

| Tomasz Kwarciniński

| On the Importance of the Philosophy of Well-being

Abstract

Objective: A weak approach to well-being policy means that government’s goal should be to choose policies that make people better off over those that make them worse off, with other things being equal. The question is what kind of underlying assumptions should be fulfilled to achieve this goal. In particular, do policymakers have to agree on some substantive theory of well-being, like hedonism or objective list theory, or persist in choosing the formal preference satisfaction theory of well-being? According to Haybron and Tiberius (Well-being Policy: What Standard of Well-being?, “Journal of the American Philosophical Association” 2015, vol. 1, no 4), we can avoid raising such questions by drawing a strict distinction between the varieties of concepts or theories of well-being and policy processes aiming at promoting the well-being of citizens. They claim that such policies are “justified only when they are grounded in the conceptions of the well-being of those on whose behalf policy is being made”, and call this approach “pragmatic subjectivism” (p. 713). From their reasoning it follows that policymakers need not develop the appropriate concept of well-being, but can leave it to citizens to choose. The paper examines Haybron and Tiberius’ proposal and defends the claim that while theoretically we can avoid discussing the concept of well-being when we follow pragmatic subjectivism, we cannot do this in practice.

Research Design & Methods: The paper uses an argument analysis.

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Findings: One way or another we will have to move in the direction of purely formalistic preference satisfaction theory or some substantive approaches like hedonism or objectivism. If we do not want to take for granted the incoherent intuitive concepts of well-being people hold, and because “well-being” is a normative concept, we have to develop philosophical theories of well-being that openly reveal their strengths and weaknesses.

Implications/Recommendations: To facilitate the process of political decision-making, philosophically informed measures of well-being are needed. To a certain extent, those measures already exist, and they are widely applied by policymakers, e.g., GDP per capita, the Human Development Index or various happiness / subjective well-being indices. However, they seem to be either insufficient or purely philosophically informed.

Contribution: The paper contributes to the development of the analysis of well-being and measures its philosophical underpinnings.

Keywords: well-being, well-being measures, pragmatic subjectivism, hybrid well-being.

JEL Classification: I31, I39.

1. Introduction

“Well-being is what is achieved by someone living a life that is good for him or her” (Tiberius 2014, p. 7110). Well-being, therefore, is something that is non-instrumentally good for people, something which is in their interest. Should governments treat citizens’ well-being as a goal? A weak approach to well-being policy means that government’s goal should be to choose policies that make people better off over those that make them worse off, with other things being equal. The question is what kind of underlying assumptions should be fulfilled to achieve this goal. In particular, do policymakers have to agree on a substantive theory of well-being, like hedonism or objective list theory, or should they continue to rely on the formal preference satisfaction theory of well-being?

According to Daniel Haybron and Valerie Tiberius (2012, 2015), we can avoid raising such questions by making a strict distinction between the varieties of concepts or theories of well-being on the one hand, and policy processes aiming at promoting the well-being of citizens on the other. They maintain that such policies are “justified only when they are grounded in conceptions of the well-being of those on whose behalf policy is being made”, and call this approach „pragmatic subjectivism” (Haybron & Tiberius 2015, p. 713). Consequently, policymakers do not have to develop an appropriate concept of well-being, but can leave it up to citizens.

This paper analyses Haybron and Tiberius’ proposal and defends the notion that we should not avoid discussion of well-being. If we do not want to take for granted the incoherent intuitive concepts of well-being held by people (including policymakers), and because “well-being” is a normative concept, we have to

develop philosophical theories of well-being that explicitly examine their strengths and weaknesses. What is more, to facilitate political decision-making, measures of well-being informed by philosophy are needed. All things considered, there are at least three reasons that well-being philosophy is important. First, it allows us to test our everyday intuitions regarding the concept of well-being. Second, it facilitates critical investigations of existing well-being policies and measures. And third, it is essential in justifying new alternative measures of well-being.

In order to show the importance of philosophical investigations regarding well-being policy, I begin with a brief overview of existing measures of well-being in economics and their philosophical justifications (section 2). Section 3 examines the contemporary state of well-being investigations revealed by pragmatic subjectivism, and the central assumptions of this theory. Section 4 presents objections to pragmatic subjectivism. The final section proposes an alternative concept of well-being, called compatibilism.

2. Pluralism of Well-being Measures

More than one concept of well-being is considered with respect to economic policy. As Alexandrova (2017, pp. XXXV–XXXVII) points out, at least three constructing concepts of well-being exist: preference satisfaction, quality of life, and national well-being. Each of these can be operationalised by various measures and philosophical justifications¹. For instance, preference satisfaction is a subjective view (philosophical justification) measured by GDP, GNP or household income and consumption. Quality of life is based on objective list theory and can be measured by the Human Development Index. Finally, national well-being can be justified by Haybron and Tiberius' pragmatic subjectivism and measured by the Social Progress Index or the OECD's Better Life Index, to name two.

