


Respecting the subject in wellbeing public policy: beyond the social planner perspective

Mark Fabian ^{a,b}, Anna Alexandrova^c, Diane Coyle^b, Matthew Agarwala^b and Marco Felici^b

^aInstitute for Social Change, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Australia; ^bBennett Institute for Public Policy, Cambridge University, Cambridge, UK; ^cHistory and Philosophy of Science, Cambridge University, Cambridge, UK

ABSTRACT

We compare and evaluate two competing paradigms in the ‘wellbeing public policy’ (WPP) space with the intention of promoting interdisciplinary dialogue. We argue that most WPP proposals adopt the same ‘social planner perspective’ (SPP) that undergirds conventional economic policy analysis. The SPP is broadly technocratic, emphasising scientific standards for what constitutes good policy and empowering ‘dispassionate’ experts. We argue that WPP could lend itself to a more transformative agenda, one that embraces the value-laden nature of ‘wellbeing’ as a concept. We call this the ‘citizen’s perspective’ (CP). It would see WPP relinquish the SPP’s stance of detached analysis by technical experts and instead give a greater role to participatory and deliberative modes of policymaking to define, analyse, and measure wellbeing and ultimately make policy decisions. We present a preliminary framework for analysing when the SPP or CP is more suitable to a particular area of WPP.

KEYWORDS Wellbeing; public policy; social planner; coproduction; participatory governance

Introduction

The majority of wellbeing public policy (WPP) advocacy on the part of scientific communities has adopted the same ‘social planner perspective’ (SPP) that undergirds conventional economic policy analysis. WPP advocacy has sought to shift the *metrics* and *definition* of wellbeing employed by technical policy analysts rather than change the policy analysis *paradigm*. We argue that WPP could and should lend itself to a more transformative agenda, one that embraces both the value-laden nature of ‘wellbeing’ as a concept

CONTACT Mark Fabian  Mark.Otto.Fabian@gmail.com

© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

and the realities of public administration. This would see WPP relinquish the SPP's stance of detached analysis by technical experts and instead give a greater role to participatory and deliberative modes of policymaking to define, analyse, and measure wellbeing and ultimately make policy decisions. We call this the 'citizen perspective' (CP).

This paper makes three novel contributions. First, we develop an interdisciplinary synthesis of high-level, paradigmatic thinking about what WPP is and should be. The SPP and CP are nascent constellations within the scholarship of WPP, splitting roughly along disciplinary lines – economists, psychologists, and philosophers on one side, political scientists, sociologists, and anthropologists on the other. Second, we articulate the SPP and CP using both the language of economics and the language of public administration. This clarifies these paradigms and allows their advocates to understand each other and communicate more effectively. It makes the stakes and concerns of each side has clear. Third, we develop a preliminary framework for thinking about the comparative advantages of the SPP and CP as paradigms for WPP that illuminates what policy contexts are well-suited to each.

Features of the social planner perspective

What is the social planner perspective?

The SPP undergirds economic analysis of the welfare effects of policy decisions. Owing to the dominance of economic thinking over policymaking in the second half of the twentieth century, non-economists engaging in policy analysis, such as wellbeing psychologists, can fall under the influence of its paradigm. Economists generally analyse policy outcomes from the perspective of a 'benevolent' social planner who aims to maximise aggregate utility as defined by a specified social welfare function (Adler, 2019). Aggregate utility is made up of rankings of relative preferences such that satisfying higher-ranked preferences provides more utility. Social welfare functions are mathematical means of aggregating individual utilities to enable collective analysis. They can embody various distributional criteria. This welfare analysis architecture is extremely powerful, able to provide rough estimates of the welfare consequences of climate change, compare the costs and benefits of competing infrastructure projects, and assess the impact of individual policy changes, for example. However, the notion of the 'optimality' utilised in this maximisation exercise rests on a series of assumptions underpinning the welfare theorems in economics that have been much debated and critiqued (Coyle, 2020). The welfare theorems also involve a particular definition of improvement: a Pareto improvement is a change in allocation of resources that leaves at least one person better off and nobody worse off.

