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BEING WELL AND DOING GOOD

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To my friends.

Table of Contents

Preface ... ii

Abstract ... ii

Enkel sammanfattning på svenska ... iv

List of Appended Articles ... vi

Keywords ... vi

Acknowledgements ... vii

Introductory Chapter ... 1

1 Introduction ... 1

2 General Features of Well-Being ... 3

2.1 Subject-Relativity ... 4

2.2 Welfare Subjects ... 5

2.3 Generality and Specificity ... 6

2.4 Well-Being as a Final Value ... 8

2.5 Ill-Being ... 11

3 Candidate Theories of Well-Being ... 12

3.1 Hedonism ... 12

3.2 Desire-Theories ... 15

3.3 Objective List Theories and Perfectionism ... 20

4 The Capability Approach ... 25

4.1 Core Concepts ... 25

4.2 The Framework ... 26

4.3 Capability Theories and Well-Being's General Features ... 28

5 Presentation of the Articles ... 31

5.1 Combining Philosophical and Democratic Capability Lists ... 32

5.2 Distinguishing Disadvantage from Ill-Being in the Capability Approach ... 35

5.3 Addiction and the Capability to Abstain ... 37

5.4 Well-Being Contextualism and Capabilities ... 39

5.5 Summary ... 42

References ... 43

Preface

Abstract

Promoting well-being is a central concern in both private and public life. Yet, what that amounts to is contested and the disagreements run deep. Some well-being theories maintain that well-being is *independent* of people's attitudes or feelings. Other well-being theories maintain that *only* such subjective experiences matter for well-being. In this dissertation, I argue that varied conditions for doing well or poorly should be the primary focus of well-being analysis, rather than the hitherto persistent parsimony that serves to find a single and universal well-being property. I further argue that well-being analysis should increasingly map existing and novel standards of well-being to their relevant contexts. Such a pluralistic account meshes well with policy-making efforts because it can apply to different settings and prioritisations. The upshot is that I provide an inclusive view where well-being analysis and well-being policy-making become closely connected. Only thereby can we both know enough about what it means to be well and what doing good by others demands of us.

Despite the deep disagreements over what well-being is, a common task lies in identifying what may be called *good-for-making properties*. To perform this task, theoreticians describe a candidate property and investigate its implications for people's well-being. When the described property is present, well-being is attained, and when it is absent, well-being is not attained. For instance, if rational acts are inherently good for people, then people acting rationally amounts to them having well-being. When people are not acting rationally, they would instead be lacking well-being. However, I argue that the theoretical parsimony in describing such a singular property comes at a steep cost. Such theorising tends to misdescribe or fail to identify prudentially good – and bad – conditions in people's lives. Thus, I argue for using a less reductive approach in prudential analyses and evaluations in both private and public settings.

This dissertation contains an introductory chapter and four articles. In section 1 of the introductory chapter, I provide an overview of my argument. In section 2, I do five things. First, I show that well-being is *subject-relative*, meaning that well-being is always present in a life if it is present at all. Second, I restrict the discussion to people as *welfare subjects*. Third, I describe the levels of generality that well-being theorising can take. Fourth, I show well-being's relations to other values. Fifth, I describe the distinction between having or not having positive well-being on the one hand and enduring ill-being on the other hand.

In section 3 of the introductory chapter, I outline the main well-being theories in the philosophical literature. These theories are typically classified as reliant on personal feelings (hedonism), personal attitudes (desire-theories), inherent goods (objective list theories), or human nature (perfectionism). I highlight their strengths and weaknesses, before moving on to section 4 where I describe the conceptual framework I use in my articles: *the capability approach*. The capability approach focuses on genuine opportunities, beings, and doings. In this context, an opportunity to X is *genuine* in the relevant sense when a person satisfies conditions that are jointly sufficient to achieve X if she chooses to. For example, an opportunity to satisfy nutritional requirements is genuine when the person both has access to food and a healthily working digestive system to process it. The opportunities, beings, and doings can be specified in different contexts as needed. Hence, capabilitarian analyses focusing on different opportunities, beings and doings, are available. In my articles, I argue for four things regarding those well-being analyses.

First, I argue that, and show how, expert opinions and public opinions can be reconciled in well-being policy-making situations. Second, I argue that, and show how, prudentially negative beings and doings should be assessed by analysing cases of homelessness. Third, I argue that the capability approach can be used to offer a complementary account to the predominant philosophical analyses of addiction which mainly focus on its descriptive nature. My complementary analysis highlights further targets for policy-making efforts. Fourth, I argue that well-being is context-sensitive. To that end, I bolster the capability approach by refining and defending a view called *contextualism*. Contextualism maintains that more than one applicable well-being concept and standard exists. I defend this view against counterarguments and consequently both contextualism and the capability approach are made more viable.

In summary, this dissertation has two connected but distinct strands. One is methodological and one is applied. It is typically argued that well-being is exclusively *either* grounded by subjective attitudes, *or* by more objective considerations such as human nature. However, this disjunction can be treated as inclusive rather than exclusive, where subjectivist and objectivist grounds can both be used to identify the constituents of well-being. Moreover, I argue that well-being theorising that focuses on salient constituents in different contexts do not need to result in one overarching theory that includes the very same constituents. Instead, a proliferation of divergent theories that specify conditions for doing well or poorly can be concurrently accepted and used. Hence, by using the approach of well-being analysis that I do in my four appended articles, theoretical and practical concerns become enmeshed. Through them, I show that being well and doing good relies on more than what is standardly acknowledged.

Enkel sammanfattning på svenska

I både privata och offentliga sammanhang är välfärdsbefrämjande centralt. Ändå är det inte vedertaget vad välfärdsbefrämjande består i, och djupa meningsskiljaktigheter cementeras. Vissa välfärdsteorier vidhåller att välfärd är *oberoende* av individers attityder och känslor. Andra välfärdsteorier vidhåller i stället att *endast* subjektiva erfarenheter spelar roll välfärdsmässigt. I denna avhandling så argumenterar jag för att flera varierade villkor för att leva väl eller illa ska fokuseras på samtidigt. Perspektivet ersätter en hittills ofta vedertagen reduktionism som ämnar till att hitta en enskild och allmängiltig välfärdsegenskap. Mycket av värde lämnas nämligen outforskat genom att så inbitet fokusera på en påstått allmängiltig och oumbärlig välfärdsegenskap. Jag argumenterar vidare för att välfärdsanalyser bör koppla samman både existerande och nya välfärdsstandarder till lämpliga sammanhang. Ett sådant pluralistiskt perspektiv går ihop väl med policy-arbete eftersom det kan appliceras i olika omständigheter och tillåter olika prioriteringsformer. Därmed ges ett perspektiv där välfärdsanalyser och välfärdsorienterat policy-arbete blir tätt sammankopplade. Endast därigenom kan vi förstå vad det innebär att vara väl och vad som krävs av oss för att göra gott för varandra.

Trots djupgående meningsskiljaktigheter om vad välfärd består i så antas ofta en uppgift om att identifiera vad vi kan kalla för *gottgörande egenskaper*. Teoretiker föreslår egenskaper och försöker sen utforska deras betydelse för vår välfärd. När den föreslagna egenskapen realiseras så realiseras välfärd, och när egenskapen saknas så saknas välfärd. Som exempel kan vi tänka oss att rationella handlingar är inneboende bra för oss. Då gäller att när någon agerar rationellt så realiserar den välfärd, medan när hen inte agerar rationellt går miste om välfärd. Jag argumenterar dock för att den teoretiska sparsamhet som följer av att identifiera någon enskild sådan egenskap medför betydande kostnader. Sådant teoretiserande tenderar nämligen att felkategorisera och misslyckas med att identifiera vad som är gott – och dåligt – för oss. Därför argumenterar jag för att vi bör använda ett mindre sparsamt sätt att teoretisera om välfärd i både privata och offentliga sammanhang.

Avhandlingen innehåller ett introduktionskapitel och fyra artiklar. I avsnitt 1 ger jag en översikt av mitt argument. I avsnitt 2 gör jag fem saker. Först visar jag att välfärd är *subjekt-relativt*, vilket innebär att välfärd alltid innehas i ett liv om det alls realiseras. Efter detta begränsar jag analyserna till att handla om människor som *välfärdssubjekt*. Därefter beskriver jag nivåerna av abstraktion som välfärdsteoretiserande kan läggas på. Sen beskriver jag välfärds relationer till andra slags värden. Sist så beskriver jag skillnaden mellan att ha eller inte ha positiv välfärd å ena sidan, och att genomlida välfärds negativa aspekter å den andra sidan.

I avsnitt 3 av introduktionskapitlet bidrar jag med grunddragen av de primära filosofiska välfärdsteorierna. Dessa teorier klassificeras typiskt sett som beroende av personers känslor (hedonism), personliga attityder (önskemålsteorier), inneboende egenskaper av godhet (objektiva listteorier), eller mänsklig natur (perfektionism). I avsnitt 4 beskriver jag sedan det begreppsliga ramverk som jag använder genomgående i mina fyra artiklar: *kapabilitetsramverket*. Kapabilitetsramverket fokuserar på genuina möjligheter som individer har, samt olika tillstånd av varanden och göranden i individers liv. I det här sammanhanget är en möjlighet till X genuin i den relevanta bemärkelsen när en person tillfredsställer villkor som tillsammans är tillräckliga för att hon ska kunna uppnå X om hon väljer att göra det. Till exempel vore en persons möjlighet att tillgodose sina näringsmässiga behov genuin i rätt mening när hon har åtkomst till mat och har ett fungerande matsmältningssystem. Relevanta möjligheter, varanden, och göranden, väljs ofta utefter behoven i olika sammanhang. Därför skiljer sig ofta välfärdsanalyser åt i kapabilitetsramverket. Jag argumenterar för fyra saker för att rama in just värdet välfärd.

Mitt första bidrag är att visa hur rekommendationer från experter och befolkningar kan försonas i välfärdsorienterade beslutsprocesser. Mitt andra bidrag är att visa hur välfärdsmässigt negativa tillstånd ska beaktas. Detta gör jag genom att analysera fall av hemlöshet. Mitt tredje bidrag är att visa hur kapabilitetsramverket kan användas för att belysa vad som är välfärdsmässigt skadligt med beroendeproblematik. Mitt fjärde bidrag visar att välfärds beståndsdelar beror på olika sammanhang. Genom detta ger jag kapabilitetsramverket stöd genom att vidareutveckla en position som kallas för *kontextualism*. Kontextualismen vidhåller att det finns fler än ett välfärdsbegrepp och fler än en välfärdsstandard. Jag försvarar kontextualismen från existerande motargument, och stärker därmed både kontextualismen och kapabilitetsramverket som ges stöd av den.

Sammanfattningsvis har den här avhandlingen två tätt kopplade men ändå olika inriktningar. En inriktning är teoretiskt metodorienterad, medan den andra är praktiskt tillämpad. Det argumenteras ofta att välfärd grundas exklusivt i *antingen* subjektiva attityder *eller* objektiva betänkanden som sådana om mänsklig natur. Denna disjunktion kan dock behandlas som en inklusiv sådan snarare än en exklusiv, med utfallet att både subjektiva och objektiva grunder kan användas för att identifiera vad välfärd består i. Vidare argumenterar jag att välfärdsteoretiserande som fokuserar på olika saker i olika sammanhang inte behöver bero på eller grundas i en övergripande teori. I stället kan en mängd av olikriktade teorier som anger villkoren för att leva väl eller illa användas samtidigt. Därmed blir teoretiskt och praktiskt orienterade aspekter hanterade på samma gång i mina analyser. Deras resultat visar att vi för att vara väl och göra gott gentemot varandra beror på mer än vad som i regel har antagits.

List of Appended Articles

1. Östlund, Sebastian. (2023c) "Combining Philosophical and Democratic Capability Lists." *Moral Philosophy and Politics* 10, no. 1: 185–201. https://doi.org/10.1515/mopp-2021-0001.

2. Östlund, Sebastian. (2021) "Distinguishing Disadvantage from Ill-Being in the Capability Approach". *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 24, no. 4: 933–47. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10677-021-10232-1.

3. Östlund, Sebastian (2023a) "Addiction and the Capability to Abstain"
Under review

4. Östlund, Sebastian (2023b) "Well-Being Contextualism and Capabilities"
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well-being, ill-being, capability approach, monism, pluralism.

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Introductory Chapter

1 Introduction

How are you? We hear that expression, or say something like it, almost every day. Usually, the expression serves as a kind of greeting rather than as an earnest question to be given a similarly serious answer. It often prompts a polite but brief response such as "I'm well, thanks" or "not too bad, and you?", after which the exchange ends. Nevertheless, we sometimes say it in a different tone of voice, and the expectations change accordingly. For instance, imagine that a friend of yours has recently been beaten or verbally abused. If you were to ask your friend the same question using the very same words, the response is likely to differ. Even a sigh or a shrug would indirectly communicate something different from when a tired colleague does the same after a long day. Similarly, when seeking to improve one's life, one may start spending significant time detailing the pros and cons of different careers, relationships, and habits. Thus, we sometimes take questions about how we are doing suitably seriously.