Before turning to the strengths and weaknesses of pragmatic subjectivism, consider the two most well-known justifications of economic well-being: preference satisfaction theory and objective list theory. As Daniel Hausman (2012, p. 80) rightly states, economists favour preference satisfaction or desire fulfilment theory² for many different reasons. Foremost among them is that economists are accustomed to the idealizing assumptions that individuals are self-interested and perfectly well-informed. The second reason is a form of epistemic and philosophical modesty. Rather than attempting to say what is good for people, econo-

¹ It is also true for other social sciences. Alexandrova (2017) calls it “construct pluralism”.

² Philosophers tend to speak about desire fulfilment rather than preference satisfaction, while economists usually distinguish between desires and preferences, and favour the latter in order to achieve comparative evaluations of the available options.

mists let people speak for themselves via preferences. The third factor that leads economists to identify well-being with preference satisfaction is their aversion to paternalistic policy. They pay a great deal of attention to individual autonomy. Moreover, the last reason, even if some economists are willing to believe that well-being is a desirable mental state in the form of happiness, they might argue that the best way to promote happiness is to satisfy people's preferences. All in all, economists are mostly willing to connect personal choices with their preferences, and further with their utility or well-being. Thus, the higher GDP per capita, the larger the range of choices available will be, and the greater the number of preferences fulfilled. The most significant failure of this theory is that it ignores the problem of preference formation. Consequently, one's preferences can be fulfilled not because they live in favourable conditions, but because they have adapted to unfavourable circumstances. Therefore, overcoming adaptive preferences is one of the most important challenges for preference satisfaction theory.

Objective list theory, which the Human Development Index justifies, is based on Amartya Sen's capability approach. According to Sen (2005), personal capability is defined as a set of valuable "doing" or "being" – that is, what the individual is able to do or to be. Consider this in the context of owning a car. It is not only important that a person possesses a car (commodity) and drives it (functioning). Their personal characteristics (e.g. health), the natural and social environment (e.g. distance to work, income) and their ability to use a car when they need and want it (capability) are also important considerations. Sen is convinced that establishing a complete, all-purpose useful list of human capabilities is impossible and unnecessary. Depending on our particular objectives (e.g., poverty eradication or gender inequality prevention), when we look for the most important capability set, we always have to rely on the process of public deliberation. Martha Nussbaum, who has also made important contributions to capability approach, takes a different view. According to her, there are fundamental human capabilities related to life, health, relationships, etc. All of them secure personal autonomy and dignity, and are therefore universally important. That leads her to propose a list of central human capabilities, comprising ten categories: 1) life, 2) bodily health, 3) bodily integrity, 4) the senses, imagination and thought, 5) emotions, 6) practical reason, 7) affiliation, 8) other species, 9) play, 10) control over one's political and material environment (Nussbaum 2003, pp. 41, 42).

Even if objective list theory seems reasonable because it protects us against adaptive preferences, we must be cautious not to fall into the trap of "Platonism". As Nussbaum put it, "Platonism" in this context is a point of view according to which "(...) the fact that people desire or prefer something is basically not relevant, given our knowledge of how unreliable desires and preferences are as a guide to what is really just and good" (Nussbaum 2000, p. 116). Thus, we can be overly

paternalistic and ignore personal autonomy. Does pragmatic subjectivism manage to avoid adaptive preferences and the problem of ignoring autonomy?

3. Shared Diagnosis and Assumptions

The present investigation of pragmatic subjectivism begins with a look at the convincing aspects of the theory. Two things are particularly worth noting here: first, an analysis of the discussion surrounding the concept of well-being (mainly within economics) through the lens of pragmatic subjectivism and, second, some of the assumptions underlying this theory.

Diagnosis

First and foremost, proponents of pragmatic subjectivism give an appropriate diagnosis of the contemporary state of the discussion within economics with respect to measuring well-being. Haybron and Tiberius point out that economic approaches usually eschew direct concern of well-being because economists, following Lionel Robbins' criticism, are convinced that well-being is both non-measurable and incomparable between persons. Instead, they tend to favour aggregate measures such as GDP, which they maintain is a good proxy for people's preference fulfilment. What is more, Haybron and Tiberius provide interesting insights into some economists' reluctance to carry out welfare enhancing policy. "We suspect – Haybron and Tiberius claim – that much of the animus toward well-being policy (WBP) in some economic circles owes, not to the emphasis on well-being, but the particular conceptions or metrics of well-being endorsed by many promoters of 'well-being' policy – the focus on promoting mental states like happiness, for instance" (Haybron & Tiberius 2012, pp. 5–6).

