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WELL-BEING AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: IN DEFENCE
OF THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH

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CWiPP considers how people's well-being can be defined, measured and improved in ways that help policy-makers to make the best use of scarce resources; and investigates the determinants of well-being insofar as these are relevant to policy formulation. The Working Paper Series offers a medium to place relevant research material in the public domain for discussion. Each paper is internally reviewed by two members of the editorial group. The contents remain the sole responsibility of the author(s).

Abstract

The question 'Equality of what?' has been fiercely debated in political theory, as well as in real world politics. What should be the focus of egalitarian social justice, and what should be measured to evaluate it? Influential theories of the best 'currency of justice' include resources, opportunities, and preference satisfaction. This paper argues that the most appropriate currency of justice is 'well-being'. Furthermore, the Capabilities Approach provides the most suitable theoretical and practical framework. Some simplistic approaches prioritise subjective wellbeing (SWB) as a guide for policy. This paper argues against such an approach, illustrating the argument with data from the European Social Survey relating to the effects of the economic crisis on the quality of life in the UK. The paper concludes that, defining well-being in terms of resources, opportunities or subjective states all have merit, but each provides only a partial perspective. The Capabilities Approach brings together the most important aspects of these partial conceptions within a single approach, providing a sophisticated conceptualisation of the multi-level and multi-dimensional nature of well-being, and a sound currency of social justice.

Introduction

The question ‘Equality of what?’ has been fiercely debated in both political theory and real world politics. What should be the focus of egalitarian social justice, and what should be measured to evaluate it? Philosophers have proposed several different answers to this question. Influential theories of the appropriate ‘currency of justice’ include resources (e.g. Rawls, 1971), opportunity (e.g. Roemer, 1998), and preference satisfaction (e.g. Arneson, 1990). This chapter proposes that the most suitable answer to the question ‘Equality of What?’ is *well-being*¹. ‘Well-being’ is a contested concept, and can be defined and measured in a variety of ways, with differing implications for policy. In this chapter, I defend the Capabilities Approach (Sen 1985; Nussbaum 2000) to well-being and justice.

The first section discusses the arguments for and against resources, opportunities and subjective states as the currency of justice. In the second section, the objections against reliance on ‘subjective wellbeing’ alone are illustrated using empirical findings relating to the impacts on quality of life in the UK of the economic crisis of 2007-2010. The final section concludes that, while resources, opportunities and subjective states are all important, each provides only a partial perspective. An account of well-being that is plural in both definition and measurement, such as the Capabilities Approach, is required as the foundation for a just society.

Equality of What?

Theories of justice are theories of value. In the case of egalitarianism, different theories advocate equality of that which, in their view, is most important (resources, opportunity, preference satisfaction and so on). In the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle identified ‘that which is most important’ as *Eudaimonia*. This translates from the ancient Greek as ‘the living of a good (flourishing) life’ (e.g. Cooper, 1975), that is, *well-being*. Aristotle defined well-being as ‘that for the sake of which everything else is done’ (EN1vii1097a16) – the ultimate goal of human life. Therefore, in this sense, egalitarian theories of social justice are grounded in theories of well-being.

Equality of Resources

The simplest account of social justice equates well-being with the possession of economic resources. At the individual and household level, this means income and wealth; at the national level, gross domestic product (GDP). On this account, social justice requires a fair distribution of income and wealth. However, it is widely recognised that GDP at the national level is not a sound indicator of national well-being (Stiglitz et al 2009; Austin, 2016), nor is possession of economic resources at the individual level sufficient for a good and flourishing life.

In his landmark Theory of Justice, John Rawls (1971) developed the resourcist account of well-being and justice beyond material resources to a wider set of *primary goods*. The primary goods are a set of basic rights, liberties and opportunities, including ‘wealth and income’, but also social goods such as ‘the social bases of self-respect’. These goods provide individuals with the freedom and resources to pursue their personal conceptions of the good life. Rawls’ theory exemplifies a classical politically

¹ In this chapter, the term ‘well-being’ (with a hyphen) is used in preference to the unhyphenated ‘wellbeing’. This is to emphasise an Aristotelian conception of well-being as a dynamic process of living (*being*) well in the social world. ‘Wellbeing’ (unhyphenated) is used only in the context of ‘subjective wellbeing’ (SWB).

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liberal position: it does not specify the content of a good life, but assumes that, whatever goals and life plans a person chooses to pursue, all people would desire and require these all-purpose goods. On this account, a just society is structured to ensure that people start out with equal primary goods.