Social welfare assessment in economics also incorporates two less-widely debated philosophical stances. First, there is the assumption of separateness of facts from values. That is, the estimation of optimality is treated as a technocratic exercise, with values only entering when politicians decide to act on the evidence this exercise provides. This separation of positive and normative was articulated by Lionel Robbins in a 1932 publication, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science*, where he argued that political processes can make value judgements (for example, by selecting a social welfare functional form) on the basis of positive evidence provided by economists. Even though the Pareto criterion means there is in fact an ethical assumption deeply embedded in welfare economics, the Robbins separation protocol has a firm hold in economics. For example, it was famously reaffirmed by Milton Friedman (1953), and recently by Esther Duflo (2017).

Secondly, maximisation of social welfare by the social planner is a version of the ‘view from nowhere’ (Nagel, 1989). Dating back at least to Adam Smith’s idea of an ‘impartial spectator’, it demands that the interests of all members of society be taken into account. Behind this admirable idea is a less appreciated aspect: the analyst themselves is placed outside the society of which they are a member (Coyle, 2021). Naturally, standing outside the society armed with all the necessary information, the analyst must assume that the public have no other necessary information (nor technical ability) that is relevant to their decision.

The SPP ideally wants a single objective to maximise and a unidimensional and cardinal measure of that variable, as this aids aggregation and comparison across individuals. In economics, the single objective is preference-satisfaction (i.e., utility). But note that preferences are heterogeneous across individuals, so in maximising preference-satisfaction economic analysis seeks to realise a plurality of values. Defining welfare as preference-satisfaction allows the economist to wash their hands, they presume, of any need to make a value judgement about what is worthwhile to maximise – they simply maximise citizens’ ability to maximise whatever it is that *those citizens* value. Money is the metric of choice for these analyses because it is unidimensional, cardinal, and arguably a good proxy for preference-satisfaction. More of it allows you to buy more stuff and thereby satisfy more preferences. Furthermore, owing to the nature of competitive markets, \$100 will provide approximately as much utility to each of two individuals even though they would spend that \$100 on a different set of consumption goods (Adler, 2019).

The social planner perspective in practice

The SPP manifests in public management in the form of a metrics-first approach to policy design, evaluation, and funding. It is implemented foremost by treasuries – ministries that fund policies but do not generally

design or deliver them. There is a noble desire to fund only good policies, and to fund better policies before worse ones. This naturally leads to a demand for cost–benefit analysis (CBA), which is the principal technical fruit of the SPP. CBA can accommodate multidimensional costs and benefits, but for cost–benefit *ratios* to be compared across projects this multidimensionality needs to be distilled down into a unidimensional index. For example, narrowing the objective of education to improving PISA scores allows complex education programmes to be compared in terms of their cost relative to their impact on this one metric. A natural extension of this approach is to focus on causal inference methods as an evaluation tool, as they can precisely identify the ‘treatment effect’ of a policy on an outcome of interest. These treatment effects are then fed into CBA. Textbooks on CBA argue that it would be rational for policymakers to calculate the cost–benefit ratio for all potential policies, rank them from highest to lowest, and then fund from the top of the list until you run out of money (Dobes, 2018).

One of the strongest challenges to the SPP within economics, especially in the context of policymaking, was the public choice movement (Buchanan, 1964; Tullock, 1965), which introduced into the assessment of policy outcomes the interests of the policymaker, challenging the notion that impartiality was possible. Public choice theory formed one basis for New Public Management (NPM), introducing practices such as target-setting to control the interests of bureaucrats (Lane, 2000). However, NPM does not address either the notion of maximisation of social welfare—calculable by an analyst from outside the model given codified information—or the positivist presumption that the facts and values aspects of a decision can be separated. Indeed, NPM is widely associated with the proliferation and entrenchment of metrics-based policymaking, CBA, technocracy, and other tropes of the SPP (Muller, 2019). NPM hoped that by making bureaucrats and decision-makers beholden to the maximisation of metrics validated by ‘science’, they would be forced to follow the evidence rather than their personal judgements or interests.