A desire to avoid jumping into other people's head leads economists to focus on empirically available choices (revealed preferences). In consequence, they ignore the values behind personal preferences, which determine what people really care about. "Whereas values embody what you care about, your priorities constitute a working ordering of where to put your efforts. A person could have good values but (...) bad priorities" (Haybron & Tiberius 2012, p. 10). Information about values cannot be inferred from choices and preferences. Disregarding evidence about personal values and insisting that their choice behaviour must be the sole indicator of what is good for them also poses a risk of becoming paternalistic. This kind of accusation is usually raised against the objective view of well-being. Haybron and Tiberius claim that in principle there is no paternalism in objective approaches to well-being, e.g., objective list theory. "Objectivism about well-being is entirely

consistent with any plausible principles of respect for persons” (Haybron & Tiberius 2012, p. 7).

As we have seen, a central issue for Haybron and Tiberius is to respect people and avoid paternalism. However, they are also aware that people are sometimes willing to tolerate ideas not in line with their values. For instance, one can adapt to life in poor conditions, forming their preferences accordingly, and not seek to improve the situation. Such cases reveal that preferences are too malleable and unstable to form a proper normative guide for resource allocation. Thus, Haybron and Tiberius describe the second concern regarding well-being policy, the problem of preference adaptation. They confirm that two main challenges for well-being theory and policy include: 1) respecting people (i.e., avoiding paternalism), and 2) overcoming preference adaptation.

Assumptions

In my view, Haybron and Tiberius diagnose well-being theory and policy accurately. They also based their solution (i.e., pragmatic subjectivism) on relatively sound assumptions. Again, it is essential to them that people be shown respect: “Persons must be treated with respect, in ways that acknowledge their status as an autonomous agent having sovereign authority over their personal affairs” (Haybron & Tiberius 2015, p. 716). They call this assumption the “agent sovereignty principle”.

Another set of assumptions focuses on policy-making and consists of weak welfarism and the principle of justifiability. Weak welfarism states that “(...) governments should, at least sometimes, consider the impact of their decisions on the well-being of their citizens (...)” (Haybron & Tiberius 2015, p. 713) in contrast to strong welfarism which requires that promotion of well-being has to be a sole goal of public policy (Sumner 2003, p. 223). Justifiability principle demands that policy which is aimed at enhancing people’s well-being should be “(...) justifiable to the intended beneficiaries, in the sense that they would consent if moderately well-informed and reflective (...)” (Haybron & Tiberius 2015, p. 720). However, it can raise concerns regarding the status of this consent, whether actual consent is required or a merely hypothetical form is sufficient.

The final group of plausible assumptions concerns the proper approach to well-being theory, which may be treated as the basis for well-being policy. First of all, such a theory should be incompatible with both preference satisfaction metrics of well-being, and maximization of aggregate happiness understood in terms of seeking pleasure and avoiding pain (Haybron & Tiberius 2012, p. 20). The weaknesses of both approaches justify this incompatibility requirement. The proper theory should, then, be sensitive to personal values because “(...) values represent what people see as contributing to the good life for them (...)” (Haybron & Tibe-

rius 2015, p. 724). Finally, a government should employ pluralistic measures of well-being, beyond GDB and subjective well-being (SWB) (Haybron & Tiberius 2012, p. 21).

4. Some Issues with Pragmatic Subjectivism

Aside from the right diagnosis and the set of plausible assumptions lying behind pragmatic subjectivism, this theory raises serious concerns. Answering these three questions is particularly important: What is “practical subjectivity”? Can we get epistemic access to “personal standards”? How important are philosophical theories of well-being in practice?

What Does “Practical Subjectivity” Mean?

Haybron and Tiberius (2015, p. 714) explain that “Public decision-making procedure regarding well-being should be subjective in practice, whether or not well-being really is subjective”. This means that pragmatic subjectivism differs from substantive subjectivisms such as preference fulfilment or happiness approaches, and is generally neutral concerning all possible theories people hold of well-being. Whatever personal well-being is, it is not government’s role to judge if one concept (e.g., preference satisfaction) is better than another (e.g., objective list theory). According to Haybron and Tiberius, a government that favours, for instance, a subjective theory of well-being has to claim that some of its constituents, e.g., Aristotelians or Thomistic Catholics are wrong or make mistakes regarding their concepts of well-being (Haybron & Tiberius 2015, p. 718).