However, resourcist accounts of well-being and justice pose problems for egalitarians. The first objection is that resources are not ends in themselves, but only means: it is not resources themselves that are valuable, but what they enable a person to be and to do in their lives (Sen, 1985). Rawls recognises that the primary goods are not final ends in themselves, but nevertheless insists that they are the appropriate *equalisandum* (that is, the thing to be equalised). This falls short of a satisfactory conception of social justice, since it does not preclude inequalities in achieved well-being.

The second objection is that different individuals have different resource requirements, as well as varying abilities to convert resources into valuable activities and outcomes (Sen, 1985). Differential conversion of resources into well-being might be due to individual characteristics of the person, or structural features of the society, or the interaction of these. For example, a member of a group that is systematically discriminated against may have a lower ability to transform education into their occupation of choice, and a person with a physical impairment may require more resources than their able-bodied counterparts to achieve goods such as mobility. Therefore, equality of resources does not necessarily result in equality of the things that actually matter.

These objections – the focus on means rather than ends, and differential conversion of resources into well-being – mean that the resourcist account provides only a partial perspective on well-being and social justice.

Equality of Opportunity

There are several varieties of Equality of Opportunity. Formal Equality of Opportunity (Rawls, 1971) is the ideal that socially advantageous positions (e.g. career opportunities) are open to all, and applicants are assessed solely on their merits. In a society that upheld formal equality of opportunity, a person's socio-economic background (or class) would have no impact on her prospects for success in life; people of the same talent and ambition would be equally able to do well. However, there may be background inequalities in people's abilities to become qualified for such positions - for example, if achievement of qualifications depends on costly education and socialization that only the wealthiest could provide (Arneson, 2013). This leads to the need to go beyond formal equality of opportunity, since it is compatible with inequalities in achieved well-being. A focus on opportunity alone can also lead to a conception of social justice in which responsibility (and blame) for disadvantage is transferred to the individual, and structural inequalities are ignored.

Fair Equality of Opportunity acknowledges the existence of background inequalities, and extends formal equality of opportunity to stipulate that, as well as opportunities being open to all, all should have 'a fair chance to attain them' (Rawls, 1971:73). The related 'level playing field' account (e.g. Roemer, 1998) states that inequalities resulting from unchosen circumstances should be eliminated, but inequalities resulting from choices that a person makes are permissible. This version of Equality

of Opportunity is held up as an ideal in liberal democracies, partly because it includes individual responsibility as a central consideration in how justice is evaluated. For example, in his address to the 2015 Conservative Party conference, the then UK prime minister cited Equality of Opportunity as a fundamental 'Conservative value' (Cameron, 2015).

However, there are serious objections to equality of opportunity as the basis of an account of well-being and social justice. The first objection concerns the very coherence of the concept of fair equality of opportunity. The ideal of fair equality of opportunity is designed to acknowledge that background socio-economic inequalities can damage people's ability to access opportunities that are, in some (formal) respect, open to them. However, specifying what counts as 'a fair chance' may prove impossible, especially in societies in which a person's values, social roles and aspirations are shaped by entrenched cultural norms around unchosen characteristics such as gender, class, and race. There is often no neat division between what a person can be held responsible for and the influence of unchosen circumstances. The range of external and subjective constraints that influence the 'fairness' of people's life chances could be infinite, and it may be simply arbitrary where the line is drawn. This would leave the concept of fair equality of opportunity theoretically empty and inoperable in practice.

The second objection is that equality of opportunity is compatible with severe inequality of outcomes – the things in life that really matter. Final ends (outcomes) are, by definition, outside the scope of Equality of *Opportunity*. A theory of well-being and justice should recognise that opportunities are necessary but not sufficient; they are at best intermediate ends that are instrumental in the achievement of the ultimate end of leading a flourishing life. Additionally, even *within* the scope of equality of opportunity, some consideration of outcomes is desirable for two reasons. First, inequality of outcome can be a good indicator, at least at the group level, of underlying inequality of opportunity (Phillips, 2004). Second, every outcome is also an opportunity for future well-being, as advantages engender further accumulative advantages (Chambers, 2009).

In summary, while resources and opportunities both seem important in some respects, individually and together they provide only a partial view of well-being as the currency of social justice, since final ends remain out of scope.

