that define our society. We don't have to take our current desires or character traits as given. We don't have to take for granted the institutional frameworks that we inhabit. Human beings have a plastic nature, and there are many ways in which we can live, some of these would be better than the currently available social options. In this manner, we can employ the concept of well-being to critically assess society and ways of life from a broad perspective, as Freud did in his work *The Psychopathology of Civilisations*. From the perspective that

Freud adopts in his work, life in contemporary western society is marred by tendencies towards psychological illnesses. From this vantage point, Freud might claim that none of us have well-being. Such a judgment would suggest that human life could be wonderful in ways that are not always possible to experience in our civilization. It would also imply that humans could have the self-understanding and capacity to build for ourselves lives and institutions that fit our needs far better than we do now. However, even if we could be clear about them conceptually, such claims are difficult to test empirically. Nevertheless, to understand them, we must step outside the delineated scope of our everyday judgments and their limited range of possibilities and comparisons.

The interplay between questions with a narrower and wider scope will be an underlying theme of this book. In general terms, it is better to be aware of the presuppositions of our questions. In particular, we need to be wary of comparing apples and pears by forgetting the implicit scope and comparative nature of judgments about well-being. This is important for the operationalisation of the concept. For example, if we want to compare the well-being of young people in urban and rural schools within a country then we would make some cultural assumptions about the nature of well-being that we wouldn't want to presume if we were critically assessing the institution of schooling within the same country using the concept of well-being. For these two cases, the concept needs to be conceived differently. For instance, the institution of schooling shapes the nature of adolescence. In the second study, the question 'for the sake of the well-being of young people, should adolescence be shaped in the way that it currently is?' is pertinent. And therefore, for that investigation, the nature of adolescence within that culture can't be taken as a given. This last point has a theoretical significance, as we shall see in Chapters 3 and 7. In general, the concept of well-being should be robust enough that it can be used for social critique, and as we have argued in this chapter, this requires a framework that allows for empirical research about what *constitutes* well-being.

The Concept of Well-Being

This book aims to provide a framework for theories of well-being. It doesn't present a full theory because this would include specifications that require empirical investigation. For instance, the well-being of a child will be different from that of an older person; the differences are empirical. This work aims to provide a framework for a theory by constructing and explaining the relevant concepts. We have already glimpsed at some of the errors to avoid in our account of the concept of well-being. The framework needs to be consistent with the evaluative nature of the concept without being reductive. It needs to explain the relevant non-instrumental values. It should avoid the error of the conception being driven by measurement.

However, before we can embark on providing a framework, we need to identify the concept that we are providing this frame for (Metz, 2013; Campbell, 2016). Before we articulate and argue about conceptions of well-being, we need to characterise the concept that will be at the centre of our investigation. The idea of well-being is the concept of our *being* well in the most fundamental, inclusive or complete way. This means that we are living well in

non-instrumentally good ways in all aspects of our lives, where 'non-instrumentally good' is qualified in what we might call for the moment provisionally *a prudential manner*.

A person's well-being provides themselves and others with reasons for action. To identify the concept, we need to specify the kind of reasons in question. We can start with some preliminary points. The reason in question will be defeasible, that is, it can be overridden by other kinds of consideration. Because of the public nature of concepts, the reason in question will be interpersonal, as Darwall's account implies. Nevertheless, the reason will be primarily first personal in its content; it is a reason for the person with regard to their own life. It is because of this that others have a reason to rationally care for one (Darwall 2002).[18]

When we specify the kind of reason in question, it is usual to claim that well-being concerns 'what is good or bad for a person' and that it is 'an evaluation of the person's life.' However, these phrases are still too broad; we need to narrow them down. We can do this in three steps. First, the reasons in question will be non-instrumental. This implies that the concept of well-being should be distinguished from that of self-interest. This is because self-interest includes cultivation and gathering of the merely instrumentally valuable. So, for example, wealth, pleasure, fame, and power will usually be in a person's self-interest, but we cannot conclude from that they will be constituents of that person's well-being. They might typically *cause* well-being, but that is a different point. Neither can we automatically assume that it is only rational to pursue wealth, pleasure, fame and power insofar as they bring or cause well-being.