When we earnestly ask how someone is doing, we are asking about her level of personal *well-being*.[1] The word 'well-being' has distinctly positive connotations. The positive connotations come from well-being typically being considered the *good for* people (cf. Crisp (2006a, 101; 2006b, 621), Darwall (2002, 1), Griffin (1986, 15), Sumner (1995, 767–68; 1996, 20)). My research into well-being is concerned with in virtue of what it is that people are doing as well or poorly as they are. My results relate *what well-being is* to *what we should do* to promote it. Hence, the title of this dissertation serving to reflect these results: *Being Well and Doing Good*.

Whether or not we are well when we respond to questions about how we are, we typically *wish to be well*. Yet, what being well entails is notoriously difficult to pin down (Alexandrova 2013; Huppert 2014, 34–36; van der Deijl 2017a). It is puzzling that we generally wish to be well whilst our best ideas of what that entails remain deeply contested.

We often orient our lives around achieving well-being and helping others close to us do the same. Thus, two reasons for addressing the

[1] In the literature, words such as 'well-being', 'welfare', 'quality of life', 'happiness', 'utility', and 'prudential value' are sometimes used to refer to the same phenomenon while having different connotations. However, the sameness of reference varies between domains. For instance, 'welfare' can concern social systems in, e.g., social-scientific writings. I will primarily speak in terms of 'well-being' in the distinctly personal sense in which it refers to the goodness *for* individuals. That being said, I acknowledge that there are neighbouring uses that are discussed elsewhere as well. Moreover, I will speak of 'being well', 'doing well', and 'living well' as being synonymous with having well-being.

puzzlement arises. From an intrapersonal perspective, we are served by having a decent idea of well-being to guide our practical deliberations, actions, and related assessments. From an interpersonal perspective, morality also plays a motivating role for raising and answering questions about well-being. Here, morality concerns how people should act. In general, people have entitlements to living good lives, or at least have entitlements against living badly. As an example, consider that nearly every conception of the good life involves good health at some level of analysis (Frey 1996, 182–83). Considering this, imagine some person, Perry, who is entitled to healthcare. Perry's entitlement can take two forms. For instance, Perry may have an entitlement to healthcare that imposes obligations on others to provide medical assistance. Alternatively, Perry is not to be interfered with when seeking such assistance. Whether a person is owed healthcare in virtue of her moral status, efforts, or something else, she is entitled to well-being in significant ways. To accurately describe what such entitlements amount to in practice, we need to understand what it means to (not) live well.

Our limited understanding of well-being in connection with the moral claim about people's well-being entitlements matters morally for private decisions and for political practices. Hence, we have both self-regarding and other-regarding reasons to better understand well-being. To that end, I have endeavoured to explore the nature of well-being, and whether it has *one* nature, through a series of methodological and applied articles.

To analyse well-being, I use *the capability approach* introduced in notable works by people such as Sen (1979) and Nussbaum (1987). The capability approach provides a conceptual apparatus for describing and assessing well-being in terms of two core concepts. The first core concept is that of a *functioning*, which is a being or doing that someone realises. For example, a person who is nutritionally satiated has the functioning of nutritional satiation. The second core concept is that of a person's *capability*, which is a person's genuine opportunity to achieve a functioning. For example, if someone could secure nutritional satiation if she chooses to, she has the capability for nutritional satiation, even if she chooses to fast. The capability approach consequently analyses well-being in terms of what people *actually achieve* and *could achieve*. So, the capability approach offers useful concepts for analysing well-being. Nevertheless, it does not impose a particular substantive theory of well-being that must be adopted in a package deal. I adopt it because it offers a clear conceptual apparatus but imposes few substantive commitments that must be accepted as a whole-sale package for prudential analysis. The capability approach offers an evaluative space to make practical use of. Thus, it facilitates in-depth analyses of various cases without necessitating any claims as to their goodness or badness without further argument.

Each well-being theory has its respective strengths and weaknesses. Rather than proposing an overarching theory of what well-being is, supplanting the available theories with some new universal standard, I have a more practicable aim in this dissertation. I set out to show which considerations should factor into our well-being theorising and show how the capability approach can help us do so. I will identify relevant desiderata to improve our understanding of what well-being is. In so doing, I do not assume some theory of well-being and spell out its implications. Rather, I begin with investigating well-being's general features to show what any adequate well-being theory ought to capture.

My research results then connect to the introductory chapter in several ways. The primary findings are provided in the four appended articles of this dissertation. In brief, they are as follows. First, that population level disagreements about well-being can occur and be handled without referencing some single well-being standard or involving illegitimate social choice procedures. Second, that being badly off in terms of well-being is not only about shortfalls of goodness, but also about enduring inherent prudential badness. Third, that being prudentially badly off stems from interactions between various personal, social, and environmental factors. Such interactions can be seen in addiction and can be appropriately analysed by the capability approach framework. Fourth, I argue that prudential goodness, badness, and neutrality are context-sensitive. That is to say, what is good for some subject in some setting may not be good for some other subject, or in some other setting. I show how such a contextualism supports the capability approach without amounting to a view of well-being as being nothing, or as being any- and everything.

The structure of this dissertation supporting these claims about well-being is as follows. The dissertation begins with an introductory chapter which is then followed by my series of articles. The introductory chapter has 5 sections in total. Section 1 is this brief introduction. In section 2, I present the general features of well-being that theories of well-being should cover. In section 3, I offer an overview of the main well-being theories' strengths and weaknesses in capturing well-being's general features. In section 4, I present the capability approach framework and motivate its use in my research. In section 5, I introduce my articles and relate their results to relevant policy-implications. After describing my results, the introductory chapter ends, and the appended articles follow.

2 General Features of Well-Being

In this section, I describe general features of well-being that any adequate well-being theory should capture. First, I argue that well-being always

obtains *in* something's life if and when it obtains at all. Second, I argue that different well-being theories can be concerned with different welfare subjects (human beings, non-human animals, or non-animals). Third, I show that well-being theories can be formulated on different levels of generality and how well-being can be seen to come in different degrees. Fourth, I argue that well-being theories ought to capture constitutive features of well-being rather than merely whatever is instrumentally important for promoting well-being. Fifth, I show that well-being has both a positive and a negative side to it. The subsequent section then details types of theories that try to capture these described general features.

2.1 Subject-Relativity

Different things may be considered good, and the goodness may obtain without qualification. For example, we might think that equality is good, or that nature has inherent value. Well-being seems different in a salient sense. The question about what it means for something to be good *for* someone involves an attributive aspect of well-being. Namely, *a subject, S, has well-being*. Something's being good *for* a person means that it is distinctly about what it is that we have reason to value for that person's sake. For instance, we may imagine a person, Simon, at a family gathering. At this family gathering, Simon's cousin, Carla, recounts how she recently improved her physical condition by preparing for a triathlon. Carla sits across one of the grandpas, George, who recently received a walker to move about. George celebrates Carla's achievements and says he wishes he never took his mobility for granted. Everything else being equal, in terms of mobility, cousin Carla is better off than grandpa George is. And Carla's level of well-being is higher than George's is because it is good for a person to be mobile. Next to George we find one of Simon's nieces, Nel. Nel is abusing drugs to get at least some respite from her intense bouts of mental illness. Nel's brother, Bob, by contrast, has enviable mental health. So, Bob stays sober, wishing his sister Nel the best in the year to come.

If there were no one at the family gathering, there would be no well-being there to assess. Consequently, well-being is considered a *subject-relative* value (Sumner 1996, 20; Hall and Tiberius 2015). That it is subject-relative may seem to imply that it requires some form of experience. However, that is not so. The overarching reason is as follows.

Even though well-being always obtains or inheres in some subject, when it obtains at all, we should not conflate *subject-relativity* with the notion of *subjectivity* (Hall and Tiberius 2015, 176). The often paired-up notions of subjectivity and objectivity are notoriously ambiguous. In this context, a theory of well-being is subjectivist if it requires that a mental state is present for well-being to obtain (Hawkins 2010, 61–62). Mental

states that constitute the positive parts of well-being are typically said to be happiness, satisfaction, or pleasure. Relatedly, the mental states that constitute the negative parts of well-being are typically said to be pain, frustration, or suffering. By contrast, a well-being theory is objectivist if it rejects the described mental state requirement (Bognar 2005, 567). That is not to say that mental states cannot be included in objective list theories. The claim, rather, should be understood as mental states not *being decisive* over what goes on any objective list theory of well-being. Hence, subjectivism and objectivism are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive categories (cf. Sumner (1996, 38–39)). Subject-relativity entails that if well-being obtains, then it does so in some subject. However, subject-relativity does not imply any stance on whether a mental state needs to obtain or not (Varelius 2003, 371–73). Given these distinctions, even objectivist well-being theories will be subject-relative. To illustrate, imagine that nutritional satiation is good for people independent of subjective feelings or attitudes. If that is so, even someone in a coma who receives nutrition is doing well prudentially (in *that* regard, the comatose patient is arguably badly off in others). Whatever well-being is, exactly, an accurate theory of it should at minimum capture its subject-relativity. Thus, well-being theories must not only be compatible with subjects having well-being but make clear how *only* subjects can have well-being.

2.2 Welfare Subjects

Since subject-relativity does not demand a particular view as to whether mental states are necessary for well-being to obtain, we may wonder which entities can be *welfare subjects*. Is it not exclusively things that can, say, feel or desire things? A welfare subject is some entity whose life can go better or worse *for* that entity. It seems clear that people can fare better or worse in terms of well-being. But is well-being only attributable to persons, or where should we draw the line? Do we need to cover all bases?

Let us briefly revisit the family gathering example where people are sharing a meal and reminiscing about previous get-togethers. At some point toward the end of the family's meal, the family dog, Fido, approaches the table begging for leftovers. We then assess that Fido's life goes better *for Fido* while eating those tasty leftovers than it did before then. If some subject can fare better or worse in this way, then it is a candidate welfare subject. Since Fido's life can go better and worse *for Fido*, and Fido is not a human, the class of welfare subjects is not restricted to human beings. In brief, the good for a subject can cover a broader range of beings than human beings (Haynes 2008; Nussbaum 2006, 402; 2011). Does this mean that a given well-being theory needs to cover them all?

When it comes to welfare subjects, intuitions may diverge. Perhaps even a plant's life can go better *for it* by being in the right conditions for growth and reproduction, say. A sunflower extending toward the sun may not experience anything in the way a person or dog does. But perhaps it is better for the sunflower to aim at the sun than to not do so. Recently, even alternative accounts of well-being that can be attributed to entities such as rivers have arisen (cf. Kramm (2020)). Whether such non-living entities can have well-being or not falls outside the scope of my investigation. For current purposes, I restrict my analyses to *personal well-being*. By 'personal well-being', I mean to capture the *goodness for* that applies to individual humans rather than, say, groups or non-human entities. Other concepts and standards of well-being may exist but are orthogonal to my analyses. A complete theory of well-being would take a modular approach. Such a modular approach involves a network of well-being concepts and standards for different kinds of welfare subjects. Thus, my analyses of how people fare and how to do well by them offer potentially inexhaustive but indispensable parts of a complete theory.

2.3 Generality and Specificity

When it comes to theorising about well-being, one may take different stances with regard to how all-encompassing one should be. In terms of theoretical generality, there are two main kinds of well-being theories. Some well-being theories are *invariantist*. Such theories maintain that only one concept of well-being exists and that it only refers to one thing (Alexandrova 2012, 686–88; 2014, 15–17; 2017, 27). Other well-being theories are *variantist*. They maintain that contextual specifications such as *the good for the elderly* or *the good for children* or *the good for non-human animals*, and so on, can involve different prudential phenomena.

Invariantism and variantism can be understood in detail as follows. Invariantism involves two central claims (Alexandrova 2017, 42). The first central claim is that there is only one concept of well-being, which concerns the most general evaluation of a subject's state. *The* concept of well-being, on the invariantist view, has only *one meaning*, which in turn refers to *one phenomenon*. The phenomenon is said to be whatever well-being, essentially, is. The second central claim is that a complete theory of well-being describes well-being both exhaustively and exclusively, i.e., it captures *all of* and *only* well-being. Variantism rejects invariantism's two central claims (Alexandrova 2017, 43).[2] First, according to variantists, the term 'well-being' can express different evaluative concepts in different

[2] Note, therefore, that the categories of invariantism and variantism are not jointly exhaustive. One may, for instance, argue that there are several concepts of well-being that are coextensive. I make use of this finding when discussing counterarguments to variantism in my fourth appended article.

contexts. Second, on the variantist view, the evaluative concepts can refer to different phenomena, for which there is no complete or unified theory.

The question that invariantists and variantists aim to answer is whether well-being is *one* thing. Kagan (1994), Scanlon (1998, chap. 3), Griffin (2007), Alexandrova (2013; 2017) and Campbell (2015) argue that there is not a univocal concept of well-being, but several ones in use. Different concepts of well-being would then serve different functions, which may explain, as Kagan notes, why divergent theories remain. For each of those theories, however, a general feature about *magnitudes* applies. To see what this entails, let us revisit the earlier family example.

Beyond the subject-relativity of well-being, people such as Carla, George, Nel, and Bob can be well in different ways or to different extents. For instance, Nel who uses drugs to mitigate her suffering is worse off than her brother Bob is in terms of mental health. Hence, we see that well-being involves some aspect of magnitude: *a subject, S, has well-being to the extent E*. Nevertheless, Nel may be doing better hedonically after using some substance than Bob does. The aspect of magnitude is what allows us to make prudential comparisons of different lives or experiences.