Equality of Subjective Welfare

An alternative position, and one that brings in a final end, is that the most suitable currency of egalitarian justice is 'welfare' (e.g. Arneson, 1989). On the welfarist account, welfare is traditionally understood as either preference satisfaction or 'hedonic' welfare, the latter defined as 'a desirable or agreeable state of consciousness' (Cohen, 1989:909). The welfarist approach evolved from the classical utilitarianism associated with Jeremy Bentham, and it is this tradition that provides the theoretical foundation of 'the new science of happiness' (Layard, 2005), which is the basis of the UK's Measuring National Wellbeing programme (Donovan and Halpern, 2002; Lepper and McAndrew 2008; ONS, 2011a).

In this most recent incarnation of welfarism, the term 'welfare' has been replaced with the more politically palatable 'wellbeing', with the latter defined as an agreeable subjective state. It is measured using indicators of happiness (a hedonic indicator), life satisfaction (a preference

satisfaction indicator), and other positive states of consciousness such as feelings of self-worth (e.g. ONS, 2011a). The subjective wellbeing (SWB) approach goes beyond equality of resources and opportunities, and places ultimate value on the final end of feeling happy. Advocates of SWB argue that it is anti-paternalistic and democratic, since it takes into account people's own evaluations of their own lives (Diener et al, 2009), and, crucially, that it is easily measured through social surveys and can be analysed using standard econometric techniques (e.g. Powdthavee, 2010). The growing popularity of SWB as the currency of justice was highlighted by a British economist who claimed on a prime-time television programme that 'In a decade's time we're going to be using happiness as the sole basis for judging the impact of public policy' (Dolan, 2014).

There are, however, numerous objections to subjective wellbeing as the currency of justice, which apply to both the hedonic and preference-satisfaction versions. Taking first preference satisfaction (reflected in modern measures of 'Life Satisfaction'), the SWB approach does not distinguish between preferences that are normatively different. For example, sadists' and racists' preferences for harming or discriminating against others should not be counted as equally important for justice as other preferences. This has been called the problem of *offensive* tastes (Cohen, 1989). The problem of *expensive* tastes is that, on a strong welfarist position (i.e. one where SWB is all that matters), the egalitarian must give more to a billionaire with a preference for expensive caviar and champagne than to a poor person who is satisfied with a diet of cheap food. Related to this is the problem of *adaptive preferences*, whereby the billionaire who is unable to satisfy his preference for champagne and caviar suffers a hedonic deficit, while a person living in multidimensional poverty remains cheerful in the face of disadvantage, having learned to accept their lot and 'take pleasure in small mercies' (Sen, 1985). The strong welfarist or subjective wellbeing position again entails a counterintuitive conclusion, this time that policy should focus on rectifying the billionaire's hedonic shortfall, rather than on the poverty of the poor but cheerful person.

These objections lead to two conclusions. First, agreeable states of consciousness are not the only thing that matter in people's lives. Second, subjective well-being data is an unreliable source of information for socially just policy-making.

The UK Measuring National Wellbeing programme is subtitled 'Measuring What Matters'. This entails two questions: (1) What matters? and (2) How should it be measured? The discussion above demonstrates that, while resources, opportunities and subjective wellbeing are each important, none is sufficient (on its own) as a conceptualisation of well-being and as a currency of social justice. Instead, justice should be grounded in a pluralist conception of well-being, whereby well-being is constituted by being well-off in multiple domains of life. This implies not only definitional pluralism, but also measurement pluralism, since the measurement of only resources, opportunities or subjective states is insufficient to reveal how well a person's life is actually going. More information is required. To illustrate this argument with respect to the welfarist subjective wellbeing approach, the next section draws upon empirical evidence about the impacts of economic crisis on people's lives in the UK.

Economic crisis, well-being and social justice

The global financial crisis that began in 2007 led to economic downturns in countries across the world. The economic crisis in the UK had many negative impacts on individuals and households in multiple domains. As would be expected, there were important impacts in the economic domain, but there were also wider impacts beyond direct economic effects. The following evidence is based on analysis of UK data from the European Social Survey (ESS, 2014). Each of the figures below shows the impact of economic crisis in a particular domain of well-being. In each case, the period of economic crisis ('Hard Times' – 2008-2012) is compared with the time period immediately before it ('Times of Plenty' – 2002-2006). Vertical inequalities (differences between income groups) are also shown. Table A1 (page 16) contains all supporting data.

Direct economic effects

Figure 1 illustrates the impact of economic crisis in the domain of material security, showing the change in the proportion of people reporting that they were finding their household financial situation 'difficult' or 'very difficult'.