To avoid this conclusion, Haybron and Tiberius suggest that pragmatic subjectivism is neutral. In their words, “Pragmatic subjectivism resembles liberal neutrality – the idea that the state should be neutral among rival understanding of the good – in acknowledging the importance of people’s conception of their own good and in enjoining governments not to take sides regarding ideals of the good life” (Haybron & Tiberius 2015, pp. 719–720). Practical subjectivity only means that whatever personal concept of well-being is used (subjective or objective), the public policy which aims to improve their well-being should be carried out according to these personal – and therefore subjective – standards.

A primary concern is that liberal neutrality is not really neutral, while pragmatic subjectivism is entirely free from substantive claims regarding the theory of well-being. Consider the liberal claim that government should be neutral concerning citizens’ own concepts of good. Is this statement not itself a proclamation of some specific concept of good? That it will be good for people if the government refrains from promoting any specific concept of a good life. At the

same time, however, it promotes a liberal way of life and discourages possible alternative options (e.g., a communitarian concept of common good) (Walzer 1994, Kwarciański 2010). This attitude is accompanied by faith in the free market as a universal means of distributing scarce resources (Sandel 2012, Kwarciański 2016). Thus, policymakers treat some of their citizens as people who are wrong or at least make mistakes regarding the concept of a good life after all. Similarly, pragmatic subjectivism also has some substantive content. In fact, Tiberius places value-based theory among other internalist theories of well-being.

According to internalist theories, personal well-being "(...) is determined by features of the individual well-being subject" (Tiberius 2015, p. 17). The main difference between the subjective and internalist theory of well-being is this: the former defines well-being regarding personal attitudes (e.g., desires, life satisfaction), while the latter can treat well-being as depending on the subject's nature perceived more broadly (i.e., not exhausted by personal attitudes). For instance, value-based approaches are internalist, which focuses on either objective or subjective values, the pursuit of which constitutes the good for the person. This theory is also developed by Tiberius who "(...) take(s) valuing to be an attitude that comprises both judgments and emotional disposition" (Tiberius 2015, p. 21).

The core thesis of pragmatic subjectivism is that policymakers should focus on personal welfare values such as health, enjoyment or freedom from suffering instead of personal preferences. This makes pragmatic subjectivism a value-based theory, which means that pragmatic subjectivism is actually a substantive view of well-being. Thus the circularity regarding neutrality is present in both liberalism and pragmatic subjectivism.

Pragmatic subjectivism is involved in some particular vision of good life because it is, indeed, a substantive theory that occupies the same theoretical plane as preference satisfaction theory so roundly criticized by Haybron and Tiberius. Further, treating pragmatic subjectivism as if it were a neutral view on an individual concept of a good life is problematic. It is quite evident that everyone has their own concept of well-being. Accordingly, however, we should not pretend that the government (comprising individual policymakers working as a whole) does not have its concept of a good life of which it strives to convince us. Hence it is not only 1) citizens' standards of well-being (there are probably multiple standards) that should be focused upon, but also 2) standards implemented by the governments, and finally on 3) practical compatibility of these two kinds of standards³.

³ Perhaps we should see governmental standards as meta-standards based on which citizens' standards are somehow evaluated and aggregated.

Can We Get Epistemic Access to “Personal Standards”?

The second concern regarding pragmatic subjectivism revolves around the possibility of policymakers’ epistemic access to personal well-being standards. As Haybron and Tiberius (2012, p. 19) state, “(...) there will often be no canonical representation of what a person truly values or wants”. If this is true, then can we gain knowledge about values held by different people? Besides an attempt to avoid the problem by setting aside the question of “how to determine what people’s values are” (Haybron & Tiberius 2015, p. 730), the authors provide two other answers to this question. They refer to policymakers’ intuition, and they call for a subjective measure of well-being to find out what people think about their happiness or life satisfaction. Both ways are rather unconvincing: The first assumes policymakers to exhibit superhuman benevolence and rationality, while the second presupposes that people always themselves best know what is good for them. What is more, because happiness is usually measured with questionnaires, one way or another, epistemic access to personal standards of well-being is rooted in people’s (policymakers or citizens) subjective experiences.