Second, well-being-defining reasons will be concerned with the quality of the person's life but not *qua* some role or social position. Therefore, they are different from the judgment that a person's life is going well as an artist, or as a designer or as a mother. A person's life can go well *qua* these regards without it going well as a life *per se*. Indeed, they might involve a sacrifice of well-being (as well as of self-interest). Thus, one's life going well in these regards doesn't constitute well-being. Of course, again, one's life going well *qua* some role or social position might typically *cause* one well-being, but that is a different point. In a similar vein, one might evaluate a person's life with regard to its success. However, for similar reasons, this won't be a constituent of well-being either. These points also mean that concepts such as 'enviable' 'admirable' won't necessarily track well-being because they might be tracking some other kinds of desirable features that a life might have.

A more delicate point: we might evaluate a person's life in terms of its achievements: whether they are achieving their important goals. And arguably this is a component of well-being.

Third, in summary, well-being concerns how well "my life is going for me", as the person whose life it is and not *qua* or with respect to criteria of evaluation outside one's living it as such. This implies that the concept of well-being isn't about specific events in one's life. For example, if I trip over or get embroiled in an ugly dispute or get confused in an argument, then such events might cause me ill-being but they won't constitute it *per se*. To

constitute ill-being, they would have to be part of a pattern such that they form part or an aspect of one's way of being. The concept of well-being concerns the quality of my life as lived concerning my *being* well. In reply to the question "What does it mean for a person to be well?", we need to answer the question: "What does it mean for a person to be?". This is an important clue as to how to proceed with a substantive analysis. [19]

From this set of claims, we can derive some implications that will guide our investigation. Foremost, the account ought to specify the relevant kinds of non-instrumental value. This imposes an important constraint that we will examine in Chapter 2, which is that we shouldn't instrumentalise ourselves. It also entails that the components of well-being shouldn't themselves be harmful as we shall see in Chapter 7.

Furthermore, the framework ought to include all the relevantly value-making facets or aspects of human life. Our being well should include our being well physically, emotionally, cognitively, relationally, identity-wise and spiritually. This means that there shouldn't be some aspect of human life that is omitted from the account. The resulting framework ought to be complete, with nothing significant missing.

Additionally, because we are investigating what constitutes *being* well, the account should reflect the holistic nature of human life. For this reason, we used the word 'aspects' rather than 'components' or 'parts' when discussing well-being. Usually a component can exist on its own, like an atom. Aspects can't exist in this way; they are abstractions from a totality. The different facets of well-being described in this treatise aren't separable except in account. For example, self-consciousness isn't like a layer that sits on top of awareness or consciousness. Rather, it permeates and modulates it. Likewise, appreciative awareness isn't something separate from one's activities and experiences. In short, the facets of well-being aren't separable components; they are aspects.[20]

In this work, we will focus on four or five aspects of human life, which we shall argue capture the required entirety in the desired way. Let us start with the first four.

First, our lives comprise various experiences, activities and processes that partly constitute a human life. By 'experiences', we mean, for instance, the experience of going to a fair or that of preparing for an exam. These are things that happen to one. By 'activities' we include actions, but also the complex nesting of actions. For instance, digging the soil is an action, but it is part of the larger activity of gardening. The activity of reading a book is contained in that of understanding a subject-matter, which is itself incorporated in the broader activity of studying for a degree. By 'processes' we mean even broader sets of activities and experiences. For example, one of the processes of human life is to fall in love (and out of it!). Another process of human life is to grow older.

Let us call this overall aspect of well-being, 'the level of activities'. Part of what well-being is must be characterised at this level. A description of well-being must concern what a person's life consists in such as what the person experiences and does. For example, if a person is seriously ill and cannot go out of the house, then this is relevant to their well-

being at this first level. Likewise, a person of limited material resources would likely be deprived at this first level (This is the topic of Chapter 3).