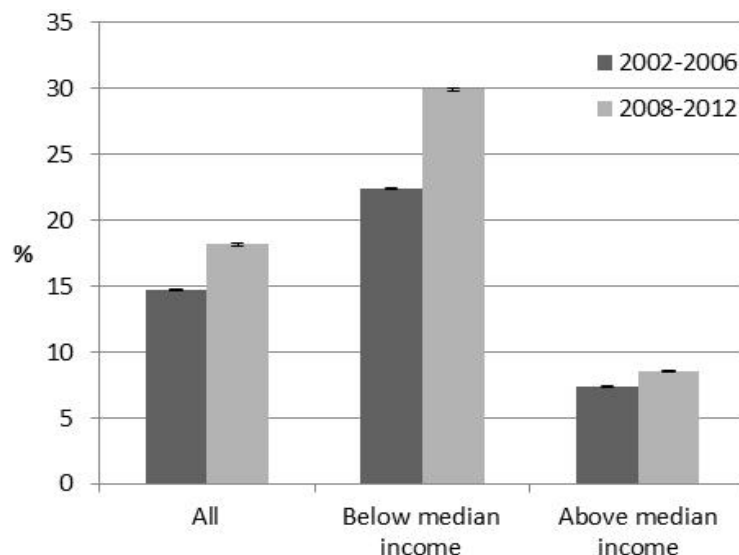


Figure 1. Household Income (finding things difficult or very difficult)

Figure 1 shows a statistically significant increase in material insecurity during the economic crisis among the UK population as a whole. Income and wealth are among Rawls' basic primary goods, and Aristotle argued that sufficient material resources are a necessary condition for a flourishing life. Figure 1 therefore supports the idea that economic crisis was a constraint on well-being. This evidence corroborates findings from other studies of the economic crisis, as the quote below shows:

'[I'm] not able to clothe the kids in a certain manner... kids [add] another dimension. You can't take them anywhere. Even a bus to Heaton Park is too expensive.'
Manchester resident (Lupton, et al., 2014)

The figure also shows that effects in this domain were not evenly distributed across the population, but concentrated among the less well-off. Material insecurity was higher among the less well-off

group in both periods, and also increased more among the less well-off. Economic crisis compounded inequality and social injustice in this domain.

Another direct economic effect of the crisis was the impact on employment. Employment is valuable in many ways, including its contribution to social connection, self-respect and material security.

‘I was made redundant...I’m really rationing with the little funds that I have...I’m really stressed out you know...I’ve [dug] into savings and there’s nothing left.’

Birmingham resident (Slay and Penny, 2013)

There were large increases in unemployment during the crisis, particularly among young people (Bell and Blanchflower 2011). The data also show that economic crisis had negative impacts in the domain of education and skills. During hard times, there were statistically significant decreases in the proportion of people enrolled in education; and for those in work, fewer reported that they were learning new skills (Table A1). This suggests that economic crisis was a constraint on people’s capability to pursue self-development in the form of education and meaningful employment.

Non-economic effects

As well as economic effects, there were also wider, non-economic effects. A study of the UK population showed that as well as material security, people place priority value on the domains of health and social relationships (ONS, 2011b). Figure 2 shows the domain of health, and the change in the proportion of people reporting that their health was ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’.

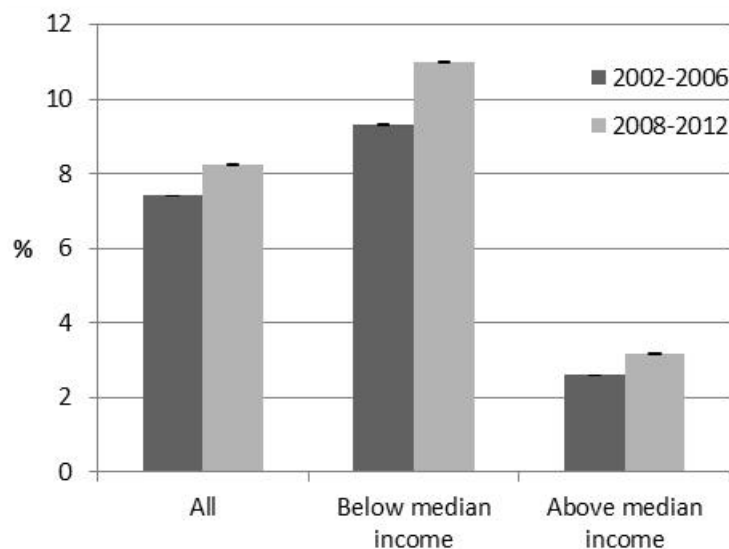


Figure 2. General Health (bad or very bad)

The data show statistically significant declines in health during the economic crisis among the population as a whole, and across income groups. There are likely to be multiple causes of deteriorating health, and this analysis does not distinguish between physical and mental health issues. However, unemployment, financial stress and cuts in health spending and disability support payments (Lupton et al., 2015) are likely to contribute. Also related to the health domain, the use of green space declined significantly during the economic crisis. This could be due to individuals and families having lower capability for leisure, in terms of material resources and time, and funding cuts

at local authority level for maintenance of parks and public green space (HLF, 2014). Overall, the data show that economic crisis diminished people’s capabilities to lead healthy lives.