To make meaningful comparisons between, for instance, Carla who is healthily athletic, and Bob who stays sober, we need some common scale. Such a scale is, following Chang (1997, 5–6), a *covering value*. A covering value allows for comparisons between A and B in terms of betterness, worseness, and equality of value. The comparisons apply to salient examples of A and B, which we may here consider to be lives or outcomes.

It is not clear that there is any scale – covering value – that is applicable in each comparison. Imagine that Nel who uses drugs was a professional athlete up until recently and receives immense pleasure from her drugs. We may wonder if she is better off overall than Carla is who recently improved her physical condition but, say, struggles in many other ways. There are important qualitative differences that we think are relevant when we compare, say, levels of mobility vis-à-vis levels of pleasure. They both seem relevant for our well-being. However, it is not evident whether one of them is more important than the other. Even if we think one might be, we may have reasonable disagreements as to *which* and by *how much*.

Nevertheless, we can make accurate comparisons along different dimensions of well-being such as mobility and pleasure more easily. If well-being is multidimensional, then well-being is a comprehensive value constituted by different things which in turn can be achieved to different extents. By way of analogy, a good meal is a specific and comprehensive thing that involves multiple components. It may involve some proper proteins, a succulent side-dish, and a decent drink. Each part can be better or worse, affecting the meal's overall quality. Similarly, it makes sense to say that: *a subject, S, has well-being of dimension D to the extent E*. So,

we can make significant progress in determining people's well-being by evaluating the dimensions individually – even without a covering value.

In this dissertation, I emphasise the value of merging theoretical and practical concerns. Hence, whilst the statement that well-being is what is good for us may be true, stating as much does not offer much practical guidance. It helps us separate well-being from other things, but it does not spell out the conditions for being well or badly off. For us to have personal and political agency regarding promotions of well-being, conditions for betterness and worseness need to be identified. Thus, whilst arguments about well-being should respect its status as a personal value, they should also be rooted in real concerns. Rather than deducing how a life is going by using a top-down approach where a theory is formulated and then put to practice, I will use a bottom-up approach. I investigate various cases where well-being is at issue. The upshots are findings that increase our understanding of what well-being is and how it can be suitably promoted.

2.4 Well-Being as a Final Value

Well-being is of central moral concern. There are two ways to understand well-being's moral centrality. First, one may consider people's well-being to be distinct from other values such as agency, that all could be promoted for a multi-faceted good life. For instance, one can find it worthwhile to sacrifice one's well-being for someone else's benefit. A struggling single parent, for instance, may decide to sacrifice some of her basic needs if this allows her child to benefit in important ways. It would be better, all things considered, if no well-being sacrifice had to be made to express her agency. A position acknowledging several final values is *pluralistic* (Sumner 1996, 193). Even if other things may have value according to pluralists, well-being is always of significant importance to our lives. Second, however, there is a position called *welfarism* which states that well-being is the *sole final value* (Sumner 1996, 3). By 'final value' I mean 'something worth promoting *for its own sake*' (cf. Korsgaard (1983, 169–70)). Consequently, welfarism is regarded as what is called a *monistic* theory about what is worth promoting for its own sake (Sumner 1996, 186). Other values, insofar as they exist, are non-final values according to the welfarist position (Tiberius 2006, 500). Well-being is thus seen as one of several final values (pluralism), or as the only final value (welfarism).

Whether well-being is one of several final values or the only one, we can broadly distinguish between non-final values and final values as follows. Non-final values are typically classified as *instrumental values*. Instrumental values are means to ends. Money, for instance, is an instrumental value for someone who wishes to secure enough to eat for the day, thereby meeting a basic need (cf. Noddings (2002, 446)).

Similarly, money can help people pay for housing, so that they may sleep comfortably. Nutritional satiation and comfortable sleep, by contrast, are things that people appropriately care about for their own sake. A life goes better for a person, everything else being equal, if she is nutritionally satiated and well-rested. Welfarists maintain that well-being is the sole such end. They maintain this whether well-being consists of many things, such as eating enough and sleeping comfortably, or just one thing such as the pleasure those activities result in. Whether well-being consists in one thing or multiple things can be described as it being unidimensional or multidimensional. By contrast, pluralists about final values maintain that even if well-being is a final value, there are other final values that (should) feature in our evaluations. Whichever of welfarism or pluralism is endorsed, the separation between final value and instrumental value is crucial. A relevant final value may be to be nutritionally satiated, or feeling pleasure, whereas a related instrumental value would be attributed to the person's food. As Dorsey (2012, 144) argues, some things should not be valued as ends. Hence, it is important in this context to be clear on why candidate examples either are or are not properly valued that way. We care about things that are of ultimate value, especially, because they are what is really at stake when considering different ways of living our lives.

Well-being is a unique final value that can be distinguished from values of different kinds. Some values are *personal* in that they must inhere in someone's life. I am analysing personal well-being, which consequently is a personal value in the relevant sense. However, agency can be considered another such value (Sen 1985). In this context, a person's agency is the extent to which she can get what she values, regardless of if it improves her own well-being. A person's well-being and agency can be assessed separately, as on Sen's (1985, 209–10) pluralistic view about final values. Sacrifices to one value can be made for the benefit of the other value, as the earlier example with the struggling single parent indicates. Of course, the child's well-being may be what motivates the parent to sacrifice her own well-being, rather than some abstract aim to promote her agency in some novel way. Still, the parent's agency seems promoted whereas her well-being is simultaneously demoted through the choice to help her child. That well-being is a unique and distinct value does not mean that it has no properties in common with other values, however. In fact, a person's well-being and agency can overlap to some extent. For example, someone seeking to improve her health by going running secures both well-being and agency interests when running. Nevertheless, a person can have different levels of well-being and agency despite such overlaps. Health can be similarly promoted by riding an exercise bike during a pandemic-incurred lockdown. But the person may not value riding that exercise bike, as an activity, for its own sake. By riding the exercise bike,

the person's health, and consequently their well-being, improves. However, their agency is not promoted as much in comparison to when the person could go out running. By running, the person secures two valuable ends (good health, and running), whereas by riding the exercise bike the person only secures one of the two valuable ends (good health). Thus, when assessing the level of value present in different outcomes and lives, it is important to be clear about *which* personal value is considered.

Moreover, personal values are to be distinguished from *impersonal* values captured by, e.g., the proposal that nature is inherently valuable, or that a pattern of distribution of goods, such as equality, is inherently valuable. We may also think of rightness and aesthetics as sources of impersonal value. A world that has no moral wrongdoing is impersonally better in terms of rightness, even if it does not amount to any goodness (for us). Similarly, a world with beautiful art seems to be impersonally better, aesthetically, than a world without it, everything else being equal.

I will build on the notion that well-being is one final value of potentially several other personal and impersonal values of importance. A central reason is that we can decouple *all-things-considered judgements* from *judgements about well-being* (Alexandrova 2013, 309). Consider, again, the claim that exercising in any way is good for you, but exercising in the way you find valuable in its own right is good in another way. We can isolate the value of well-being from the value of agency, much like we can isolate it from considerations of beauty. To illustrate, a person who rides an exercise bike while watching classic movies in an impressively furnished apartment may experience more beauty (at least of certain kinds) than someone who goes running outside in a seriously drab environment. When assessing an outcome, or a life, we do not have to run all these values together and make assessments all-things-considered.[3]

Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that there is some insight to be gleaned from relations between proxies and well-being. For instance, other projects, such as social-scientific ones, may focus on proxies of well-being to measure and to affect well-being. To illustrate, a social scientist may be interested in the number of hospitalisations of some group, such as the homeless people in a city. Here, the number of hospitalisations could act as a proxy for the well-being of a group or its members. By contrast, I aim to analyse the underlying value such proxies are thought to measure and affect. Hence, in what follows, I will not make claims about mere proxies of well-being that may be of social relevance, though some of them will inform my arguments. In them, I restrict my focus to well-being as one important concern and am largely agnostic as to other ones.

[3] For a treatment of all-things-considered judgements the reader is well-served by Parfit's (1984) *Reasons and Persons*, Temkin's (2012) *Rethinking the Good* and subsequent discussions such as those by Kagan (2015) and Temkin (2015). I aim to disentangle differences they tend to combine.

2.5 Ill-Being

As illustrated, well-being is always something that obtains in some life. But, even when well-being is not present in a life in the sense that a person is doing well, we have clear intuitions that there is a distinct difference between not being well on the one hand, and being unwell on the other hand. Hence, it should be noted that how well or poorly one is doing is not only assessed with reference to attained goodness (or lack thereof). Rather, certain things appear to be inherently negative for us (Kagan 2014; Sumner 2020). Any analysis of well-being will be inaccurate if it does not engage, as well, with the negative aspects that make up *ill-being*.

Ill-being is substantively bad in the sense that enduring it is worse than not enduring anything. Whatever ill-being is, exactly, the concept of ill-being allows us to make sense of the idea that whereas some things are worth having (by being positive), and some things are not worth having (by being neutral or of zero value), other things are worth *not* having. To illustrate, we can imagine that feeling pleasure is something worthwhile, and not feeling pleasure is not worth seeking out, whereas enduring suffering is worth avoiding. The absence of what is valuable for us is not enough to account for the negative aspects. Hence, analyses of well-being should involve, beyond what is good for us, also what is bad for us.

There are several kinds of theories being used to capture well-being's general features. As illustrated throughout this section, the general features are as follows. First, well-being is a subject-relative value. That is, well-being always obtains, if it obtains at all, in some entity's life. The second general feature of well-being that I brought up concerns its range of application, i.e., *which subjects* can properly be considered *welfare subjects*. I argued that well-being can apply to more beings than people but made it a point to restrict my philosophical analyses to human beings. The third general feature of well-being is that its nature can be analysed on different levels of generality. This shows that even if more things remain to be said with regard to well-being (e.g., for other welfare subjects), those will be orthogonal to the analyses offered here. Whether we view well-being as *one singular phenomenon* or a collection of phenomena depends, in large part, on how abstract and general we aim to be. I endeavour to focus in-depth on particular conditions for doing well and poorly, rather than breadth of scope. Whatever level we theorise about well-being on, however, I argued that a fourth general feature of well-being is its status as a final value, or as an end. Fifth, well-being has a positive and a negative side which should both be analysed by theories. The available theories range from being about what people's subjective feelings or attitudes are, to ones that focus on wholly objective – mental state-independent – features. I will present these contending theories for

analysing well-being next. In the subsequent section, I describe the capability approach framework and motivate its use in my research.

3 Candidate Theories of Well-Being

Theories of well-being standardly fall into one of two categories. Subjectivist theories maintain that (only) mental states ground what well-being consists in. Objectivist theories deny that they do so. The main subjectivist theories are hedonism and desire-theories, whereas the main objectivist theories are objective list theories and perfectionism. Different versions of subjectivist and objectivist theories respectively diverge in some respects from others in the same type of theory. But the theories of each type share common characteristics. I will now describe these common characteristics, including their main strengths and weaknesses.

3.1 Hedonism

According to hedonists, feelings are central to well-being (Hawkins 2010, 64; Parfit 1984, 4). Hedonistic well-being theories are *internalist* in the sense that they only focus on feeling tones (cf. Crisp (2006b, 623)). When you go to an amusement park and ride a rollercoaster, the ensuing exhilaration arguably makes your life go better for a bit. The reason, according to hedonism, is that the exhilaration feels good. Similarly, when you stub your toe, life seems to take a sharp turn for the worse, at least for a little while. The reason for this is arguably that pain feels bad. Hedonistic well-being theories capture these cases, by holding that only positive and negative feelings, in general or of certain kinds, make up well-being.

Feelings are mental states. Since hedonistic well-being theories analyse well-being exclusively in terms of mental states, they are subjectivist well-being theories. The relevant positive mental states are referred to by words such as ‘happiness’, ‘pleasure’, or ‘satisfaction’. Hedonistic well-being theories also include negative mental states. The negative mental states are often referred to by words such as ‘pain’, ‘displeasure’, or ‘suffering’. If there were no such mental states, then well-being would not exist, according to hedonistic well-being theories. Since only sentient subjects can experience the relevant mental states, hedonistic well-being theories determine that the role of *the experiencer as an experiencer* is what determines her role as *the experiencer as a welfare subject*. It thus captures well-being’s subject-relativity since feelings are always felt *by* someone. Subjectivism and subject-relativity are distinct as I argued above, but hedonistic well-being theories tick both boxes at once.

Because hedonistic well-being theories focus exclusively on how subjects feel, they set clear boundaries for which entities can be welfare

subjects. For anything to have well-being, it must experience, or be able to experience, relevant feelings, if hedonism is true. Non-sentient entities cannot have well-being if hedonism is true. However, human beings can typically feel the relevant feelings. Hedonism is thus a candidate theory of personal well-being in the sense that I am currently exploring.

Hedonistic well-being theories can be formulated on different levels of generality. Some hedonistic well-being theories maintain that there is one single positive feeling that constitutes well-being. There may, however, be different hedonic tones that make up well-being, for which quality and quantity both matter (cf. Mill (2015, 123–25)). For instance, drinking a soft drink might give a person some pleasure, but the pleasure's quality is different from that of listening to music. If there are multiple qualities, not only do the sources of pleasure vary, the pleasures are distinct in kind. By 'distinct in kind', I mean to express that the pleasures *feel different* and thus make up different well-being dimensions. Typically, hedonistic theories are invariantist. Despite different versions existing, only one collection of feelings is taken to matter for any and all welfare subjects.