Second, we are aware of those constituents of a life in ways that can be more or less appreciative of the valuable nature of those experiences, activities or processes. As we undergo an experience or undertake an activity, we are conscious of our actions and what they are directed towards. Let us call this 'the level of awareness'. Part of the specification of well-being must be at this level. A description of well-being must include how a person is aware of their experiences, activities and processes, and the related objects. A person's awareness can be of lower or higher quality. For example, if I am attentive to and absorbed in what is good about the activity that I am engaged in, then *ceteris paribus*, my well-being will be greater than that of a person who isn't. At this level, well-being is about how we are aware of the world around us including our activities. Put simply, such awareness should be appropriately appreciative. Such appreciation will involve one's emotions and moods including happiness. From the phenomenological point of view, the quality of one's life depends on what one pays attention to and under descriptions. By appreciating appropriately the value of one's activities etc., one can construct a phenomenological world that constitutes one's being well (See Chapter 4). Any account of well-being must be concerned with this level of human life: the quality of awareness with which the person attends to the activities of their life. For instance, a person who is seriously ill may be very anxious about their health and, as a result, unable to appreciate the limited activities that they can engage in.

Third, the activities (etc.) that partly constitute a life are essentially relational in nature. In our experiential and active life, we are always interacting with things and persons beyond ourselves. The meanings of our everyday actions concern especially other persons. This implies that to describe the well-being of a person, we must characterize their relations with the world around them, and especially with other persons. In a sense that has yet to be explained, other people can become part of our lives. Any account of well-being must include this aspect of human life. Without it, a characterization of well-being would be essentially incomplete.

Fourth, in these experiences, activities and processes, we are aware of ourselves; we are self-conscious. As we shall see, self-consciousness is not a single phenomenon. However, in terms of well-being, this dimension may be regarded as one's relationships to oneself. This is another ineluctable aspect of human life that needs to be included in any account of well-being.

So far we have presented four aspects of human life that any account of well-being must include. These four aspects are structurally constitutive features of any human life that are evaluative necessary in the requisite sense. They are structural features of living that are potentially good-making in the relevant way. They are something like the *a priori* forms of well-being.

To characterise human well-being, in each case, we need to describe a set of non-instrumentally valuable states of being and specify the relevant criteria. Additionally, the

four features require irreducibly different criteria of evaluation, and therefore they are genuinely independent from each other, even if they causally feed into each other in synergetic ways. Thus, when we specify the relevant criteria for each of the four aspects of being human, we will be close to grasping the required framework. Furthermore, if there are no other necessary and structurally constitutive features of a human life that are genuinely independent (i.e. that can't be reasonably subsumed under one of these four) then we have all the elements for a complete framework. Have we left out something essential and structurally constitutive? If the answer is 'no' then we have all the elements for a complete framework.

Let's remember that the above features are supposed to be four general aspects of human life. They are separable only abstractly or in thought. As I eat my food in a restaurant with my friends, my actions constitute the first level. Thank goodness, I am conscious of the food I eat, and of the activity of the eating. That is the second level: my awareness can be of better or worse quality. In eating, I am in relations to the other people around me, and to the food. The quality of these relations constitutes the third level. While I am eating, and being with my friends, I am conscious of myself in many ways, including as someone doing those things. Self-awareness constitutes the fourth level of well-being. These four aspects or levels are intertwined with each other in everyday life. We distinguish them because in each case, the criteria relevant for well-being are different.

We put forward four, but is there a fifth? This question is difficult to answer now because we haven't even been through the four criteria, and therefore we cannot assess whether putative candidates for a fifth structurally constitutive aspect of human life are already included within the four or not. We need to understand the four before we can assess whether there is a fifth.

The next chapter will propose what might appear to be a distinct fifth candidate. This is the general idea that we shouldn't instrumentalise ourselves. A person's well-being is diminished when one instrumentalises oneself or parts of one's life. For instance, life's activities typically involve having purposes, and well-being will depend on whether one instrumentalises one's activities to those purposes or goals. This suggestion needs some explanation and work. Hence, we shall dedicate a whole chapter to it.