Social relationships emerged as another highly valued domain in the UK (ONS, 2011b). Figure 3 shows the effects of hard times on social isolation.

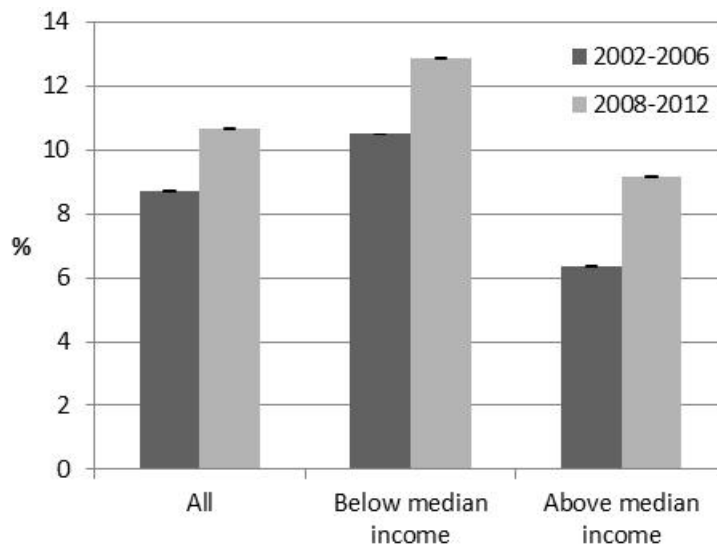


Figure 3: Social Isolation (meet socially once a month or never)

The data show statistically significant increases in social isolation during hard times. The quote below from a participant in a study about the effects of economic crisis summarises one of the ways in which hard times can have a direct effect on people’s social relationships:

‘People will be focusing on their basic needs...You become more inward looking rather than outward looking and concerned about the community. All your energy is taken up just surviving and holding it together.’
Birmingham resident (Slay and Penny, 2012)

There are multiple other ways in which economic crisis might be expected to harm social relationships. For example, a reduction in disposable income may reduce people’s ability to participate in social activities such as going out with friends, attending clubs or classes that cost money, or getting a bus or train for social visits and activities. Whatever the mechanisms, the data support the idea that economic crisis harmed social well-being.

Taken together, the evidence strongly supports the hypothesis that economic crisis posed various external constraints on flourishing. Furthermore, there is additional evidence that economic crisis also created internal, subjective constraints. Popular discourse and the interdisciplinary literature relating to the Great Recession suggest that economic crisis caused ‘a downsizing of expectations’ (Pew, 2010) resulting in ‘the crushed dreams of millions’ (Treas, 2010). In support of the idea of economic crisis posing subjective constraints on people’s horizons of aspiration, research shows that during hard times, there was widespread downgrading of goals and aspirations in the UK, away from

higher agency goals such as creativity and adventure, towards basic security goals such as social order, stability and personal safety – a sort of ‘hunkering down’ in the face of economic crisis (Austin 2016a).

Subjective well-being

Overall then, there is strong evidence that economic crisis in the UK had negative effects in multiple domains of well-being. However, there was one domain that remained immune from the effects of hard times – the domain of subjective well-being. Figures 4 and 5 show the trends over time.