Following this line of reasoning, we can distinguish between two kinds of hedonism: *broad hedonism* and *narrow hedonism*. Broad hedonism concerns any and all positive and negative experiences (Gregory 2015, 115). Broad hedonism thus does not commit its proponents to any specific selection of relevant mental states. That being said, broad hedonism can be contrasted with narrow variants that detail either pleasure or happiness as good, and pain or displeasure as bad (Gregory 2015, 115–16). Broad hedonism is formulated at a comparatively higher level of generality than the narrow variants are. Common to all of them, however, is that only positive mental states and negative mental states matter in terms of well-being. Broad hedonism encompasses all the comparatively narrower hedonistic well-being theories. But broad hedonism does not offer information about which specific mental states make up well-being.

There is, in hedonism's favour, reasons to be concerned with people's positive and negative feelings. To see why, consider that some psychological mood disorders, such as depression, involve *anhedonia*. Anhedonia involves a diminished ability to feel pleasure or lowered assessments of previously experienced pleasures (American Psychiatric Association 2013, 88, 221). If a friend is depressed and unable to either feel or recall the joys you've shared together, then you would rightly feel sympathy for her. If someone has a life with barely any positive hedonic qualities, that life is worse for that person than it otherwise would have been (everything else being equal). Hedonism attempts to explain why: those hedonic qualities constitutively improve people's levels of well-being. By constitutively improving these levels, I mean that feeling the hedonic qualities *is* to be well. This is different from causally improving

well-being, such as when someone goes to a comedy show seeking the pleasure derived from a set of jokes. In this context, the comedy show is a means to the end that feeling the relevant hedonic qualities make up.

Similarly, hedonistic well-being theories maintain that a life goes badly to the extent that uncompensated pain, displeasure, or suffering, is present in someone's life. Insofar as the negative feelings can be placed on a spectrum from, say, torture to total bliss, trade-offs are possible. However, even if some instances of pain (etc.) could be compensated for by instances of happiness (etc.), the negative experiences are inherently bad for whoever feels them (Kagan 2014, 261–63; Sumner 2020, 421).

As illustrated, hedonic qualities come in degrees. While a person who suffers from anhedonia may be unable to feel any amount of pleasure, most people feel some pleasure for some duration. Recall the example with drinking a soft drink or listening to music. Depending on one's tastes, some soft drinks give more enjoyment than others do. Moreover, tastes in music differ. Someone might enjoy a tangy soft drink significantly more than a sweet one (or vice versa). Similarly, someone might enjoy a local band's rock music a little bit but enjoy listening to the national orchestra very much (or vice versa). Moreover, the longer the positive feelings last, the better the person does. Hedonism thereby aptly captures the magnitude aspect of well-being in terms of intensity and/or duration (Sumner 1996, 88–89). That said, some object that minor pleasures do not last long enough or have the required "depth" to amount to deeper happiness. They conclude that some psychological accounts of happiness and accounts of well-being can diverge (Haybron 2001, 505–6; Feldman 2010, 27–28). Still, hedonists can in principle respond that the essence of pleasure is present. If there is some distinction between psychological happiness and some deeper happiness, then well-being is distinct from that deeper happiness. Hence, hedonistic well-being theories can, to some extent, maintain that pleasures are nevertheless inherently good for us.

In summary, hedonism captures well-being's subject-relativity. It also quantifies over many relevant welfare subjects, namely those who can feel. Hedonistic well-being theories are also available on different levels of generality. Broad hedonism claims that positive and negative feelings exhaust what matters for well-being. By contrast, narrow hedonistic well-being theories also make claims about *which* feelings matter for well-being. Hedonistic well-being theories also have something to say about what magnitudes of well-being consist in. Namely, in intensities and durations of positive mental states balanced with negative mental states.

Hedonism's exclusive focus on feelings faces a serious challenge, however. It has been argued that we do not only care about how we feel but also about what we *actually do*. Nozick (1974, 42–45) famously captured this through an argument about an *experience machine*. The

experience machine is a curious invention. It is a hypothetical device that can make us feel however good we wish and in whatever ways we wish. The mechanism, as Nozick describes it, is such that neuropsychologists hook people up to it, and the machine then alters the people's minds. The machine can make those hooked up to it feel as though they were writing the next great novel, made social connections, and more, without knowing that they are not actually doing any of these things. Furthermore, Nozick asks us to assume that we are guaranteed that the experience machine will work flawlessly without interruption or people to maintain the machine, so that we could all enter it. Moreover, we could, as Nozick argues, be offered opportunities to re-enter the real world to program new scenarios for us to experience in the machine. If hedonism is correct, then the question of whether or not to plug into the experience machine would be a no-brainer insofar as one aimed to promote one's own well-being. Nozick maintains, however, that there are good reasons for not plugging ourselves into this machine. On Nozick's view, there are relevant *desires* we have reason to fulfil beyond experiencing various generated feelings.

Moreover, versions of hedonism that do not distinguish between qualities of mental states, for which intensity and duration only matters, can lead to counterintuitive assessments. We might imagine, as Crisp (2006b, 630–31) invites us to, an oyster whose life lasts arbitrarily long. The oyster constantly experiences some relevant positive feeling, such as a persistent low-level pleasure. The magnitude accumulates to some level that is greater than any level achieved by people whose lives are more complex but shorter. Many find that other things matter beyond minor pleasures added up over time. Human lives involve pursuits of healthy relationships and successful projects, and more. These goals, when achieved, do not necessarily amount to higher levels of positive feelings than the oyster could achieve in the eons it might exist. Nevertheless, they arguably improve our well-being beyond the oyster's. So, something beyond quantity of (at least the low-level oyster-like) pleasure matters.

Hedonism has strengths but also faces challenges that some seek to meet. But for those who contend that mental states are constitutive and non-negotiable for well-being, there is an attractive alternative available.

3.2 Desire-Theories

The experience machine has sometimes been seen as a deathblow to internalist well-being theories such as hedonism (Crisp 2006b, 620). Internalist theories focus only on what *experiences feel like*, i.e., their feeling tones, rather than how *we feel about them*, i.e., our attitudes toward the experiences. How we feel about things, including feelings, brings in another crucial concept in this context, namely that of *desires*.

Desire-theories hold that certain mental states must be present for well-being to obtain.[4] They are therefore subjectivist. However, by contrast with hedonistic well-being theories, the relevant mental states are *attitudes* rather than *feelings*. Attitudes are *intentional* mental states in that they are *directed toward* various things (Sumner 1995, 765–66). For instance, I can have a positive attitude toward raising taxes to help the needy, but a negative attitude toward raising taxes to wage wars. My attitudes are subjective but can connect to states of affairs outside my mind and typically do so. Hence, desire-theories are alternatives to hedonism rather than, say, some novel narrow version of hedonism.

Plausible examples of desire-satisfactions increasing people's well-being exist. For instance, if someone wishes to be nutritionally satiated, then the person's life goes better when she achieves such satiation. Similarly, if a parent desires that her child succeeds, and the child does, then the parent's life seems to go better than it otherwise would. Hence, it would seem that life often goes better for us when we get what we want.

Just like life often goes better for us when we get what we want, life often goes worse for us when our desires are frustrated. Imagine that a person applies for a lucrative and respected job that she really wants. Unfortunately for her, however, another applicant is offered the position. Therefore, the first person's life goes worse for her than her life would have done if she had been offered the job. On desire-theories, it is not necessarily feelings such as pain or suffering that makes lives go badly for people. Rather, it is the frustration of desires. A person may not feel anything resembling pain, but nonetheless fare badly in some scenarios.

One strength of desire-theories is that they give subjectivists tools to avoid the serious challenges posed by the experience machine and the long-living oyster. In brief, desires offer a way for subjectivists to maintain that mental states have a significant prudential role, distinct from feeling-tones and their magnitudes. Let us say that desires are relations between welfare subjects and states of affairs. A person may acknowledge that hooking up to the experience machine would result in much pleasure. Nevertheless, the person may deem it not worthwhile to do so because there are other states of affairs that they more strongly desire to realise.

A person may desire to write *real* novels, build *real* relationships, and *actually* achieve their goals, instead of merely feeling as though they do. Similarly, imagine that a mildly pleased oyster living for eons would eventually experience more pleasure than even the most extraordinarily pleased and long-lived humans do. Nevertheless, people may reasonably desire to reach very high levels of pleasure *sometimes* compared to

[4] Various words describing the same type of theories exist. Other versions include 'desire-fulfilment theories' and 'desire-satisfaction theories' and cognates. I will stick to 'desire-theories' for brevity and uniformity, but the terms are interchangeable for my purposes of analysing personal well-being.

dispersing an even greater amount of pleasure through the ages. Desire-theories can accommodate this by focusing not necessarily only on the number of desires that are satisfied, but on their relative intensities. Desire-theories can thus avoid some of the hedonistic well-being theories' main drawbacks that exclusively focus on what welfare subjects feel.

Besides these comparative strengths, desire-theories are similarly suited to capture many of well-being's general features. For instance, desires do not exist in isolation but are always *someone's* desires. If well-being must obtain in some subject, and desires require a subject, then desires can capture well-being's subject-relativity. In this case, too, desire-theories tick both the subjectivism box and the subject-relativity box.

In identifying welfare subjects, desire-theories fare similarly to hedonism. Just as people feel things, they usually have some desires in favour or against states of affairs. For instance, I would like another cup of coffee if I were asked at most points of the day. I would not, however, be keen on having a heavy meal for lunch nearly any day at all. People might not generally care much about these specific things, but that is not a problem for desire-theories. As long as people have some desires to attain, or avoid, certain things, then they will be considered welfare subjects by desire-theories. What is good for people remains up to them. Importantly, however, this does not make desire-theories variantist. To illustrate, imagine that some person, Dana the desire-theorist, believes that desire-fulfilments are good for people and seeks to satisfy hers. Next, imagine that another person, Harry the hedonist, believes that the balance of pleasure and pain exhausts what matters for well-being. If some desire-theory is correct, Dana the desire-theorist has a true belief whilst Henry the hedonist has a false belief. Desire-theorists are subjectivist by being dependent on mental states. But the mental states only make the *sources* of well-being differ. Desire-theories are invariantist since well-being is considered to be *one phenomenon*, namely desire-fulfilment or (equivalently) desire-satisfaction, with different ways of being realised. By way of summarising, desire-fulfilment is one end with many means.

Regarding welfare subjects, many human beings are at least plausible candidates. However, whether or not all human beings count as welfare subjects depends in large part on how cognitively demanding it is to have desires. To illustrate, many people can differentiate between different things, say, bread and pasta, and desire one more than the other when cooking a meal. And even if some person is ambivalent, other desires are *basic* or *instinctual*. Consider, for instance, desires to meet basic needs for survival such as eating and drinking *anything*. Due to those desires, many human beings will be considered welfare subjects. But desire-theories have a difficult time covering entities that are, for one reason or another, unable to have desires perhaps because of some complication at birth.

When it comes to magnitudes of well-being, both amounts and intensities of desires matter. Everything else being equal, if some person desires to have a successful career and healthy relationships, the person does better the more desires are fulfilled. Beyond this, people can have stronger and weaker desires (Sumner 1996, 122). For instance, someone's desire to cool off on a warm day could be weaker than her desire for eating food after having gone without any food for days. Desires are therefore not necessarily substitutable, as they affect people's well-being differently depending not only on their number but also on their intensities.

With regard to desire-theories and their levels of generality, some versions are more open-ended than others are. For instance, some desire-theories maintain that anything a welfare subject desires, and obtains, makes the person's life go well for her. However, the most plausible versions put up restrictions on which desires should count since some desire-satisfactions do not make our lives go better for us. Imagine, for example, that someone wanted to satisfy as many desires as possible for as long as possible. The person deliberates on this and decides that getting addicted to some drug will ensure that they satisfy desires consistently. However, it is counterintuitive to think that the person thereby increases their well-being (Parfit 1984, 497). Similarly, someone might put itching powder in their shirt so that they can spend all day scratching an itch, fulfilling desires at an astonishing rate. Both people's recurring desires to take drugs and to scratch itches are satisfied. In addition, their overarching desires to live a life filled with satisfied desires are satisfied, too. Yet, neither person appears to be doing prudentially well by satisfying their desires. Hence, desire-theories have a serious challenge to address. The presence of desires, even strong ones, does not universally coincide with well-being once they are realised or well-being loss when frustrated.

Since desire-satisfactions are not universally good for us, some desire-theories maintain that only *informed* desires matter for personal well-being. A desire is informed when a person has full information and rationality, or corresponds to what she *would* want if she both knew all the relevant (non-evaluative) facts and could vividly appreciate them (Hawkins 2010, 63–64; Heathwood 2015, 139). On such theories, ideally considered preferences are those that one has from engaging in deep, calm, clear-minded and error-free deliberation about one's preferences with complete relevant information (Arneson 1989, 82–83). Such desire-theories have gained the most significant support. With these conditions fulfilled, the addict and scratcher counterexamples might be avoided.