How does the social planner perspective manifest in WPP?

The SPP in WPP is an outcome of the way that academic research of wellbeing and the policy world have interacted in the recent decades (see Bache, 2020; Bache & Reardon, 2016; Jenkins, 2018; and Scott & Bell, 2013 for thorough historical overviews). Initial publications purporting to launch a new field of wellbeing studies, almost all in economics and psychology, began to appear mainly in the USA in the 1990s (Kahneman et al., 1999; Van Praag & Ferreri-Carbonell, 2004), building on more sporadic earlier work. Soon its proponents began to translate this ‘new science’ into policy (Diener et al., 2009; Diener & Seligman, 2004; Graham, 2011). They advocated novel indices to

track wellbeing nationally and internationally, and policies to target wellbeing instead of or in addition to conventional economic indicators.

In the UK, this work was picked up by prominent economists and psychologists, and quickly acquired influential sponsors in government who began advocating for policy driven by wellbeing (Layard, 2005; O'Donnell et al., 2014). For the most part, these ambitions to steer policy by wellbeing metrics were not realised, though the language of wellbeing and happiness entered the New Labour Government's decentralisation drive in the early 2000s. The arrival of the Coalition Government in 2010 produced more lasting WPP initiatives, but also moved away from New Labour's localism to an approach built on standardised wellbeing metrics. Wellbeing advocates such as Oliver Letwin in the Cabinet were able to institute changes at the national level. These included the start of National Wellbeing data collection by the Office of National Statistics, the birth of the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, and the first mention of subjective wellbeing in the Treasury's Green Book (Fujiwara & Campbell, 2011).

The wellbeing policy agenda has advanced significantly in a number of other countries. These include the US, Bhutan, UAE, and New Zealand. In the UK, wellbeing has remained the focus of prominent academic sponsors such as Richard Layard and his colleagues at the influential LSE Centre for Economic Performance (CEP) and continues to win significant attention at different levels of government including wellbeing focused policy agendas in the devolved nations and local government. The work of CEP, especially the book *Origins of Happiness* (Clark et al., 2018) and subsequent publications (Frijters et al., 2020; Frijters & Krekel, 2021), clearly exemplify the SPP. A recent endorsement of a similar expert-driven approach, emphasising the need for common metrics and benchmarking of policies comes from the Nordic Council of Ministers, a body that speaks for Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland (Birkjær et al., 2021).

WPP advocacy emerging from the wellbeing sciences, with few exceptions, retains the social planner's focus on an 'ultimate value' and a narrow (ideally unidimensional) metric for it that policy should aim to maximise. High profile psychologists Diener and Seligman (2004), for example, argue (p. 1–2) that 'wellbeing should become a primary focus of policymakers, and that its rigorous measurement is a primary policy imperative ... wellbeing ought to be the ultimate goal around which economic, health, and social policies are built'. Leading happiness economists writing in Frijters et al. (2020, pp. 144–145) make similar claims:

We argue that a useful approach would be to have an interactive process in terms of 'agreed-upon metrics and causal effects'. The idea is that the bureaucracy should adopt a current metric for wellbeing (i.e., life satisfaction) until a

better one comes along. Similarly, it should maintain and regularly update a list of believed effects of various policies and circumstances on its chosen metric of wellbeing.

This advocacy also exemplifies the SPP's claims to the value-neutrality of such data and the ability of the social planner to offer objective advice on their basis. Ed Diener and Martin Seligman (p. 24), for example, write that 'we believe that measures of wellbeing are—and must be— exactly as neutral politically as are economic indicators. The indicators are descriptive, not prescriptive, and must remain so.'