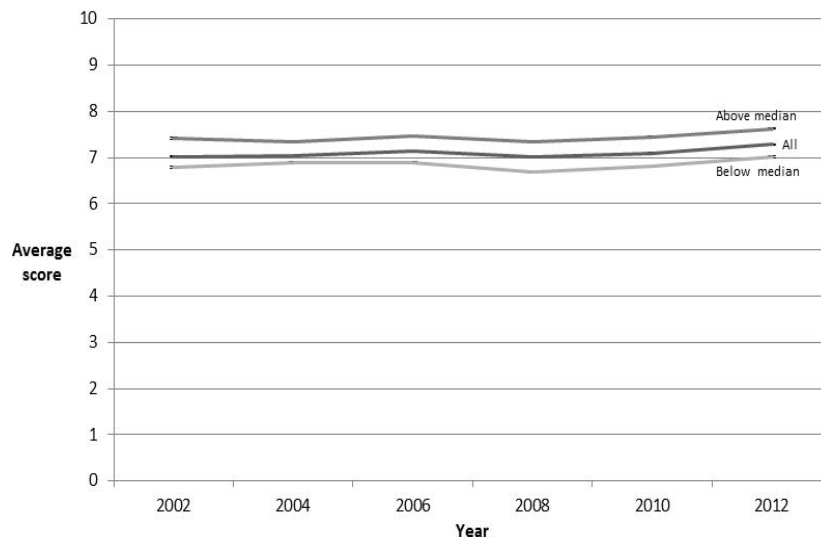


Figure 4. Life satisfaction average score

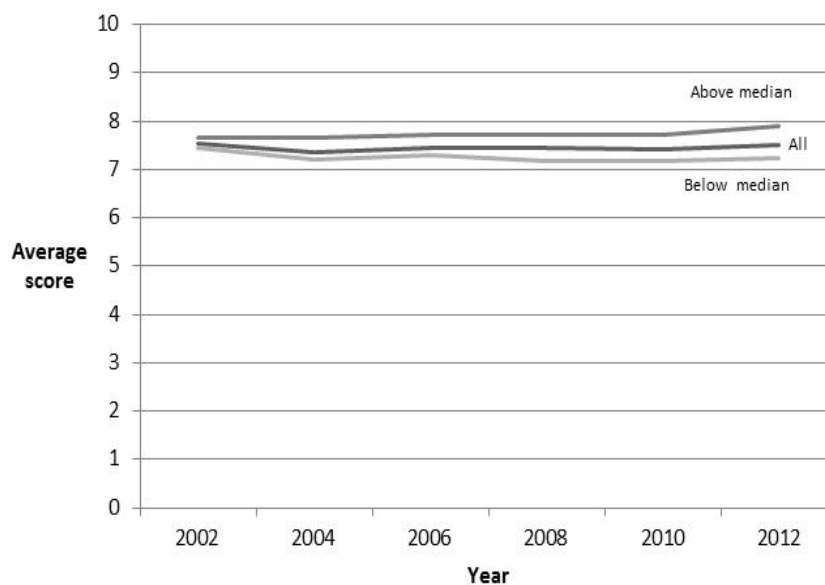


Figure 5. Happiness average score

The data show that average happiness and life satisfaction scores were not affected during the period of hard times. The trends are flat, with no statistically significant variation at the population

level or within income groups. These results are in line with other research relating to the effects of the recent economic crisis on subjective well-being in the UK (Crabtree, 2010; ONS, 2012; OECD, 2013), as well as past economic crises in other parts of the world (Veenhoven and Hagenaars, 1989).

Although the SWB approach to well-being and justice goes beyond resources and opportunities to incorporate a final end, its focus is restricted to a single end only – an agreeable mind-state. This represents too narrow a conception of well-being, and, moreover, SWB suffers from distorted links to other important ends, as the above analysis of economic crisis and well-being shows.

Beyond SWB: Equality of capability

An approach to well-being that meets the criterion of value pluralism is the Capabilities Approach (Sen, 1985; Nussbaum, 2000). The Capabilities Approach (CA) was designed in response to the objections outlined above against resourcism and welfarism, and in recognition of the need to ‘expand the informational basis’ of evaluations of well-being and justice (Sen, 1985). The foundational claim of the CA is that well-being is a question of the real freedoms (capabilities) people have to achieve valuable ‘beings and doings’, known as ‘functionings’. Proponents of the CA argue that the aim of public policy ought to be the expansion of capabilities – the space within which people can develop a conception of the good life, and have the opportunity and ability to live in accordance with that conception.

The CA conceives of well-being as determined by characteristics of the person in interaction with features of the social, political and material environment in which she lives. It deals with the question of differential conversion of resources into well-being through its theorisation of ‘conversion factors’ (Sen 1985). Conversion factors at the individual, social and environmental levels determine the rate of conversion of resources into capabilities (freedoms and opportunities) and functionings (outcomes). This entails multi-level measurement pluralism, since as well as measuring multiple ends, full capabilities assessments account for features of the individual *and* the external context.

The CA is sometimes criticised on similar grounds to equality of opportunity. For example, the emphasis on individual freedom leads some to conclude that the CA ignores the social-relational character of personhood and well-being (e.g. Dean, 2009). It is also argued that, like equality of opportunity, the CA over-values hypothetical possibilities to the detriment of actual outcomes, and once again risks missing that which is most important in people’s lives (Reader, 2009).