Since Haybron and Tiberius (2015, p. 722) “(...) think it likely that governments promoting citizens’ values will, in fact, do better at promoting well-being than governments promoting their own views about what is best for citizens”, it is understandable that they focus on a subjective approach. However, preferring citizen’s values above government’s view of what is good for people comes with one serious weakness: governments can be deceptive. Policymakers can try to hide their real views regarding well-being behind the rhetoric of fulfilling their citizens’ personal standards. As Slavoj Žižek recently warned us, there is the “bizarre intersection of research on topics like love and kindness with defence and intelligence interests” which can lead governments to use different strategies (like “nudges”) more to “exploit our irrationalities than overcome them” (Žižek 2018) Today, we cannot ignore the prospect of populist governments pretending to act (and sometimes actually acting) according to the preferences of the majority of citizens, while in fact it is predominantly focused on maximizing the vote-count it will command in the next elections. Seeking to reduce the threat, Haybron and Tiberius give policymakers this practical advice: “(...) policy should focus broadly on things people clearly value – health, happiness, friendship, employment (...)” (Haybron & Tiberius 2012, p. 25).

It seems that, to gain access to personal values, a government has to rely on subjective measures of well-being or create an objective list of goods. One way or another, we have to slip in the direction of a subjective theory of well-being or some other substantive approaches like internalism or objectivism. If we do not want to take for granted the incoherent intuitive concepts of well-being held by people, and because “well-being” is a normative concept, we have to develop

philosophical theories of well-being that openly reveal their strengths and weaknesses. In particular, we will have to investigate the possibility of choosing a third way – a genuinely hybrid concept of well-being linking objective and subjective aspects of personal experiences.

How Important Are Philosophical Theories of Well-being in Practice?

The last issue I will investigate is the role of philosophical theories of well-being in the context of public policy-making. According to Haybron and Tiberius (2012, p. 9) “(...) prevailing theories tend to overlap significantly on the set of ingredients of well-being, even if they don’t agree on the fundamental explanations for why these ingredients are on the list”. Basing their reasoning on this belief, supporters of pragmatic subjectivism assert that policymakers should pay attention to the set of things people clearly value such as health, happiness or friendship regardless of their justification delivered by different well-being theories. I will call this conviction “the overlapping thesis,” and will now analyse whether it can be justified.

Tiberius (2011, p. 17) seeks to persuade us that since various philosophical theories can justify a very similar list of valuable goods applied in the psychological research into well-being, this fact supports the view that people take care of similar things even if they differ regarding their justification. For instance, one would expect happiness, health and friendship will be on a list of valuable qualities created by a psychologist guided by hedonistic as well as eudaimonistic theories of well-being.

The overlapping thesis, however, solely rests on idealizing conditions like the requirement demanding that desires or preferences should be informed (Tiberius 2011, p. 9). Because our desires can be misdirected, people sometimes want things which clearly hurt them (especially in the long run), it seems to be better to ask them what they would want (or prefer) if they could foresee the bad outcomes their desires may produce. Would you really smoke cigarettes if you knew that doing so would cause your health to deteriorate, very possibly leading to lung cancer or a stroke? We can in fact distinguish our deeper desires or true preferences from present ones. According to John Harsanyi (1977, p. 646) “(...), a person’s true preferences are the preference he would have if he had all the relevant factual information, always reasoned with the greatest possible care, and were in a state of mind most conducive to rational choice”⁴. Thus, this idealizing condition constrains a kind of subjective state which is conceived as well-being. For instance, a mani-

⁴ The critics of “true preferences” view claim, however, that such criteria are too demanding, arbitrary, the procedure based on them encounters lack of transparency, public influences are undervalued, and cannot be assumed that these preferences have to be coherent (Špecián 2019).

fested desire to smoke cigarettes as uninformed desire would be excluded from subjective states enhancing one's personal well-being.

By applying such constraints we can justify the list of well-being ingredients in a way similar to how those postulated by proponents of objective list theory were justified. It is quite apparent that a person who has all the relevant factual information and reasons with great care will pay attention to such areas of life as health, happiness or relationships. Nussbaum (2000, p. 118) even claims that there is some convergence between idealized subjective theories of well-being and objective list theory. This convergence can also be seen in MacLeod's view, according to which most of the well-being theories, philosophical as well as psychological, can be presented on a subjective-objective scale. Theories located in the middle of the scale, dubbed "subjective" by MacLeod, try to incorporate both subjective and objective aspects of well-being simultaneously. Thus, all "subjective" theories postulate similar well-being ingredients, differing only with respect to their justification. Aside from the informed desire approach, of relevance here are Sumner's authentic happiness theory (Sumner 2003) or Kraut's developmentalism (Kraut 2007). Even specific concepts of well-being, independently favoured by Tiberius and Haybron, belong to the category of "subjective" theory. While Haybron's (2008) theory is more objective, as it refers to individual emotional nature, Tiberius' (2011) approach is located slightly more in the direction of the subjective end of the scale, as she focuses on authentic values interpreted as stable patterns of people's behaviour.