In keeping with the value freedom and 'outsidedness' ideals of the SPP and its technocratic, metrics-first practices, the legitimacy of policy in WPP advocacy is supposed to be determined entirely by scientific standards. Frijters et al. (*ibid.*), for example, argue that:

Because the list [of effects of various policies on wellbeing] would be so influential in setting priorities and generating effects, its elements must be arrived at via a transparent process and improvements should be as scientifically argued as possible ... Given the importance of openness, we think it is probably best to have a headline estimate derived from whatever the supposed 'best study' is on some topic, because that allows practitioners to see all of the elements of the process (i.e., the type of measurement, the type of individuals, the conditioning set of other variables, etc.). Of course, any such nominated 'best estimate' would need to be backed up by several other studies that have similar results, and if their methodology is close enough, one could advocate a meta-estimate of them.

Frijters et al. go on to argue, straight from the SPP textbook, that policy-makers should decide whether a policy is desirable on the basis of cost-effectiveness analysis, where 'value is measured in units of happiness' and 'the problem is how to maximise aggregate happiness of the relevant population.' They assert that 'the correct approach is then to rank all possible policies in terms of the extra happiness which they generate per pound of expenditure.' In terms of implementing WPP, Frijters' et al. identify 3 pivotal areas for development: measurement, methodology, and government guidelines. Scholars must develop and debate the first two, while analysts must be trained in the later; then 'ultimately, government needs to be empowered to apply the wellbeing toolkit for wellbeing to become the goal of policymaking,' (p. 161). There are no citizens here or debates over values; there is only supposedly dispassionate analysis of solved political problems. This technocratic approach has been implemented in UK Treasury guidance on CBA, including an algebraic formula for calculating 'WELLBYS' in monetary terms – a quantity that determines whether a policy is worth pursuing (HMT, 2021).

WPP advocacy preserves the SPP's assumption of an asymmetry of knowledge and wisdom between the social planner and the public. For example, Diener et al. (2018) argue that 'Smoking seems to be related to lower SWB,

and thus perhaps counterintuitively, cigarette taxes can actually raise the happiness of smokers.’ There is no suggestion here of asking smokers for their opinion, as these would be riddled with ‘cognitive bias’ (Fabian & Pykett, 2021). Prominent happiness economists similarly raise cognitive biases as a reason why citizens can only be trusted to report their life satisfaction and participate in politics, but not policymaking, which should be reserved for analysts (O’Donnell et al., 2014). The tacit and local knowledge of citizens and street level bureaucrats is here marginalised, with centralised technical knowledge endorsed instead. The social planner grants that the public has values but does not grant them knowledge about how to realise these values, which is why the policymaker and expert work with each other rather than the public. Notably, the only role for citizens in Frijters et al.’s framework appears to be electing the government (p. 161).

The extent to which the SPP allows for deliberation and localism is minimal. Minipublics and other deliberative exercises are sometimes mentioned (e.g., O’Donnell et al., 2014, pp. 69–70), but used largely to ensure formal legitimacy, rather than discovery and development of new policies, or indeed new metrics (Oman, 2016). The lack of commitment to learning *between* experts and citizens is also reflected in the fact that WPP advocates take ‘local wellbeing policy’ to consist in empowering communities to use wellbeing indicators *as defined centrally* and validated by experts (Scott, 2014 Scott & Bell, 2013;). The social planner takes indicators to have been validated once and for all and then undertakes to spread their use as widely as possible with the goal of benchmarking and standardising evidence (Brown et al., 2017). Localism and metrics-pluralism undermines these essential features of the CBA approach to policy prioritisation. Since quantitative evidence is most likely to be standardisable, transferrable, and to fit with evidence hierarchies, it inevitably dominates decision making (Oman, 2016, 2020; Oman & Taylor, 2018).