However, it is not evident that even informed desires provide sufficient restrictions on which desires count as constitutive of well-being. One drawback of desire-theories arises because desires can go beyond the mental states of the agent having the desire. For example, I may desire

that a stranger that I will never meet or come to think about again has a pleasant day. If this stranger happens to have an altogether pleasant day, my life will be going better *for me* than it otherwise would have. But this is counterintuitive. I will never come to hear of this stranger's good fortune, and it being good has little effect on *my* well-being (Parfit 1984, 468). By contrast, we likely believe that the earlier example where a parent's well-being is improved does so because the parent bonds with the child over successes. Or, the explanation may be that the parent hears about the success, which sparks desired joy. Certain restrictions on what makes desires relevant for well-being may be necessary to make desire-theories convincing (Parfit 1984, 149; Sumner 1996, 125). To illustrate further, imagine that someone living in the year 2000 desires that the *first Friday of February in the year 3000* is a sunny day. If that day is sunny, but the person has passed before it, we are not prone to think that the person's life went better for it. Nor, likewise, are we prone to think that the person's life went worse if the day ended up, say, rainy instead. *Future people* may be better or worse off for it, but not that person. An attitude is a relation between a person and some state of affairs. For well-being, the relevant domain of states of affairs arguably needs to be restricted in some ways. Relevant desires should involve the person's life. Hence, the unconstrained ways in which we can desire other things poses a problem.

Nevertheless, focusing only on desires about our own lives only helps so much. Our well-being can be affected regardless of any desires. Let us revisit the case with the comatose patient as a further illustration. If the comatose patient is given fluids and adequate nutrition, it would be good for her despite no self-regarding desires being present let alone satisfied. Analogously, not being afforded that medical care would be bad for her, even if no self-regarding desires are thwarted. Hence, even though desires about our own lives are often relevant, they do not line up with all well-being promotions and demotions. Desires do not do all the relevant work.

In summary, desire-theories have certain strengths in comparison to hedonistic theories of well-being. They stem from the intentionality of desires – their directedness toward states of affairs. However, their intentionality can, as illustrated, cause issues, such as when desires are about things that make them ill-informed, ill-advised, or unknown to have been satisfied. Since neither non-intentional feelings nor intentional attitudes appear problem-free for capturing well-being, I turn to the competing objectivist theories of well-being. Contrary to subjectivist theories, these do not demand the presence of any mental state for well-being to obtain. Instead, objectivist theories analyse well-being as follows.

3.3 Objective List Theories and Perfectionism

Objective list theories have two characteristic features. First, they do not require that mental states obtain for well-being to obtain (Fletcher 2015, 148). Second, they are enumerative theories rather than explanatory theories (Bognar 2005, 568; Crisp 2006a, 102–3; Sumner 1996, 45–46). This means that objective list theories present things that, when obtained, purportedly make people's lives go better for them. However, objective list theories do not describe some *single* good-for-making property in virtue of which we may understand why these things are good for us.

Beyond objective list theories' two characteristic features, they only have things in common, if they do, by enumerating the same things as constituents of well-being. The listed things appear distinctly positive, such as having achievements, friendship, knowledge, success in one's projects, and more (Rice 2019, 1074; Griffin 1986, 107). It is not necessary for objective list theories to *exclude* mental states. However, it is not those mental states that ultimately *ground* or *determine* what goes on the lists. Hence, it is not anyone's good feeling about X, or someone's desire for X, that determines whether X goes on some proposed objective list.

Objective list theories aim to cover what is good for people without requiring that there is some single thing that well-being is reducible to. Friendship, on objective list theories that include it, is not allegedly good for us because we feel happiness around friends or desire friendship. Friendship is instead deemed inherently good for us as, say, social creatures. Similarly, knowledge, on lists that include it, is not only good for promoting our aims, our happiness or pleasure, or because we desire it. Knowledge is allegedly good for us to have as an end. It being valuable as an end means that knowledge is valuable apart from any effects of having it (Hurka 1993, 5). Hence, the value is *inherent* to friendship and knowledge, on objective list theories, not derived from external sources.

To illustrate, consider the life of a scholar. Such a life ideally involves much knowledge. A world, W1, in which scholars get things right for the right reasons would be better knowledge-wise than a world, W2, in which none of them get things right for the right reasons. Nevertheless, whatever knowledge the scholars have in W1, they may have gone to great lengths to secure it. This could involve staying up late each night reading, only eating fast food to save time, and missing out on developing and nurturing social relationships. Comparatively, they may live more balanced lives in world W2. In W2, they, say, better manage day-to-day activities but fail to do as rigorous work to produce and disseminate as much knowledge as those living in W1. Thus, prudentially, W2 may be better than W1 *for* the scholars, even if W1 is better than W2 is knowledge-wise for them. Even if knowledge is good for people, it is not the sole good on objective list

theories. On those theories, everything does not bottom out in some single aspect of life unlike hedonism's exclusive focus on feelings and desire-theories' exclusive focus on people's desires. Rather, objective list theories enumerate many final values as component parts of well-being.

However, the scope of things that can be enumerated in objective list theories is a potential drawback. On objective list theories, several things are purportedly good for us without reference to some single stable good-for-making property. A good-for-making property could be, say, pleasure. If an experience is pleasurable, then the experience is good for the person to have. The good-for-making property, whichever it is, shows what is allegedly essential to well-being. However, since the enumerated items on objective list theories are distinct from each other and taken to have their value inherently in virtue of what they are, we may wonder how they amount to parts of the *same* value. Subjectivists about well-being may object that objective list theories lack the kind of connectedness that hedonists' focus on feelings and desire-theorists' focus on attitudes offer. The connectedness, here, is to be understood as a common feature of each prudential experience, such as its being pleasant, or satisfying a desire.

Whether it is a bug or a feature of objective list theories that they consist of disparate things is contested. Nevertheless, there is potential to unify objective lists while maintaining a focus on distinct well-being dimensions. By seeking a *perfectionist* grounding of the various things that are listed, a more connected type of objectivist theory is formulated (Sher 1997, chapter 9; Bradford 2021, 587). One may view perfectionist theories as objective list theories with an added component that explains which items should be included in the objective list and thus unifies them.

Different kinds of perfectionism exist. Following Hurka (1993, 4), we can classify *broad perfectionism* as being about achievement of excellences. This is what Sumner (1996, 23) does when characterising perfectionist value as held by good exemplars of some kind. A virus, say, may have perfectionist value by being an efficient spreader. This is not the kind of perfectionism that is relevant for analysing well-being, however. Rather, Hurka's (1993, 4) notion of *narrow perfectionism* will be what I explore in what follows. Hurka's narrow perfectionism does not deal with all excellences of all kinds. Instead, it deals with a shared *human nature*. Narrow perfectionism offers a theory of flourishing that grounds the relevant goodness in *intrinsic* value (Hurka 1993, vii, 5). That a value is intrinsic means that its goodness inheres in the entity itself (Korsgaard 1983, 170). Following this reasoning, achievements, friendships, and knowledge, would be good for us *in virtue of what they are*. The relevant benchmark they are assessed by is whether they realise our human nature.

One of the strengths of objectivist theories is that they provide an account of well-being that is insensitive to contingent variations in social

circumstances. By comparison, subjectivist well-being theories can be *distortionary*. Distortion, when it occurs, is said to arise due to *adaptive preferences* (van der Deijl 2017b; Terlazzo 2014, 284; 2017; 2019). Consider, for instance, a person who has internalised norms implying that they are worth less than their (would-be) peers. We might imagine a child of abusive parents who gets used to being bullied, beaten, and neglected. At some point, the everyday struggles become entangled with the child's expectations of what she is entitled to.[5] Similarly, warehouse workers who are not afforded opportunities even for bathroom breaks may downgrade their expectations and become understandably but unreasonably pleased if they get a few minutes off the clock. Adaptive preferences are thus particularly problematic because people can become accustomed to harsh circumstances. People can, as Sen (2009, 283) puts it, "train themselves to take pleasure in small mercies" with the "effect of distorting the scale of utilities in the form of happiness or desire-fulfilment". The distortion in such cases consists in overestimating one's level of well-being, after receiving less than is reasonable. So, even if there are reasons to be concerned with people's subjective states, there are also reasons to involve some standards of adequacy for those subjective states. Informed desires involve such standards in terms of full information and rationality or, as described earlier, standards in terms of correspondence with what someone *would* want if she both knew all the relevant (non-evaluative) facts. However, those are very strong requirements. Objectivist theories offer feeling- and attitude-independent standards of adequacy that do not amount to quite as strong requirements on welfare subjects' capacities. Hence, they can arguably apply to more people of various levels of cognitive or evaluative capacities compared to informed desire-theories.

A drawback both of objective list theories and perfectionism is that what allegedly improves our lives does so without regarding any of our attitudes (except to the extent that the list items involve attitudes). It seems that it should matter to some extent what one thinks about one's life. For instance, if a recluse scholar endorses solitude, then friendships may not improve his life by much. Friendships could come at a cost of much knowledge, which the recluse scholar, for one reason or another, values much higher. Some items can correspond to universal basic needs (for example, nutritional satiation, bodily health, and so forth) and help us avoid some adaptive preferences. Yet, other items seem dependent on attitudes. According to *the endorsement constraint*, all putative benefits will only be good for us if one endorses it in one's life (Wilkinson 2003, 175–77). The endorsement constraint could in principle be relaxed to only apply to some items, since there may be examples for which people's

[5] Similar examples are offered by Nussbaum (1997, 283), Sen (1999, 62–63), and Hawkins (2010, 63).

assent to the objectivistically determined items is necessary for well-being to obtain. That claim draws the objectivist theories more toward some kind of informed desire-theory, however. Therefore, the boundaries become blurred once subjectivist and objectivist commitments are mixed.

When it comes to subject-relativity, narrow perfectionism does well. It, as indicated above, focuses on those features that are essential to humans, whichever those features are. Since human features only obtain in human subjects, the activities and excellences that narrow perfectionism details will be appropriately subject-relative. When it comes to the partitioning of welfare subjects, the question is more open-ended, however. Perfectionism, as described, picks out humans as relevant. Non-human animals, however, remain outside the scope of narrow perfectionist theories that exclusively rely on human features. Nevertheless, it is possible to formulate *other* narrow perfectionist theories that cover non-human animals. They will then be orthogonal to the theories of human well-being, if potentially overlapping (all animals likely benefit somewhat by being nutritionally satiated, for instance). As such, it may be possible to formulate well-being theories applying even to things such as viruses or rocks. However, those would be irrelevant to narrow perfectionism for human beings. The adequacy of perfectionistic theories of human well-being do not stand or fall with other theories of other entities' well-being.

In terms of generality, broad perfectionism covers several excellences and several kinds of things. Narrow perfectionism focuses on some more restricted selection of those excellences for some specific kind of welfare subject. Hence, perfectionism has a certain kind of openness to it in that one may either focus on excellences in general, or as constrained to a particular domain or set of (candidate) welfare subjects. The openness of the perfectionistic framework makes it malleable and applicable for different theoretical purposes. The perfectionist theories will be invariantist well-being theories but constrained to the level of species or natural kinds. A natural kind, in this context, is a group of entities that exists in virtue of essential properties that its members share. Such a feature could be humans' potential for rationality, for instance.[6]

Regarding magnitudes of well-being, perfectionistic well-being theories are pluralistic. They are pluralistic in that they cover *different* things. Knowledge is not reducible to friendship, nor vice versa. Thus, perfectionistic well-being theories need multidimensional accounts of prudential magnitudes. Some dimensions may be assessed on a binary

[6] Though it may be considered controversial, it is conceivable to categorise human beings such as infants, those with dementia, those with developmental challenges and other cognitive psychological conditions, as being rational, just unable to reason well (Korsgaard 2004, 80–82). My point here is not to set any thresholds regarding who counts as human and who does not, but to describe one common way of understanding humans as rational animals (whether or not this view is correct).

scale, such as achieving or not achieving some goal. We can also gauge those in terms of *how many* achievements someone has, and *how important* they are according to some standard. The same goes for friendships, and knowledge accruement. Hence, the magnitudes of well-being will be *dimension-dependent*. A recluse scholar will do well in terms of knowledge, whereas an academically disinterested social butterfly is likely better off in terms of friendship. Comparisons will therefore become complicated in terms of aggregated, overall, assessments of well-being.

Despite the difficulties for objective list theories and perfectionism in assessing people's overall levels of well-being, they aim to capture intrinsic ends. Hence, both these objectivist types of well-being theories try to analyse well-being as a final value. It may have many parts, that can be combined in different ways, but is nevertheless one complex value.

In summary, objectivist theories of well-being offer a distinct way of determining what is good for a person. They are subject-relative and are also able to focus on relevant welfare subjects despite an openness to many excellences and kinds of subjects. Perfectionist well-being theories need to provide information about relevant excellences and kinds. That information is available, and can be presented on, different levels of generality. In terms of being better or worse off, the picture is made somewhat complicated by the multidimensionality that perfectionism typically offers. Still, this theoretical complication may in the end be acceptable insofar as well-being is a complex rather than a simple value.