Now, to return to the overlapping thesis: It is, first and foremost, at most only partially true. We can agree that well-being theories which belong to the "subjective" category can differ from each other mainly in terms of their justification, and not in terms of the list of specific well-being ingredients. However, we cannot state the same with respect to theories located at the two opposite ends of the subjective-objective scale. Pure hedonism or desire-fulfilment theory without idealizing conditions differs from objective list theory not only in terms of the justification of valuable goods but also in the appropriateness of these specific goods. In fact, hedonists postulate seeking only one kind of good, which is pleasure or freedom from pain. Proponents of desire fulfilment or preference satisfaction theory will not indicate any specific goods at all, claiming that what is valuable for a particular person depends solely on her or his desires or preferences.

Secondly, even if the "overlapping thesis" is true, it does not support pragmatic subjectivism. If all theories generate a similar list of well-being ingredients, why should policymakers refrain from choosing one theory over another. On the one hand, if the justification does not matter, the neutrality of pragmatic subjectivism is useless, too. On the other hand, if neutrality is indeed important, it is because

people have different views regarding both valuable goods and their justification. This leads us to the conclusion that the “overlapping thesis” has to be rejected.

Thirdly, since a personal standard regarding well-being has normative aspects, the question of what people really care about regarding well-being must be answered, as must what people think they should care about (what their values are) and why. To critically investigate answers to the latter normative question⁵, philosophical theories must be invoked, each of which will give us different guidance, depending on the preferred justification of the well-being ingredients.

Fourthly, a really hard practical question is not how to uncover some level of consensus regarding things people clearly value – such as health, happiness, friendship, employment – but how to deal with the trade-offs between these values. This creates a real challenge for a government that would see itself as neutral. Tiberius and Haybron seem to believe that by paying more attention to people’s values and extending the range of well-being indices (beyond GDP) and measurement methods (e.g., including questionnaires), decision-makers will be able to uncover patterns of the well-being embodied in a society. For instance, they give an example of a city planning commission and claim that, according to well-being research, policy-makers can notice that low-traffic zones may foster social networks, friendship, and happiness among residents (Haybron & Tiberius 2012, p. 23). What they do not take into account is the heterogeneity of both society and government, and the possibility that even if some consensus at the abstract level regarding parts of well-being are reached, the interests of various groups and members of society must in practice be balanced.

Consider the example of wearing religious symbols in public places. In France, for instance, there is a debate about whether public places such as beaches or swimming pools should proscribe a particular clothing style. Whatever decision a given municipality may make, it will never be neutral with respect to persons’ well-being. While it increases it for some, it decreases it for others⁶. Neither pragmatic subjectivism nor the overlapping thesis seem particularly helpful here.

In conclusion, it seems to be better not to accept the overlapping thesis, but instead of depreciating the differences between objective and subjective theories of well-being, to consider the two together. What we should really care about is the compatibility between subjective experiences of being happy and their objective counterparts.

⁵ In fact, this is the only reason why Tiberius admits that we should take seriously philosophical theories of well-being.

⁶ I would like to thank the anonymous referee for drawing my attention to this issue and suggesting the example of wearing religious symbols in public places.

5. Compatibilism over Pragmatic Subjectivism

The critical overview of pragmatic subjectivism presented in the last section allows us to infer the following conclusions. First, treating a government as a neutral institution regarding well-being policy would be naïve. So pragmatic subjectivism's supposed neutrality cannot be seen as a strength. It is not only citizens' standards of well-being but also the standards implemented by governments that must be taken into account. Second, even if a government sought to be neutral, policymakers would face serious obstacles in getting epistemic access to constituents' well-being standards. Ultimately, a government must either rely on subjective measures of well-being or create an objective list of goods. Finally, even if epistemic access to personal standards were possible, we could not assume that people committed to various well-being theories differ from each other only in terms of the justification of valuable goods. Blurring the boundaries between subjective and objective theories of well-being by upholding the overlapping thesis is a rather unconvincing strategy. What we should care about is the compatibility between the well-being standards of policymakers and those of ordinary citizens. To do that, we can look at personal subjective experiences of being happy and their objective counterparts (list of goods), and try to find a way to narrow down the gap between these two aspects of individual well-being.

Two Types of Compatibility

It is evident that compatibility can be achieved when policymakers refrain from claims regarding citizens' well-being and its justification. This type of compatibility is based on government neutrality. However, such an approach is risky and hard to achieve, if not impossible. Another type of compatibility acknowledges that both sides – citizens and policymakers – can act in accordance with their concepts of well-being, but it requires a shared view on at least some of the particular things that enhance people's well-being. The more both sides go beyond their own subjective point of view, the better chance of reaching the goal of common minimum compatibility of those goods that benefit people. Acknowledging that neither a government nor a society is a homogenous body, we can also indicate the common minimum of compatibility between various parts of government and different groups of society.