Due in part to the influence of hedonic psychologists and happiness economists, the SPP in WPP described above is nowadays embedded in knowledge-broking organisations that work to translate scientific understanding into policy (Austin, 2016). These include the OECD, which has published several reports on measuring subjective wellbeing (SWB), mostly recently in 2013, and who established a Centre on Wellbeing, Inclusion, Sustainability and Equal Opportunity (WISE) in 2012; the National Academy of the Sciences in the United States, which published the findings of a high-level panel on measuring SWB (Stone & Mackie, 2013); and, in the UK, the What Works Centre for Wellbeing (WWCW). The foreword to the OECD’s (2013) guidelines makes explicit that it aims to ‘be most useful to governments and other decision-makers’. The National Academies report targets a similar audience: ‘Could gathering data on SWB help governments and organisations develop policies that better serve the needs of their constituents?’ The

WWCW is the only one of these organisations to include the public in its immediate audience. They describe their mission as ‘to develop and share robust, accessible, and useful evidence that governments, business, communities, and people use to improve wellbeing.’ These knowledge brokers are responding to a perception within ‘expert’ communities that the optimal mode of policymaking involves taking insights from science and delivering them directly to ‘decision makers’ in government and other powerful bodies.

Evaluating the social planner perspective

The SPP has much to commend it. We begin this section with an overview of these strengths before considering the perspective’s weaknesses, with special attention to how these manifest in WPP.

The strengths of the social planner perspective

The SPP has firm ethical foundations, namely welfarism. A variant of utilitarianism, this view holds that policies, rules, and regulations should be evaluated according to their impacts on human welfare. It is a popular doctrine among moral philosophers and economists, with many high-profile advocates going back at least to Bentham arguing that governments ought to maximise happiness (Sumner, 1996). There are sophisticated versions of welfarism that stand up to scrutiny better than earlier versions. The basic idea that everyone’s welfare should count has been supplemented with many theoretical tools about how to identify and measure this quantity and how to incorporate into this calculation other ethical considerations such as equality and fairness (Adler, 2019).

Another substantial theoretical foundation for the SPP is the methodology of evidence-based practice, from which the social planner’s emphasis on measurement, data analysis, and causal inference stems. This methodology in social science emerged out of evidence-based medicine and has exerted growing influence over policy in recent decades (Littell & White, 2018). The social planner tropes of WPP advocacy are thus familiar to social scientists, so life satisfaction measurement plugs straightforwardly into their existing practices.

Evidence-based policy’s influence stems in part from its potential to ‘rationalise’ policymaking. In addition to acting as a counterweight to policies shaped by purely political calculations, compiling research results, official statistics, and policy impact studies can enable policymakers to abandon policies that are not working, scale up those that are, and identify opportunities to improve policies further. In a famous example, the ‘scared straight’ programme, widely believed to reduce criminality among delinquent youth, was shown by a randomised control trial to have the opposite effect. Its

consequent discontinuation refocused public resources on potentially more effective policies (Breunig, 2018). The framework of social welfare functions and the tools of CBA informs voters as to what a policy delivered and at what cost, aiding democratic accountability. In general, high benefit-to-cost ratio interventions should be funded, low ratio interventions should not, and when these heuristics are violated, flags are raised that can instigate further investigation (Dobes, 2018). While often controversial, the methodology can apply a discipline to public spending that mitigates the construction of ‘white elephants’ and other patently bad value projects.

A final argument for the SPP concerns comparative advantage (Boswell & Corbett, 2018). The public elect officials for the specific purpose of making decisions on their behalf. There are several advantages to this representation, ranging from the need for specialisation (policy makers have a unique skill set) to the quality of information and expertise available to government officials – citizens may reasonably expect policy makers to be better briefed to make important decisions because they have the civil service apparatus to help guide them (Badano, 2020 Heath, 2020;).

The limits of the social planner perspective

When critiquing the SPP, it is useful to distinguish between four dimensions: ethical, political, epistemic, and practical. In each of these, the social planner oversteps her bounds; she claims to have knowledge and entitlements that she cannot plausibly have.