Throughout this section, I have aimed to highlight both the strengths and weaknesses of the main candidate well-being theories. Whilst some may strike some readers as more plausible than the others, it is clear that certain trade-offs occur if we opt for any single candidate theory. Recently, it has been argued that well-being may not require that we exclusively focus on subjectivist aspects nor on objectivist goods. The reason, it is argued, is that both aspects may be *sufficient* to ground well-being but not always necessary. These theories are *robust hybrid theories* (Wall and Sobel 2021). This is fertile ground for seeing just how much more we can get out of prudential theorising by opening up for new candidate theories.

To that end, I turn to the theoretical framework that I will use: the capability approach. It is especially suitable for my analytical purposes of describing what well-being is and what we should do to promote it, as it opens up the scope for varied accounts of well-being in different settings. Neither type of well-being theory has hitherto been without its strengths and weaknesses. The capability approach also has things going in its favour, and things I aim to improve on. I turn to these things next.

4 The Capability Approach

As argued above, some feelings appear good for us, but are not exhaustive of well-being. Desires seem important, too. Yet, not all desires make our lives go well for us when they are satisfied. Nor do all desires make our lives go badly when they are frustrated. Rather, objective considerations are crucial in certain scenarios. But what are we to make of these tensions? In this section, I argue that the capability approach can be used to meld subjective and objective considerations while offering a cohesive way of theorising about well-being. As I shall argue, the capability approach lets us identify what matters for living well in an informative and not overly reductive way. In short, I argue that the capability approach is an open-ended framework, for theories of various values, that can incorporate both subjective and objective considerations. Some capabilitarian theories focus on objectivist and universal groundings of opportunities, beings, and doings, that are in people's interests. Other capabilitarian theories instead focus on subjectivist and contingent determinations of such opportunities, beings, and doings. The capability approach consequently does not fall neatly into only one of the subjectivist or the objectivist kinds of well-being theories. In this section, I explain what accommodates this significant openness to variation, and set the stage for my analyses that explicitly include both kinds of grounds. I do so by first presenting the capability approach's core concepts. Then I distinguish the capability approach *framework* from its *various theories*. Lastly, I relate the capability approach to the general features of well-being described above.

4.1 Core Concepts

Imagine that you are going to theorise about well-being for the first time. Instead of abstracting away all the subtleties and details of your life, you would likely think of concrete scenarios. You may remember going without food for a significant period of time or being stuck with a stomach bug. You may think that whether you were unable to get food or were unable to get much nutrition out of it, it sure seems good for you to be able to be well-fed. As you go on, you might think of some time you got hurt, being unable to get from place to place. You may not remember exactly where you wanted to go but being unable to get anywhere seemed distinctly bad for you. After a while, you notice that a lot of value is offered by the opportunities you have to live in certain ways. The capability approach puts such opportunities front and centre in well-being analyses. The idea is that opportunities allow people to live valued and valuable lives. Realising such opportunities is also a key factor. The things we *could*

be and do, and the *actual beings and doings*, make up different prudential aspects: our so-called *well-being freedom* and *well-being achievement*.

To describe what is at stake, the capability approach focuses on what are called *capabilities* and *functionings*. These concepts should be understood as follows. Someone has the capability to X if and only if the person satisfies jointly sufficient conditions for realising X if she chooses to. Consider, for instance, the capability to be educated. To be educated, a child requires some internal capacities such as a decent memory, and an ability to reason. Beyond this, the child may need external sources of information and guidance. Neither the internal capacities nor the external resources may be individually sufficient for the child to be educated. But when combined, the capacities and resources may jointly lead to the child learning. Once the child is educated, the child not only has the capability to be educated, but also has the related being or doing, i.e., the functioning of being educated. Thus, capabilities are genuine opportunities, whilst functionings are their realisations (cf. Qizilbash (2006, 21–22)).

Moreover, we ought to consider, as an auxiliary concept, what has come to be called *conversion factors* (Robeyns 2017, 45–47). A conversion factor affects the extent to which some bundle of resources can be transformed into a functioning (cf. Robeyns (2016, 407)). For instance, someone with poor eyesight will need more resources to be able to read compared to someone with excellent eyesight. The person with poor eyesight consequently has a weaker conversion factor than the person with excellent eyesight has. Similarly, someone with a defective immune system has a worse conversion factor for health-related capabilities and functionings than that of someone whose immune system works well. Hence, conversion factors act as something like catalysts or dampeners with regard to a person's ability to attain some functioning or capability.

Capabilitarian well-being theories list disparate capabilities and functionings as constituents of well-being. Hence, the theories are sometimes grouped with objective list theories. However, doing so is not entirely accurate. The capability approach, when used as a framework for well-being theorising, can use objectivist determinations of the relevant capabilities and functionings but also desire-based determinations (Qizilbash 2013, 37–38). To illustrate how this works, I will now distinguish *the capability approach* from its *various capability theories*.

4.2 The Framework

The capability approach is a framework for analysing various values by listing attainments and shortfalls of capabilities and functionings. Such values include well-being but also other candidate final values. Some philosophers and political theorists use the capability approach to analyse

well-being (cf. Sen (1979), Nussbaum (1992), and Austin (2018)), but it is also used to analyse justice (cf. Nussbaum (2006) and Sen (2009)), agency (cf. Sen (1985) and Claassen (2018)), and development ethics (cf. Sen (1999), Crocker (2008), and Byskov (2018)). The framework, thus, does not only offer an analysis of well-being, but rather offers a structure for various value analyses. Such value analyses can feature one or more of the core concepts presented above (*functionings* and *capabilities*). For certain purposes, assessing the freedom people have to live lives they have reason to value by assessing people's capabilities may be important. In societies, for instance, it may not be fitting to impose beings and doings on people even if people have claims to those beings and doings. To illustrate, a society that enforces that people eat enough oversteps reasonable boundaries compared to one that merely gives them such capabilities. For other purposes, such as assessing the level of agency people have in development contexts, looking at people's chosen functionings may be particularly salient. It should be noted, therefore, that whilst the capability approach involves both people's genuine opportunities and their achievements, one can emphasise different things depending on what is taken to be of significance in one's value analysis.

The capability approach's structure is modular. Robeyns (2016; 2017) describes how the modules can be used to construct different capability theories. According to the modular account, there are three kinds of modules. First, there are necessary modules that all capability theories share. Second, there are mandatory modules with optional contents that can vary between different theories. Third, there are modules that depend on the mandatory modules' optional contents or are optional and contingent rather than mandatory for each specific capability theory. These are called *A-modules*, *B-modules*, and *C-modules*, respectively.

Among the mandatory modules, we find a commitment to using the concepts of capabilities and functionings as the main analytical components, and things to operationalise. Hence, well-being is to be analysed in terms of people's genuine opportunities, and/or their beings, and doings. On the capability approach framework, capabilities and functionings thus make up the *evaluative space* (Robeyns 2017, 51–53).

In this evaluative space, capabilities and functionings are *value-neutral* (Robeyns 2017, 41–45). That capabilities and functionings are value-neutral means that the goodness or badness of them is not given by definitional decree. A capability or functioning is thus not inherently good for us as such. Deciding the goodness of such capabilities and functionings is for substantive and purpose-dependent capability theories to do. It is not a task for the framework that only offers the tools for making those decisions. To illustrate, the capability approach framework is neutral as to the value, disvalue, or lack of both that, e.g., developing friendships,

picking between equivalent toothpastes in the supermarket, and being sad, have. Providing the relevant standards of value is left to theories that the framework facilitates the construction of. In this regard, the capability approach framework is thus similar to broad hedonism and broad perfectionism. Hence, different theories of values such as well-being, justice, or agency, can assign different valences (i.e., positivity, negativity, or neutrality) to capabilities and functionings. They can even consider different capabilities and functionings salient or relevant for their different aims. For well-being, perhaps not meeting needs is negative, but for agency reasons going on a hunger strike could be distinctly positive.

Next, I show how the capability approach relates to well-being's general features identified in section 2. I then describe my use of this framework.

4.3 Capability Theories and Well-Being's General Features

Regarding well-being's general features, capabilitarian well-being theories capture them differently depending on their exact designs or contents. I will go through the general features that I identified in section 2 and relate them to the capability approach's proffered core concepts.

First, regarding subject-relativity, each capabilitarian theory will capture this general feature of well-being by analysing well-being in terms of capabilities and functionings. A capability is a genuine opportunity *of* some subject to realise some being or doing. A functioning, in turn, is such a being or doing. Since capabilities and functionings are the main analytical components, well-being's subject-relativity will be reflected.

Second, different theories demarcate welfare subjects differently. Nevertheless, they conform to *normative individualism*, meaning that individuals are of ultimate moral concern (Robeyns 2017, 57–58). Non-human animals are covered by capabilitarians such as Nussbaum (2006; 2011). However, the focus is often on humans, as is clear in capabilitarian inquiries into human development. So, the capability approach can be used to cover various proposed welfare subjects, including non-human animals, or even lifeforms more generally. But it does not demand that we do so to cover each purpose-dependently relevant welfare subject. Accordingly, it allows me to analyse personal well-being, as per my aims.

Third, regarding levels of generality, we can note the distinction between the capability approach framework and the capability theories that the framework facilitates. This division in terms of generality makes room for a variety of well-being theories. When a capabilitarian well-being theory's purpose is to analyse personal well-being, then the theory is about that kind of well-being rather than any other ones. A further question that follows, however, is whether there is only one such theory of well-being that should be endorsed. Or is well-being rather context-sensitive and

subject to individually or politically grounded variations? My arguments in the appended articles push for being specific regarding dimensions, and for an openness to context-sensitive variations of well-being components.

Furthermore, the capability approach allows for different thresholds of capability and functioning attainments. To begin, we may note that the capability approach offers an evaluative space where capabilities and functionings make up dimensions of well-being. Like in the case of objective list theories and perfectionist theories, overall evaluations become difficult to make. Nevertheless, magnitudes of doing well or poorly can be assessed intra- and interpersonally in different dimensions.

To illustrate the centrality of magnitudes, the capability approach's attention to measurements is seen in some of its political applications. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has published data on the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (Global MPI) in the Human Development Reports since 2010. According to the 2010 report's authors, "[t]he MPI is grounded in the capability approach" and it "[…] complements monetary-based methods by taking a broader approach" through identifying "overlapping deprivations […] across the same three dimensions as the [Human Development Index]" (UNDP 2010, 94). The Human Development Index (HDI) precedes the Global MPI. It was developed by Sen and ul Haq in the 1990s (UNDP 2010, iv–vii). The HDI involves measures of three capability/functioning dimensions, an assigned set of weights, and production of their geometric mean. The HDI's output is a value in the range of 0-1 that pertains to a particular country. The higher the numerical value is, the better the country is doing along the measured dimensions. The three measured dimensions in the HDI are *life expectancy*, *people's level of education*, and *Gross National Income (GNI) per capita*. The HDI and Global MPI are thus measurement applications involving magnitudes of capability/functioning attainments.

Regarding magnitudes and dimensions, it should be noted that the Global MPI and HDI introduce some substitutability between dimensions of well-being. For guiding policies, reducing the information-base to some single number can be useful. But such reductions can also be problematic. Consider, for instance, the capability for nutritional satiation and the capability to be treated as an equal. Next, imagine someone who is well-fed but treated poorly and unequally. Now, instead imagine someone who is treated as an equal by others but is starving. If this information were reduced to a single number about their well-being, then the distinctness of their experiences would be lost. In order to better reflect their distinct experiences, instead of producing unidimensional information about capabilities and functionings, methods producing partial orders can be used. One such method is that of *set dominance* (Sen 1987, 43–45). Set dominance, in brief, offers a way to compare multidimensional outcomes.

If non-substitutability of dimensions holds, methods involving set dominance reflect this as follows. Imagine that a recluse scholar can gain much knowledge, while a sociable scholar can gain much knowledge *and* build friendships at the same time. If everything else is equal between them, the sociable scholar has one further capability and/or functioning than the recluse scholar does. The sociable scholar's set of capabilities *dominates* the first one's. Hence, the sociable scholar is better off by having *the same and more* opportunities compared to the recluse scholar.

The set dominance method is limited in that it will not produce orderings of well-being outcomes when people attain different well-being dimensions. Imagine that the recluse scholar has knowledge and successful projects but no friendships, whilst the sociable scholar has knowledge and friendships but no successful projects. They are on par in the knowledge dimension. However, they differ in the other well-being dimensions and therefore cannot have their well-being levels compared *overall* by seeing whose set dominates the other. Moreover, the set dominance method will not provide information about the extent to which dimensions are attained, only information about whether they are attained at all. For instance, one may satisfy nutritional needs to different degrees. The set dominance method will typically need to set a threshold and disregard differences between someone who has insufficiently much, but some, to eat, compared to those who have nothing to eat whatsoever. Nevertheless, other evaluative methods can be produced for assessing magnitudes and dimensions in these expanded ways. The exact ways of assessing them in terms of level of attainment varies from case to case. To illustrate, assessing how much or little someone has a capability to eat enough for health reasons will differ from assessments such as how much she can move about. As I will argue, some prudentially bad experiences are not mere shortfalls of good ones. Consequently, the capability approach in its standard forms involves a level of narrowness regarding what would be better than what in comparing well-being outcomes. That narrowness, however, I will show can be addressed in a productive way.