Taking into account possible conflicts of interest between these groups, it is crucial that decision-making be based on both subjective and objective well-being being measured simultaneously. Because such objective common ground is normative, it can be supported by philosophical argumentation. It is also possible to create a hybrid theory which would combine subjective and objective aspects of well-being. This approach could be sensitive to the issues of adaptation and

autonomy described earlier. What is more, this type of compatibilism differs from pragmatic subjectivism as, instead of being neutral on substantive well-being, it is actually doubly non-neutral. It is so that compatibilism tries to combine both subjective and objective concepts of well-being.

Before moving to a brief overview of a hybrid concept of well-being and a related measure, I will make some additional remarks regarding government–citizen relationships. Building on Karl Popper’s *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (<https://www.economist.com/democracy-in-america/2016/01/31/from-the-archives-the-open-society-and-its-enemies-revisited>, accessed: November 2019), I believe that electing the government that will be based on the best possible well-being theory and whose theory will be the most compatible with citizens’ beliefs regarding well-being is not the most important consideration. Rather, the crucial act is to have an effective means of getting rid of bad rulers, who in preset context are those below the threshold level of compatibility. It is incumbent upon philosophers, among others, to define that level.

HWB as a Measure of Compatibility

As the problem of epistemic access to personal values has illustrated, pragmatic subjectivism refers to a subjective measure of well-being (SWB). In contrast, compatibilism calls for the incorporation of more objective aspects of well-being. One possible way to address this problem is to create a hybrid version of well-being.

To calculate such a measure, we take into account hedonistic as well as objectivistic approaches to personal well-being. The hedonistic approach focuses on personal happiness or life satisfaction, and is a subjective well-being theory (S), while the objectivistic approach belongs to objective list theories (Q) like Martha Nussbaum’s capability approach. The hybrid concept of well-being (HWB) can be seen as a combination of these two factors (subjective and objective) according to the following formula: $HWB = \min(S, Q)$.

Defining HWB as the minimum value of S or Q might yield three possible outcomes: either Q is less than S ($Q < S$), S is less than Q ($S < Q$) or S is equal to Q ($S = Q$). Each of these solutions can be interpreted as follows. If $Q < S$, then someone chooses the goods which are not worth wanting, or she/he adapts to bad living conditions (has less expensive tastes, for example). In such a case their well-being remains at level Q . If, on the other hand, $S < Q$, then the person does not want to choose the goods which are worth wanting or she/he seeks luxury (has expensive tastes). Accordingly, their well-being remains at level S . When $S = Q$, the individual chooses merely the goods which are worth wanting. HWB is an openly normative measure of well-being – that is, it is based on the list of objective goods which are philosophically justified as worth wanting. Attempts have been

made to operationalise this formula using, for instance, data from the European Quality of Life Survey (Kwarcinski & Ulman 2018).

To enhance a person's well-being, two separately justified and independent conditions should be fulfilled: first, an outcome which is the object of personal desire should be worth wanting (an objective condition), and second, the subject should want to achieve this outcome (a subjective condition). Both conditions are independently necessary and jointly sufficient. At this stage, the approach is an exemplification of what Woodard (2015, p. 7) calls a joint necessity model of well-being.

Prioritising Q when it takes a lower value enables us to be sensitive to the adaptation problem. Favouring S when it becomes lower, on the other hand, is response to the problem of personal autonomy. In other words, if you feel very happy (S is high) while your quality of life is poor (Q is low) then your well-being is in fact at level Q . But if you feel really dissatisfied (S is low) while your quality of life is great (Q is high) then your personal experience should have priority and your well-being should remain low. In such a case, nobody should be able to force you to choose the goods you don't want. Thus, in order to highlight your autonomy, in this approach level S will indicate your well-being.

For more clarity, consider a simple numerical example. Assuming the following six scenarios: (1) $S = 6, Q = 8$, (2) $S = 5, Q = 9$, (3) $S = 4, Q = 3$, (4) $S = 6, Q = 7$, (5) $S = Q = 2$, (6) $S = Q = 10$. First of all, the best scenario is (6) because it represents the highest outcome of both subjective and objective well-being, and there is no gap between these two measures. For the analogical reason, the worst scenario is a (5). What is more, comparing scenarios (2) and (3), scenario (2) is clearly better because the lowest number in this scenario ($S = 5$) is higher than the lowest number in scenario (3), which is $Q = 3$. Doubts may arise when scenarios (1) and (4) are compared. That is because the lowest numbers are the same in both scenarios, but in such a case we can take into account the second number and determine that scenario (1) is better. Alternatively, the gap between S and Q may seem lower in scenario (4), making this a better scenario. It is certainly true that the *HWB* does not always allow for the creation of a complete ordering of states of affairs. However, in many situations it can support such comparisons.