The ethical problem arises because the SPP is typically articulated using the concepts of utilitarianism. While utilitarianism is a wide umbrella term that admits of diverse articulations (all controversial), the ‘*wellbeing social planner*’ adopts a specific version of this philosophy. The good here is exhausted by positive responses to standard questionnaires, and the right course of action is to adopt whatever policy maximises these reports given the resources available. The wellbeing social planner thus has an especially narrow view of both the good and the right. People are treated as receptacles of utility who lack agency and knowledge of their own to improve their lives (a longstanding critique – see Smart & Williams, 1973). The improvements happen *to them*, and policy is not done *with them*. These improvements are also not constrained by rights, obligations, or any other constitutional considerations. Clark et al. (2018, p. 123), for example, quickly affirm a commitment to freedom when defending WPP, but only because freedom makes people happy.

Related to these ethical problems are political ones. The SPP embodies the political philosophy of technocracy, in which decisions about how to realise our values are outsourced to the expert. But since wellbeing is a value-laden concept, the expert must make value judgments about what it is and what

data reliably measure it before they can conduct an analysis, thereby overstepping the technocratic remit (Alexandrova & Fabian, 2022; Singh & Alexandrova, 2020). One need not be a sceptic of expertise to see this. There is plenty of room in a democracy for division of epistemic labour and hence for the idea that some people know more about a complex technical problem than others (Moore et al., 2020). But the social planner claims undue expertise about matters on which citizens themselves clearly also possess expertise, namely their own wellbeing. In this way, the SPP undermines democracy (Davies, 2015 Fabian & Pykett, 2021;). It implicitly adopts a 'deficit model' of citizens according to which they are too ill-equipped or biased to form opinions about policy. In speaking directly to the bureaucrats and policymakers rather than the various publics engaged in political action, the social planner bypasses political processes on paternalist grounds (Haybron & Alexandrova, 2013). The result is a democratic deficit, with citizens feeling shut out of the policies that affect their lives.

The epistemic line of criticism questions the ability of the social planner to be 'evidence-based'. Discovery and confirmation of causal relations between wellbeing and variables that can be affected by policy is essential to the SPP and is perhaps the strongest card in its deck. But how warranted is the social planner's confidence in her evidence base? We see three reasons to worry.

The first is that the wellbeing social planner is cavalier about the 'validity' of data about wellbeing for policy applications. Most wellbeing data come from reported life satisfaction or other short questionnaires. It is customary to use headline psychometric indicators as evidence of their validity (Clark et al., 2018; Diener et al., 2009). But it is well known that psychometric validity is always relative to a population in which a given survey was initially validated. In addition to this relativity, construct validation operates on purely correlational evidence – the point of construct validation is to check that a scale correlates with other variables that our background assumptions say are relevant (Alexandrova & Haybron, 2016). As such, construct validation is silent about the psycho-linguistic process involved in mapping the underlying construct of interest ('wellbeing') to self-reports on the metric in question. Yet understanding this process is crucial for assessing the *precision* of these metrics, especially in welfare analysis applications (Fabian, 2021). Partly because of our almost total ignorance about this underlying process, whether life satisfaction scales are precise enough for things like cost-effectiveness analysis is hotly contested (see Adler, 2013; Benjamin et al., 2020 Fabian, 2021;). The kind of construct validity evidence presented by subjective metric enthusiasts to demonstrate validity – that life satisfaction went down during the COVID-19 pandemic, for example – does not address these issues of precision.

A related issue is aggregation. Traditional economic analysis relies on 'objective' metrics, notably income. Experts identify domains of wellbeing,

gather the associated objective data, and analyse it, including in terms of applying weights and deciding on aggregation processes (Agarwala et al., 2014). This facilitates the comparison of results across individuals, as they are based on the same input data and aggregation process. In contrast, subjective wellbeing questionnaires rely on the individual being assessed to make these calculations for themselves. Its proponents tout this as the great advantage of subjective wellbeing (Frijters et al., 2020, p. 16), but they typically fail to mention the disadvantage: each respondent may consider different domains of their life, weights, and aggregation methods. As such, the reporting process likely varies over individuals and/or over time. For example, Kapteyn et al. (2013) show that when vignettes are used to anchor responses to a common standard, differences in subjective financial satisfaction between US and Danish respondents disappear. If comparability is so opaque, then we must be careful about the inferences drawn from such data, regardless of the rigour of the statistical analysis.