[1] Mackie 1999 assumes that for claims about something to be valuable or good to be true, there must exist values as Platonic entities. In other words, objective claims about what is valuable must be absolute and cannot be relational. This tendency to confuse absolute with objective and subjective with relational is criticized by McDowell 1998. In other words, there can be objectively true claims about what is valuable that aren't absolute. Objective claims don't need to be absolute. See Thomson 2002a and 2002b and also Le Bar 2013.

[2] "Theory tells us that well-being components or dimensions will assume different priorities in different countries, depending on their levels of achieved wellbeing, different cultural priorities and so on" (McGillivray and Noorbakhsh 2004: 15). That different cultures in fact value differently doesn't imply difference in what is valuable.

[3] Tiberius and Plakias 2010 seem to confuse subjective theories in this sense with hedonist and desire satisfaction based theories. We need to separate a) what counts for well-being is dependent on the subject's positive attitudes or what they value from b) that pleasure and pain and/or that desire satisfaction might matter non-instrumentally for well-being. The first is akin to a meta-ethical subjectivist claim, which we will examine shortly. The second is a substantive normative claim about well-being which can be made within an objectivist framework.

[4] In our later work, we added 'becoming well' to this list.

[5] This includes whether a person feels satisfied with aspects of their life.

[6] Seligman 2012 (page 29) says positive psychology is about what we choose for its own sake. Notice that this is descriptive and not normative.

[7] Even if we can so measure it.

[8] For the purposes of this discussion, we are not distinguishing 'evaluative' and 'normative': both affirm reasons for action.

[9] By 'those values', we mean the non-instrumentally valuable aspects of work.

[10] As a technical but important aside, one should distinguish between the intrinsic and the non-instrumental value of an activity. 'Non-instrumental' indicates that the activity is valuable for its own sake; 'intrinsic' indicates that the valuable features of the activity are non-relational. By distinguishing them we allow that the non-instrumental value of an activity need not be intrinsic; it could be relational.

[11] This isn't the idea that we should a mix of both objective and subjective indicators of well-being. Indicators pertain to how to measure rather than what is measured.

[12] Academically, this position is called 'non-cognitivism.'

[13] Technical aside*:* The view that "X is good." reduces to "someone values X." is closely related to meta-ethical subjectivism, the position that value claims express attitudes rather than state desirability. They are not identical, but there is a plausible case that the first entails the second. Here is why: if "X is desirable." means that someone values X, then it is not really an assertion that can be true or false. It is an expression of an attitude. Note, however, that the reverse doesn't hold: "A values X." (a claim about A) does not entail "X is desirable." (a claim about X). In short, reducing value claims to claims about what people value amounts to a form of meta-ethical subjectivism.

[14] For present purposes, we can collapse the second and third senses. However, it is important to keep them separate because of the prevalence of understandings of subjectivity that ignore intentionality. This point will be important for chapters 3, 4 and 6.

[15] This doesn't imply a Cartesian view of the inner.

[16] In contrast, the objective measures of well-being are those which are not subjectively self-reported, such as income levels, health, and family life conditions. Of course, these objective markers aren't definitional of well-being even if they are reliable indicators.

[17] Evaluations are relative to some criterion or set of criteria. In other words, we should not say 'X is better than Y' *simpliciter* because there must be some criterion with respect to which this is true. It may be false with respect to other criteria. In effect, this means that 'better' and 'worse' judgments are description-relative.

[18] One has reason to rationally care for things apart from the well-being (such as things of aesthetic value or truth). However, if one cares *for a person* then there is a defeasible presupposition that *ipso facto* one cares for their well-being (Darwall 2002).

[19] Like the concept of good health, we would expect the concept of well-being to be multi-dimensional, pluralistic and vague.

[20] This point belongs to Kant and Marx.