We can also consider a dynamic scenario and ask how a possible intervention – leading to an increase in S and a decrease in Q , or *vice versa* – should be evaluated. For instance, let us assume that an intervention in scenario (3) causes Q to increase by 1 point and S to decrease by 1 point, This gives us scenario (3'), where $S = 3, Q = 4$. In such a case, these two scenarios will be equivalent but that does not mean that policymakers should take the same action in both cases. Knowing what kind of well-being measures (S or Q) are lower lead to the proper intervention.

It is important that the *HWB* index can be seen as a measure of compatibility between subjective and objective aspects of well-being. Based on this index, we can calculate the gap between subjective experiences and objective factors of well-being. Policymakers can also tend to minimize this gap and reach a point at which $HWB = S = Q$.

6. Concluding Remarks

Although defenders of pragmatic subjectivism deliver a sound diagnosis and their theory is based on a number of plausible assumptions, there are better ways to justify philosophically pluralistic measures of well-being, including by using the Social Progress Index or the OECD's Better Life Index. Owing to concerns regarding pragmatic subjectivism, compatibilism is better able to justify well-being policy. Moreover, two compatibility dimensions can be highlighted in the context of well-being and governments – citizens' common compatibility level, and aspects of subjective-objective well-being. Because the former refers to a compatibility threshold and a common standard of well-being which are normative, the latter consist of two kinds of well-being theories (subjective and objective). Philosophical considerations, therefore, cannot be avoided.

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O znaczeniu filozofii dobrobytu

(Streszczenie)

Cel: Zgodnie ze słabym ujęciem dotyczącym prowadzenia polityki publicznej w zakresie dobrobytu celem rządu powinno być wdrażanie takiej polityki, która poprawi położenie obywateli, przy innych czynnikach niezmiennych. Jakie założenia muszą być spełnione, by osiągnąć ten cel; w szczególności, czy decydenci polityczni muszą akceptować którąś z substancjalnych koncepcji dobrobytu, jak hedonizm czy lista dóbr obiektywnych, czy też mogą pozostać przy formalnej teorii dobrobytu, która postuluje spełnianie preferencji podmiotów? Zdaniem D. Haybrona i V. Tiberius (*Well-being Policy: What Standard of Well-being?*, „Journal of the American Philosophical Association” 2015, vol. 1, nr 4) możemy uniknąć stawiania tego typu pytań, dokonując ścisłego rozróżnienia między rozwijaniem koncepcji dobrobytu a procesem politycznym mającym na celu promowanie dobrobytu obywateli. Według nich proces ten jest uzasadniony wyłącznie wtedy, gdy opiera się na koncepcjach dobrobytu tych, w imieniu których jest podejmowany. Stano-

wisko to określają mianem „subiektywizmu pragmatycznego”. Zgodnie z tym ujęciem decydenci polityczni nie muszą się angażować w rozwijanie jakiejś szczegółowej koncepcji dobrobytu, pozostawiając to zadanie odpowiedzialności obywateli, w imieniu których działają. Celem pracy jest analiza koncepcji autorstwa D. Haybrona i V. Tiberius, zwanej subiektywizmem pragmatycznym, oraz obrona tezy, że wprawdzie teoretycznie możliwe jest uniknięcie dyskusji na temat substancjalnych koncepcji dobrobytu, lecz nie jest to osiągalne w praktyce.

Metodyka badań: W artykule wykorzystano analizę argumentacji.

Wyniki badań: Subiektywizm pragmatyczny prowadzi do opierania działań decydentów politycznych na substancjalnych koncepcjach dobrobytu (hedonizm, lista dóbr obiektywnych) bądź do stosowania czysto formalnych ujęć dobrobytu. Jeśli nie chcemy opierać koncepcji dobrobytu na niespójnych przekonaniach ludzi, a także ze względu na to, że dobrobyt jest pojęciem obciążonym normatywnie, powinniśmy zmierzać do rozwijania koncepcji dobrobytu otwarcie eksponujących ich filozoficzne założenia.

Wnioski: Podejmowaniu decyzji w zakresie polityki publicznej sprzyja świadomość filozoficznych założeń stosowanych miar dobrobytu.

Wkład w rozwój dyscypliny: Artykuł przyczynia się do rozwoju analizy filozoficznych założeń koncepcji oraz miar dobrobytu.

Słowa kluczowe: dobrobyt, miary dobrobytu, subiektywizm pragmatyczny, dobrobyt hybrydowy.