The two objections of individualism and failure to focus on achieved outcomes are, however, mis-readings of the CA. First, both Sen and Nussbaum adopt relational definitions of well-being. Nussbaum’s CA is explicitly grounded in an Aristotelian definition of the person as a social animal who depends on her social environment for her development of basic human capacities (Nussbaum, 2000:84), and derives her self-concept and well-being from her relationships of love, belonging and solidarity (Nussbaum, 2007). The capability for affiliation is said to play a special role in organising and suffusing other capabilities (Nussbaum, 2000:82). Similarly, Sen argues that human beings are ‘quintessentially social creatures’, and that ‘No individual can think, choose or act without being

influenced in one way or another by the society around him or her' (Sen, 2002:80). Sociality and relationality are at the heart of the CA.

Second, the need to include achieved functionings (outcomes) in evaluations of well-being and justice is also recognised by both Sen and Nussbaum. For example, Sen (1992:51) states that, to know how well a person's life is going, 'we do, of course, need to know what is chosen from each set, and not just what the set is from which the choice is being made.' He uses the term 'refined functionings' to refer to the combination of capabilities and functionings (e.g. 1985:202). Refined functionings have been argued to represent 'the most complete informational basis' for evaluations of well-being and justice (Fleurbaey, 2006), and are therefore a strong candidate for a currency of justice. Considerations relating to the measurement of capabilities are discussed below.

Discussion and conclusion

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, both the definition and metrics of well-being are important in specifying its role in public policy and social justice.

Defining well-being

With respect to the definition of well-being, an agreeable subjective state is only one among a plurality of important ends that people value. Similarly, resources and opportunities are necessary conditions for living a good life, but neither is sufficient. The CA clarifies and formalises the relationships between resources ('commodities'), opportunities ('capabilities'), and outcomes ('functionings'). It conceptualises well-being as a function of features of the individual and their environment, creating a space for comprehensive evaluations of well-being and social justice that include both individual and structural factors.

The CA was designed as a broad theoretical framework, to be tailored to specific populations and contexts. Some theorists refrain from specifying which capabilities are most important, and say that this is an empirical question: it is context-specific and should be decided through the democratic participation of the relevant population (e.g. Sen, 2002). Others argue for the existence of a core set of capabilities that are universally valuable. Nussbaum (2000) specifies a list of ten 'Central Human Functional Capabilities' which, she argues, are political entitlements that should be guaranteed to all people by state constitutions. The list consists of domains such as 'Bodily Health', 'Affiliation' and 'Control over one's Environment'. Nussbaum argues that the central capabilities are deliberately specified at a high, abstract level that can accommodate individual and cultural variation, and are compatible with the principles of political liberalism. Nevertheless, her approach of stipulating specific core capabilities has been criticised as anti-democratic and paternalistic (e.g. Barclay, 2003).

This question of outcomes – which are most important and who should decide – poses a dilemma for the CA. Sen's approach has been criticised for being too 'thin' and abstract to be of practical use (e.g. Rawls, 1999), while Nussbaum's thicker approach is open to paternalism objections. The paternalism objection can be rebutted by conceiving of the central capabilities as an 'overlapping consensus' – one that can form the basis of an agreement between different parties, and which leaves room for individual and cultural diversity (Nussbaum, 2000:232). The inclusion of freedom, agency and practical reason as universal values further responds to the paternalism objection

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(Nussbaum, 2000:51). In addition, the use of refined functionings – pairings of freedoms and outcomes – as the appropriate definition and metric of well-being, represents a promising compromise between the thin and thick versions of the CA.

Measuring well-being

The evidence also demonstrates the importance of how well-being is measured. The ‘new science of happiness’ (Layard, 2005) has gained momentum in recent years; however, empirical findings about the impacts of economic crisis demonstrate that subjective indicators do not always reliably reflect the actual quality of people’s lives. While various sources show that hard times had no effects on national happiness and life satisfaction, analysis of separate spheres of well-being shows that there were real impacts on important aspects of people’s lives. This demonstrates that the complexity of what it means to lead a flourishing life cannot be reduced to a subjective well-being metric. A reliance on SWB alone would entail different policy action to a pluralist measurement approach.

As well as population-wide impacts, there were also vertical and horizontal inequalities² in the effects of hard times: impacts were concentrated among the least well-off and the young, and existing inequalities were compounded by the crisis. The finding that SWB indicators failed to reflect this crucial matter of justice supports the ‘adaptive preferences’ objection to a strong welfarist position.