Fourth, regarding the capability approach's connection to well-being's general features, it focuses on people's ends rather than their means. Capability theories identify these ends as various capabilities and/or functionings. This is a feature that all capability theories share. Hence, they all aim to capture people's ends, rather than merely whatever resources happen to facilitate those ends. Conversion factors determine what is needed for a person to be or do that which makes up well-being. So, whilst the capability approach considers resources important, they are only derivatively important. The capabilities and functionings are crucial.

In the capabilitarian framework, there is consequently a great degree of openness. The openness involves deciding which dimensions matter,

for which welfare subjects, and how they can be aggregated when determining levels of well-being. As a stepping-stone to my articles, I pose the overarching question: what does it mean that people can and do live well, and how can we do right by each other? I engage with it by providing value-theoretical and political considerations that determine the answer, rather than by providing an abstract theory to deduce answers from. I now turn to describe my findings in the fifth and final section of this chapter.

5 Presentation of the Articles

This section serves to introduce the dissertation's appended articles. There are four articles appended, two of which have been published in journals. They have two different themes: one methodological, and one applied. The first article is methodological and on the topic of selecting capabilities relevant for well-being in a philosophically accurate and simultaneously politically legitimate way. It is published in *Moral Philosophy and Politics*. The second article is applied and on the topic of disadvantage, ill-being, and homelessness. It is published in *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*. The third article is similarly applied and provides a novel analysis of addiction by using the capability approach. It is currently under review. The fourth article returns to my methodological beginnings. In it, I argue that context-sensitive theories of well-being have a specific role to play in connecting theoretical accuracy and practical efficacy. That article is also currently under review. The following descriptions summarise the core contributions in these four articles. In addition, I provide auxiliary comments on the practical implications of the arguments I make in them and the upshot for well-being research at large.

The joint picture my articles provide is as follows. In well-being research, there is a marked tendency to focus on simplifying the relevant dimensions of well-being as far as possible. This is done to come up with an overarching theory of well-being that has the widest possible scope. However, in attempting to take such a bird's-eye-view, well-being theorising often loses sight of the specifics that matter to and for people.

In my articles, a view emerges to the effect that well-being is seen as consisting in sometimes non-necessary but variably sufficient properties. Contrary to the prevailing monistic views, I argue that well-being dimensions do not reduce to some essential property, be it pleasure, satisfaction, or some objective perfection. On the view I propose, the determination of relevant dimensions can have different grounds. Consequently, the value-space of well-being varies in four different ways. First, variations can obtain on population levels depending on compromises between expert opinions and public opinions through social

choice procedures (article 1). Second, the value-space is not exhausted by attainments and shortfalls of general positive dimensions but instead incorporates specific and independently identified ill-being dimensions (article 2). Third, ill-being can obtain in multiple ways. By providing a capabilitarian analysis of addiction's prudential impact, I complement existing philosophical analyses of the nature of addiction in a constructive way (article 3). Fourth, I argue that what well-being amounts to does not boil down to just one phenomenon. The reason is that contexts fix prudential concepts that refer to different well-being standards (article 4).

The value-space of well-being, therefore, should be seen as specific and context-sensitive rather than general and universal. This means that well-being research and related policy-work benefits from working in tandem, making explicit which concepts and standards are taken to be suitable in specific contexts. Doing so elucidates relevant trade-offs and avoids reducing the evaluative contents to some insufficiently informative story.

5.1 Combining Philosophical and Democratic Capability Lists

My first article is about which capabilities we should distribute to members of society, and on which grounds that decision is to be made. The decision involves three aims. The first is to distribute the relevant capabilities, i.e., the capabilities that make up well-being. The second is to allow for public participation in the decision-making processes. The third is to assess selection procedures in terms of their accuracy and legitimacy.

We may take a prospective perspective of the task ahead: which capabilities and functionings should people have, and on what basis should they be selected? We may also take a retrospective perspective where we assess the outcomes and reasons for making selections. When conflicts between philosophical ground level principles and democratic deliberations occur, we need some way to maintain a balance between stakeholders while avoiding indeterminacy. We may, for instance, consider scenarios where experts and the general public have different perspectives on what matters for well-being. As an example, consider recommendations from experts on basic needs during a pandemic. These experts may recommend various restrictive policies, including mandatory testing and treatment, to safeguard people's health. A population's opinion on the matter will only track this recommendation contingently – in other words, the public may disagree with the experts. When disagreements obtain, due to stakeholders prioritising differently, it is not evident whose recommendations are to be enacted. For policy-makers who wish to get things right, and to do right by people, it is important to formulate a solution. So, in Östlund (2023c), I present one such solution.

In the article, I engage with a discussion about a purported dichotomy between philosophical selections and democratic selections of the opportunities, beings, and doings, that people have reason to value. These options are known in the literature as *the philosophical position* and *the democratic position*. In responding to this purported dichotomy, Byskov (2017) formulates a reconciliatory research agenda that aims to combine the positions in a mutually reinforcing way. The aim is thereby to both achieve philosophical accuracy in tandem with political legitimacy when it comes to promoting people's capabilities. I contribute to this research agenda by proffering a selection method that affords equal priority to philosophical and democratic considerations while avoiding instances of indeterminacy when disagreements between relevant stakeholders occur.

My contribution to the reconciliatory research agenda consists in a voting method that satisfies two desiderata. The desiderata concern the equal priority between philosophical and democratic considerations, and a decisiveness in case ties arise. To see how ties can arise, I will produce a few examples, and describe my equitable tie-breaking selection method.

We begin by identifying the union of the philosophical and democratic lists. Let us denote the philosophical list by 'P', the democratic list by 'D' and their union by 'C'. For now, we may assume that P and D are consistent in the sense that each item on a list can in principle be simultaneously realised with every other on the same list. However, as I will show, C may have members that are incompatible with being realised with at least some other members in the union. Thus, conflicts can arise.

Next, we consider the list-items that are in the symmetric difference of P and D. That a list-item is in P's and D's symmetric difference means that it is in one and only one of P and D. Let's say that P contains the members *mobility*, *nutritional satiation*, and *self-respect*. Furthermore, let's say that D contains the members *housing*, *nutritional satiation*, and *self-respect*. Then the symmetric difference of P and D, denoted by 'S', would contain *mobility* and *housing*. The members of S can be consistent with each other, as in this example. But it is possible for items in the symmetric difference to come into conflict with members of P or D. This is because the ground level principles underlying the selections for P and the democratic opinions underlying the selections for D contingently overlap. Imagine that P instead contains the members *protesting*, *nutritional satiation*, and *self-respect*. Similarly, imagine that D instead contains *constant political order*, *nutritional satiation*, and *self-respect*. When considering these listed items, we should note that the first respective members of P and D undermine each other. The reason is that the political unrest that protesting involves is incompatible with constant political order. When inconsistencies arise between members of S and P or D, we

need some guidance to avoid the minimal result of realising none of the options. My selection method offers a way to avoid such minimal results.

The selection method I proffer uses pairs of conflicting list-items as input for a regulated voting procedure. I argue that this voting procedure can, and should, be used when we are simultaneously concerned with philosophical accuracy and political legitimacy in urgent situations. Here, a situation is urgent when it is time-sensitive and leads to significant losses of value unless indeterminacy is avoided. Examples include responses to pandemics, but also to natural disasters such as floods and wildfires spurred by climate crises, for example. The voting procedure lets a philosophical representative (or an 'expert' representative, more broadly conceived) and some democratic deliberators set weights to the conflicting capability pairs. The procedure produces further selections when used in the described way, while maintaining equality between philosophical (or 'expert') considerations and democratic deliberations.

For handling conflicts, other methods of compromise may seem attractive. Consider, e.g., ranking outcomes of consistent configurations from the conflicting capabilities in (the union of philosophically and democratically selected capabilities) C. This method first takes the power set of consistent combinations of the conflicting capabilities. Then philosophical and democratic representatives can provide their respective rankings of the outcomes, i.e., each subset. The task is then to find where they end up with an outcome that is on the same rank placement.

The outcome ranking method is admittedly attractive under certain ideal conditions. When we have a lot of time to spare without impacting people's well-being negatively, seeking optimal solutions will give us the best possible outcome. However, the number of outcomes to consider for the outcome ranking method increases significantly with each additional conflict being considered. The task consequently becomes difficult to perform in a timely manner for the outcome ranking method the more conflicts it considers. Urgent selections relating to for example pandemics, floods, and wildfires, must be considered alongside all other selections until some equally ranked and consistent configuration is found, on the outcome ranking method. My proposed regulated voting procedure is, by contrast, more likely to result in selections as the conflicts increase in number. The regulated voting procedure that I produce in this article considers pairs of conflicting items, but not taken in isolation. Rather, on my voting procedure, the entire set of conflicting capability pairs is voted on by placing votes on the members from each conflicting capability pair. Another drawback of the outcome ranking method is that it does not include cardinal information about outcomes. That makes comparisons more difficult than on my regulated voting procedure. Thus,

in non-ideal conditions where decisions have time-constraints, my regulated voting procedure has an additional strength worth securing.

In summary, the article contributes to a reconciliatory research agenda about legitimate selections of which capabilities people should be afforded. The argument runs as follows. Philosophers can come up with theories of well-being and spell them out in terms of ground level principles that justify capability selections. The public can sometimes have divergent ideas of what well-being is and establish a different selection of capabilities through democratic deliberation. This can create conflicts when it comes to deciding which selection of capabilities to promote in society. Nevertheless, despite the merely contingent overlap between philosophical and democratic determinations of well-being, they can be systematically combined to achieve benefits stemming from both.

5.2 Distinguishing Disadvantage from Ill-Being in the Capability Approach

My second article engages with an underdiscussed part of living well: not living badly. There is a difference between *not being well* and *being unwell*. Sumner (2020) argues that it should be captured by well-being theories and calls this task 'the ill-being test'. The ill-being test basically amounts to showing that a given well-being theory should also be a theory about what is prudentially negative. If a theory appropriately distinguishes between the prudentially positive and the prudentially negative, it passes the ill-being test. In Östlund (2021), I subject the capability approach to this test and recommend a foundational modification to capture inherently negative well-being aspects, i.e., people's ill-being. Hence, I show that capabilitarians can meet the test.

The article has one critical component, and one constructive contribution. I begin by presenting the philosophical foundations of the capability approach and show that ill-being is analysed as deprivations. To analyse ill-being as deprivations, in this context, entails that being badly off in terms of well-being exclusively involves failures to attain beings and doings that people have reason to value. Capabilitarian hallmark works on disadvantage by Wolff and de-Shalit (2007; 2013) also appear to mainly work within the constraints of what we may call *the no-basic-bads view*. The no-basic-bads view holds that well-being badness is exhausted by *failures to attain well-being goodness*. To illustrate, what would be bad about being sick is that one is not healthy. I analyse cases of homelessness and relate them to healthcare, social care, psychology, and political science. I thereby show that various inherently negative features are obscured by capabilitarian well-being theories that the no-basic-bads view constrains. The inherently negative features are obscured due the

primary focus on attainments and deprivations of goodness. This is the article's critical component. I then provide a foundational modification to the capabilitarian framework to help its well-being theories pass the ill-being test. That makes up the article's constructive contribution.

In the article, I argue that negative beings and doings and opportunities to avoid these negative beings and doings must be accounted for. By accounting for them, however, capabilitarian theories of well-being need to be changed in two significant ways. First, when it comes to assessing well-being, it cannot be maintained that looking at sets of various valuable capabilities and functionings suffices. Providing an index or a set dominance ranking in terms of capabilities and functionings will be substantially incomplete when making well-being assessments. Moreover, a justification of why some beings and doings are inherently negative needs to be provided. This can be done on a case-by-case basis, or by some negative counterpart to, e.g., narrow perfectionist theories.

My foundational modification is motivated by a series of assessments of well-being dimensions and their magnitudes. One way of picturing the mainstream capability theories' evaluative space is by envisioning a two-dimensional mathematical plane. Imagine that we list the capabilities and functionings along the X-axis, and their value in terms of well-being on the Y-axis. Some of these capabilities and functionings will be wholly positive in terms of well-being. For example, securing nutritional needs could be one such positive dimension. Some will be purely neutral in terms of well-being, such as picking between functionally equivalent toothpastes in a supermarket. Others may span a region from positive Y-values to the zero-line. However, by exclusively paying attention to values on or above the zero-line, the relevant negative dimensions become obscured. I contend that the evaluative space of well-being should not be constrained to that area. I support this claim by investigating aspects of homelessness such as being anxious, stressed, demeaned, dominated, fearful, and humiliated. These beings and doings are not mere shortfalls of various positive capabilities or functionings, but inherently negative and are crucial to understanding the plights of many poorly off people.

In the article, I do not assume that each functioning or capability will have the same valence. That is, a capability to X and the functioning X could, as far as my argument goes, have different statuses as positive, neutral, or negative. What I do emphasise is that some functionings are inherently negative for people. For instance, a negative example could be that one recurringly smokes despite wishing to quit. Strictly speaking, capabilities quantify over functionings because the concept of capability is defined in the space of functionings. However, my argument does not assume that the valence of a functioning is always inherited by the related capability to X or vice versa. Hence, one may contend that having more

genuine opportunities is always good for a person, even if the opportunity is for something negative. To illustrate, it may be considered good for a person to have the capability to smoke, in that she is afforded control over her life. Nevertheless, one can still contend that it is better to have that capability while opting against smoking. Whether that is so, or if one is even better off without the capability, is something that I remain agnostic about. But, I conclude that anything negative should be accounted for.