The second epistemic challenge concerns the social planner's ideal of assembling best practice about 'what works'. Frijters et al. (2020, p. 128) want something akin to the Imperial Kew Gardens, which collected best agricultural practices to be exported to the colonies. But such a knowledge bank is poorly suited to dealing with problems of external validity and the context-sensitivity of wellbeing. The social planner is attracted to the idea that the 'structure of a happiness equation has the same general form in each industrialized country' (Blanchflower, 2009, p. 161). Local context, if it comes in at all, does so via different coefficients for the universal variables. But elsewhere in policy such an approach is widely rejected. In the debate around causal inference from RCTs, whether a policy works and how it does so is considered a local matter (Cartwright & Hardie, 2012). Work coproducing wellbeing indices with specific communities has thrown up a range of idiosyncratic factors that do not feature in the 'universal' variables of happiness equations and push back on standardised metrics (Daniels et al., 2018). For example, people living in financial hardship collaborating with Fabian et al. (2021) questioned the appropriateness of life satisfaction scales. One participant in particular noted that when she had internalised patriarchy she thought her domestic abuse was normal and not something to be dissatisfied about. A universalising ambition is problematic for a phenomenon as complex and heterogenous as wellbeing.

The third problem under the epistemic heading is the assumption, inherited from the standard economic social welfare maximisation approach, that the social planner stands outside the society she evaluates. The risk in this is a failure to incorporate the likelihood that the objects of study are in turn reacting to the expert studying them (Coyle, 2021). Failure to account for potential reflexivity, which could range from strategic responses to wellbeing surveys to behavioural changes, is likely to lead to incomplete or irrelevant policy

recommendations. For example, an excellent study by Bellet et al. (2019) uses exogenous variation in exposure to good weather in call centres to show that happier workers are more productive. Yet employees might perceive new policy efforts at 'workplace wellbeing' implemented on this basis as a cynical ploy from management to squeeze more work from them. This may inadvertently make them less happy and productive.

Finally, we turn to practical critiques, which concern the unsuitability of the SPP to everyday public management. We distinguish three clusters of criticism: localism, systems thinking, and administrative clumsiness. Together, these criticisms illuminate that the SPP is especially awkward at the mid-scale of public management.

CBA, causal inference methods, and narrow goals and metrics brings clarity to high level agenda setting and precision to the evaluation of individual policies. However, they are unworkable with respect to the bulk of public management, which is characterised by policy *systems* pursuing multidimensional objectives and trying to appease a variety of stakeholders. Policy practitioners and the public administration scholars who study them have complained of this for decades (Muller, 2019). However, the SPP's assumption of outsidedness downgrades the granular and tacit knowledge of practitioners on the ground, especially those of agencies and street-level bureaucrats that actually deliver government services, in favour of classified and aggregated knowledge. Scott (1999) persuasively argues that this aspect of the SPP has been responsible for some of the great tragedies of 'high modernism', including famines and natural degradation.

Policymakers have come to realise that 'community ideas, energy, social capital, and local knowledge are ... key ingredients for solving a range of entrenched policy challenges' (Eversole, 2011, p. 51). However, they are stymied in their efforts to engage communities by the knowledge hierarchies inherent to the SPP. Communities voice a range of concerns and evidence them using locally accepted metrics. Policymakers are unable to process this information because they operate on outcomes dictated from on high and metrics validated centrally or even externally. As a result, studies of community engagement note time and again that it happens in a way that makes little sense to communities and fails to meet their local needs (Herbert-Cheshire & Higgins, 2004; Taylor, 2007). This is an acute threat to WPP, as coproduction efforts demonstrate that meanings and appropriate measures of wellbeing are often highly variable by locality, including not just geography but also demography, policy area, and administrative scale.