The capabilities approach helps to make sense of what happened in people’s lives during the Great Recession. In terms of ‘combined capabilities’ (the combination of personal and external factors that constitute capability), economic crisis can be seen as an external constraint that reduced people’s ability to live well in multiple dimensions. Research also shows that, in addition to creating external constraints, economic crisis led to internal constraints on expectations and aspirations. Economic crisis therefore had a two-fold effect on well-being. This shows that the evaluation of social injustice requires a pluralist account of well-being that recognises both individual and contextual constraints on flourishing. The CA does not exclude subjective or resource-based indicators, but includes them as one part of a wider set of information that goes beyond a simplistic reliance on GDP or SWB.

The simplicity of an SWB metric is, however, one of its attractions. The CA is richer and more informationally demanding than resourcist and welfarist approaches. This leads some to doubt the very possibility of measuring ‘freedom’, which is constituted by unobservable hypothetical opportunities. However, there is much innovation in the measurement of capabilities and refined functionings on a large scale (e.g. Krishnakumar, 2007; Anand et al., 2009), and there are successful examples of the approach in operation; for example, at the UK’s Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC, 2007). More challenging measurement requirements are not an adequate reason to discount the capabilities approach to well-being and social justice (although this may explain why the CA is less popular than the SWB approach in some policy circles).

² Vertical inequalities relate to differences between those with different incomes. Horizontal inequalities are inequalities among groups defined by different characteristics, such as age group, ethnicity or gender.

Conclusion

This chapter began with the question, 'Equality of What?' I have argued that *well-being* is the appropriate currency of social justice. Defining well-being in terms of resources, opportunities or subjective states all have merit, but each provides only a partial perspective. The capabilities approach brings together the most important aspects of these partial conceptions within a single approach. Definitional and measurement pluralism make the CA informationally demanding. However, the CA provides a sophisticated conceptualisation of the multi-level and multi-dimensional nature of well-being, and a sound currency of social justice.

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Appendix 1

- Unless otherwise stated, all data are from the European Social Survey: Period 1 ('Times of Plenty') refers to rounds 1-3 (2002-2006), and Period 2 (Hard Times) refers to rounds 4-6 (2008-2012).
- For ease of comparison, the table shows 95% confidence intervals in parentheses. Standard errors are available on request.

Group	Period	Domains of Well-being						SWB (average score)	
		Material Security (% finding things 'difficult' or 'very difficult')	Health (% 'Bad' or 'Very bad')	Social Isolation (% meet socially less than once a month)	Work and skills [¥] (% 'Not true' or 'A little true' that you learn new skills at work)	Education (% currently enrolled in education)	Green Space [§] (% who access once a week or more)	Life Satisfaction	Happiness
Population	Times of Plenty	14.70 (±0.06)	7.41 (±0.01)	8.71 (±0.00)	15.58 (±0.49)	8.20 (±0.13)	54.00 (±2.84)	7.06 (±0.01)	7.45 (±0.03)
	Hard Times	18.13 (±0.09)	8.23 (±0.02)	10.67 (±0.00)	20.99 (±0.70)	4.70 (±0.04)	48.00 (±1.85)	7.13 (±0.01)	7.45 (±0.01)
	<i>Valid n</i>	<i>13,237</i>	<i>13,387</i>	<i>13,392</i>	<i>1,755</i>	<i>13,403</i>	<i>3,670</i>	<i>13,346</i>	<i>13,381</i>
Below median income	Times of Plenty	22.33 (±0.33)	9.32 (±0.03)	10.50 (±0.00)				6.85 (±0.02)	7.31 (±0.03)
	Hard Times	29.89 (±0.64)	10.98 (±0.02)	12.88 (±0.00)				6.83 (±0.03)	7.19 (±0.03)
Above median income	Times of Plenty	7.39 (±0.04)	2.60 (±0.00)	6.36 (±0.00)				7.40 (±0.05)	7.68 (±0.05)
	Hard Times	8.52 (±0.04)	3.16 (±0.00)	9.18 (±0.00)				7.47 (±0.04)	7.77 (±0.04)

Notes
[¥]For this question, data for Period 1 are from 2004. Data for Period 2 are from 2010. This question appeared in a rotating module in these two survey years only.
[§] For this question, data are from Defra (2009) Public Attitudes and Behaviours towards the Environment tracker survey. Period 1 is 2007. Period 2 is 2009.