Besides highlighting the need to include inherently negative well-being aspects in accurate theories of well-being, practical implications also follow. For instance, harm-reduction policies can involve mitigations of negative beings and doings, even if they do not succeed in promoting positive beings and doings. This matters when it comes to *avoiding harm* which is important alongside the aim of *doing good*, insofar as societies should do so. Thus, my foundational modification can help inform well-being-related policy-work, creating a connection between (in my view, more accurate) capabilitarian well-being theories and political practices.

In summary, in this article I argue that the distinction between being deprived and facing inherently negative beings and doings matters for two reasons. The first reason is that capabilitarian theories of well-being are inaccurate unless they appropriately incorporate these negative aspects. The second reason is that policies informed by the standard capabilitarian well-being theories can miss important harm-reducing policy-efforts. Consequently, I conclude that capabilitarians should reject the no-basic-bads view which is too often implicitly endorsed. Instead, capabilitarians are recommended to expand their focus on positive opportunities, beings, and doings, to also include negative ones. These results put capabilitarian well-being theories on par, with regard to ill-being, with subjectivist ones such as hedonism and desire-theories by also capturing basic bads.

5.3 Addiction and the Capability to Abstain

In my third article, I offer a complementary prudential analysis to philosophical analyses of addiction's nature. Addiction is a wide-spread problem affecting people from different places, generations, and classes. There are two standard ways that addiction is analysed in philosophy (Burdman 2022). The first standard way is given by what is known as *compulsion views*. These views suggest that addiction is uncontrolled, compulsive, behaviour. The second standard way is given by *choice views*. Choice views, by contrast with compulsion views, consider addiction to consist in controlled but poor choice-making. These standard views have difficulties capturing what addiction involves from a prudential perspective and would benefit from a complementary analysis that focuses on addiction's negative impact. To that end, I provide a

capabilitarian analysis which is agnostic as to addiction's nature, i.e., whether it consists in compulsion, poor choice-making, or some combination thereof, but shows what prudential end it undermines.

On my complementary analysis, addiction is treated as a multiply realisable phenomenon that hampers people's genuine opportunities to abstain. People's self-control and choice-making capacities are shown to be merely two personal conversion factors amongst other ones. Moreover, they are exemplars of only one kind of factor. Other kinds matter too, such as social and environmental factors, that lie largely outside the control of individual people who suffer from addiction. Hence, my capabilitarian analysis highlights further targets for related well-being policy-work.

In the paper, I argue that addiction always relevantly involves some well-being loss. A central prudential end that addiction undermines is the capability to abstain. I propose that a person has a capability to abstain from something if that person's conditions are such that she reliably refrains from it if she chooses to. This is a genuine opportunity that affords people control over their actions. The analysis is applied to several cases of substance addictions at several points in the article. As the analysis quantifies over beings and doings generally, however, it could in principle also be applied to what is known as *behavioural addictions*. Behavioural addictions are such that they involve recurring non-controlled non-substance-related activities, such as problem gambling. Thus, though I focus on a proper subset of addictions, the analysis can be expanded on.

Any capability to X is attained only when a person's personal, social, and environmental conversion factors jointly facilitate the person's achieving X if they choose to. So, capabilities are composed of sets of conversion factors. On my analysis, if a set of personal conversion factors P obtains, then the sets of social conversion factors, S, and environmental conversion factors, E, may jointly facilitate the person to abstain. However, if P is combined with other sets of such conversion factors, the person may be unable to abstain. Hence, rather than relying on an analysis of addiction as a shortfall stemming from specific personal conversion factors, lacking the capability to abstain results from *interactions* between various conversion factors. Therefore, my analysis abandons the idea that what is at stake in cases of addiction is any proper subset of such factors. To capture what is at stake, we should rather focus on their interactions.

I show this through a series of complex cases involving addiction. One case, I argue, shows that prudential problems of addiction are not only due to compulsion. An addiction can be surveyed over time, and even when it at first seems compulsive, its character can change. Over time, addiction can lead to physical dependency in ways that prohibit the drug user from feeling the euphoria that may first have overpowered her self-control. What is left is a painful withdrawal as a default state that the drug

user seeks to avoid. This avoidance replaces the initial search for satisfaction. When such shifts occur, the person remains addicted. Yet, aversions to such painful states are (or would reasonably be) shared by non-addicted and addicted people alike. Hence, it is not with reference to a lack of self-control that addiction's prudential badness obtains. Rather, what is central is that the person's capability to abstain is undermined.

Another case, moreover, shows that addiction's prudential impact is not centrally about continued substance use. To see why, we may imagine a person who vows to stop drinking and manages to do so only with great strain. When a person falls below a threshold of compulsion, the person nevertheless endures a well-being loss because of an impaired, or insecure, capability to abstain. Further, I show that even cases of addiction that at first appear to be irrational need not be. The reason is that the path from addiction to sobriety can be modelled as a three-stage process wherein the person has (1) an active addiction, (2) abstains and endures withdrawal, and (3) reaches stable sobriety. The third stage is better than the first. However, a person is not necessarily making poor choices, I argue, for not seeking sobriety out in some instances when the first two stages are jointly worse than the first stage is in isolation. This matters for evaluations of addiction, because a person is not guaranteed to attain stable sobriety at all, or not for long enough for any benefits to outweigh the extra costs of stages 1 and 2. Nevertheless, the person is addicted and endures a well-being loss, again attributable to a specific loss of capability.

Further cases are provided, highlighting various prudential nuances. They support the claim that my capabilitarian analysis of addiction's prudential impact integrates pertinent evaluative aspects together with the standard philosophical views of addiction. The standard philosophical views maintain that addiction is a merely personal issue. However, I conclude that addiction's prudential impact requires us to analyse individual factors, socio-political milieus, and environmental factors in tandem. The upshot is that philosophy and policy-work should reflect this insofar as they are to be accurate and to promote people's well-being.

5.4 Well-Being Contextualism and Capabilities

In my fourth article, I return to the methodological aspects of analysing well-being. In it, I defend a position that maintains that well-being is context-sensitive, building on work about invariantism and variantism.

In the contemporary philosophical literature on well-being, a position called *well-being monism* is predominant. The position involves three claims. First, that well-being has essential properties. Second, that there is one unambiguous concept of well-being that describes those properties. Third, that well-being theories should capture those properties exclusively

and exhaustively. Well-being monism has been challenged, however. An alternative view called *contextualism* denies the three claims. In effect, contextualism maintains that there is no such thing as well-being *simpliciter*, i.e., well-being *without qualification*. Instead, contextualism maintains that concepts and standards of well-being can vary. In response, well-being monistic arguments have been produced to the effect that contextualism implies that those investigating well-being, were contextualism true, lack a shared subject matter. But, the argument continues, they do not lack a shared subject matter. Hence, contextualism is rejected on that basis. I show how contextualists can rebut the claim that those investigating well-being lack a shared subject matter if contextualism is true. I then unravel a related worry, namely that those investigating well-being appear to have a shared standard of well-being. If they have a shared standard, then context-sensitivity fails to hold. This challenge is also parried, and contextualism is thereby made more viable.

The article interfaces with the capability approach. Centrally, there is a debate about the use of the concept of well-being. One radical position is that the concept of well-being should be eliminated. For instance, Richardson (2019, 357) argues that "the concept of well-being can aptly be set aside, in favour of other, more precise and well-targeted concepts that pioneering work on the capability approach has brought to the fore". Such concepts may be more precise, but those concepts being well-targeted for prudential analysis relies on some background notion of well-being. For instance, goodness *for* a person is different from what may be good to do ethically, from being a good specimen of a kind, and from being aesthetically valuable. Furthermore, well-being, which is about personal benefits, can be distinguished from values such as agency (Sen 1985; Robeyns 2005, 102–3; Hart and Brando 2018, 294–95). A person may, e.g., value helping a friend in need even if this comes at a prudential cost. Similarly, as is often the case for young children, some are afforded well-being without much agency. Some notion of well-being is what allows us to make these divergent evaluations. Hence, the claim that the concept of well-being is obsolete is premature. To retain these distinctions of what has value in what way, we have reason to retain some notion of well-being.

To that end, I argue in favour of a pluralism rather than eliminativism. I affirm that well-being is about what is good for a person rather than what may have value in other ways. Nevertheless, the conditions for that goodness are taken to vary from situation to situation. Despite the immense influence of capabilities and functionings described by Sen and Nussbaum, there is no "master list" that all accounts of well-being aim (or succeed) in bottoming out in. There is a proliferation of ways of detailing well-being, and of operationalising aspects for political purposes, embraced by capabilitarians. Yet, such proliferation would be problematic

if at most one capabilitarian well-being theory is true, and all applications, measurement-wise and policy-wise, should connect to that one theory.

Consequently, I show that contextualism can justifiably serve the function of underpinning a proliferation that is both sought after and applied in practice. Nevertheless, contextualists and capabilitarians need to make some concessions, I argue. By detailing a substantive task which I call *the shared standard challenge*, it is shown that the negative parts of well-being, that is, ill-being, ought to be barred from being seen as even contextually good for us. Following this, I refine the contextualist position to allow for non-exhaustive, disparate, accounts of well-being while maintaining reasonable restrictions of things that are beyond the pale.

My argument focuses on whether well-being is one or many things. Invariantism, in the capabilitarian context, holds that there is only one correct list of capabilities. Typically, the capabilitarian literature has adopted invariantism when discussing *the question of the list* (cf. Robeyns (2017, 171–74)). The debate has since progressed further, showing that for different purposes, such as theorising about well-being on the one hand, and justice on the other hand, different lists could be applicable. However, a further step is motivated to take when we consider, e.g., what is good for a child, good for someone who is not neurotypical, good for an elderly person, and so on. I show how capabilitarians can produce context-sensitively tailor-made and policy-relevant well-being theories by leaving room for divergences without losing focus on what is good for people.

In the literature thus far, the capability approach has been seen as offering an objective list theory or as an informed desire-theory (Qizilbash 2013, 37). Yet, contrary to common assumptions, this disjunction does not need to be treated as an exclusive one. Instead, one can give room to both subjective and objective determinations of well-being in hybrid theories that involve both subjective and objective grounds (see Wall and Sobel (2021)). The benefit of so doing is that one can reject the purported requirement that each dimension relates to every other dimension in virtue of some shared and essential property of well-being for all theories.

The role of a master list, as assumed by invariantism, works as follows. Imagine that we have two comparatively specific capabilitarian theories of well-being, WB_{T1} and WB_{T2}. If only one of them properly instantiates some master list, then we face a serious problem insofar as well-being monism is true. In effect, we need to answer the question about which of the two theories is correct. If WB_{T1} is an instantiation of the master list while WB_{T2} is not such an instantiation, then we would have to discard WB_{T2}.

The capabilitarian procedure above can be described schematically as follows. Let's say we have a list, WB_{GA}, formulated on a high level of generality. WB_{GA} contains the *type members* A, B, C, ..., N. For some comparatively specific theories of well-being, we might see the *token*

members $a_1, b_1, c_1, \ldots, n_1$. Now, assume that some group A adopts these tokens as relevant for their well-being. Furthermore, assume that the tokens are exemplars of the types in WB_{GA}. If these two claims hold, then A's list satisfactorily coheres with the general account. However, imagine that some group B comes up with the list items $a_1, b_2, c_1, \ldots, n_1$, and b_2 is not an exemplar of any item in WB_{GA}. The situation then requires that capability b_2 is changed, or that B's theory is rejected. But this requirement of being an exemplar of a type, I argue, is too strong. Instead of adopting this requirement, capabilitarians can provide various concurrent and non-identical well-being theories with different exemplars. However, they can only do so on the condition that none of the items make up ill-being dimensions. Hence, capabilitarians can produce theories of well-being that proliferate in any number of ways, as long as they do not count what is incontrovertibly bad for us as being good for us.

5.5 Summary

My appended articles, as introduced in this section, merge theoretical and practical concerns. As an overarching result, I show that well-being can be different things in different settings and that what matters is not whether the various theories converge, but whether they are suitable to their respective contexts. Being well, moreover, involves avoiding what is bad for us, whether that is homelessness, addiction, or something else entirely. The specific expressions that well-being and ill-being takes are not, in my view, to be glossed over. To be well, and to do good, thus, involves specificity and requires us to be attuned to many varied states of people.

Through my appended articles, I use the conceptual apparatus of the capability approach. I sometimes engage with foundational issues in the approach. Those foundational issues, when solved, are to the benefit of those who use and promote the framework. But such issues are addressed mainly because of their relevance to what is good, and bad, for people. The object of study is thus, despite certain methodological challenges being taken on, not *the capability approach* as such. The object of study, rather, is made up by the goodness and badness for us. My answers then relate to how we are to do right by each other insofar as well-being is concerned.

Serious thinkers have long dealt with questions of who stands in a position to know about goodness and who best guides us to flourish. Questions about what makes us distinctly human go far back as well, with early, even ancient, responses that have since influenced the capability approach via especially Sen and Nussbaum. Though I do not deal much with this historical legacy directly, I owe much of the reasoning to people that have done much of the needed groundwork. I acknowledge their significant influence and contribute to the ongoing discussions as follows.

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