Most public services are delivered by a system, and systems resist the social planner's paradigm of individual policy design and evaluation. Life expectancy, for example, a common metric in wellbeing indexes, is the result of a health system that includes medical research, pharmaceutical markets, hospitals, doctor training, and myriad other parameters. While

RCTs have a role to play in evaluating *aspects* of this system, a holistic evaluation of health care policy requires a system-level analysis (Podger, 2018). This reveals that assessing and comparing policies on a narrow criterion like ‘life satisfaction per dollar spent’ is lacking. The marginal effect of general practitioner visits, for example, depends substantially on how the pharmaceutical market is regulated, how many hospital beds are available, the training general practitioners receive, etc. – it is unreasonable to invoke *ceteris paribus* here.

Tools for evaluation in the context of systems, like the agent-based model used by Kasman et al. (2019) to evaluate a whole-of-community childhood obesity intervention, acknowledge the need for a multidimensional approach to policy objectives and metrics that confounds the SPP. Some public management scholarship emerging in response to the on-the-ground challenges posed by complex systems is even more radical. For example, human learning systems theory argues that public management should optimise for learning, not control (CPI, 2021). This is often best achieved through *relationships* – qualitative insights, coproduction, corporate memory, mentoring and other forms of knowledge sharing that can handle the messiness of policy practice – rather than the analytical tools preferred by the social planner.

Scholars of contemporary public management have demonstrated the perverse and unintended consequences of governance by benchmarking, including loss of trust, disempowerment of frontline workers, notably teachers and nurses, and administrative bloat (Van Thiel & Leeuw, 2002). The metrics-first approach to policymaking, at least as it manifests in New Public Management, leads policy to be contorted to suit the SPP, rather than analytical approaches being developed from within the needs of public management. To avoid repeating these errors, WPP should ask what contribution it can make to contemporary issues in public administration, rather than asking how public administration can implement the science of wellbeing.

Wellbeing public policy from the citizen perspective

In developing the CP as a countervailing approach to the SPP, we start by dropping the latter’s commitments of value-freedom (the separation of facts from values), outsidedness, privileging RCTs and CBAs as evaluation tools, and prioritising the centralised creation of standard metrics. What would WPP look like without these?

To reject value-freedom means to recognise that questions of wellbeing are not purely technical, but in fact thoroughly value-laden. As such, wellbeing policy should start with ethical arguments and political legitimation, not statistical inquiry. While it might be reasonable for researchers to keep these ethical and political matters in house for some scientific purposes,

when they cross over into the policy domain, especially in a democratic society, these matters must be settled in the public sphere (Alexandrova & Fabian, 2022). This would lead us to reject outsidedness: the policy practitioner and the wellbeing expert must be participants in a legitimate political process, rather than acting after it.

The first pillar of what we call a 'citizen perspective' should therefore be *participation* of the public in the generation and validation of knowledge relevant to WPP. There are several ways to implement such participation. At a minimum, publics can be consulted about different ways of measuring wellbeing or different wellbeing policies. The 2010–2011 'What matters to you?' consultation by the Office of National Statistics was one way of inviting public input on what statistics should represent the UK's national wellbeing (ONS, 2019). However, consultations are by their nature one-way and embody substantial power asymmetries. Experts decide what questions to ask and how to parse the data. Oman (2016) documents how this led to blind spots and the omission of many perspectives on wellbeing from the outcomes of the ONS process. In particular, the 'open response' data, where participants could write in what wellbeing means to them personally, were almost entirely overlooked in favour of quantitative data from 'check-box' questions prefilled with categories selected by experts. Such power asymmetries are characteristic even of some more deliberative processes where experts inform citizens about complex technical issues involved in a policy area, such as vaccine distribution, and then citizens deliver experts their value judgements after deliberating amongst themselves (Rawlins, 2005). Such practices see experts structure the policy problem to be addressed, soliciting value judgements from citizens only to plug them in to an expert developed analytical framework.

One way of overcoming such asymmetry is more robust participatory processes. These are referred to as co-production, or sometimes co-creation, co-design, or collaborative governance (Bevir et al., 2019; Bovaird, 2007; Emerson et al., 2012; Fung, 2015). Coproduction is a well-established practice in health and design sciences, local governance, and social policy. Coproduction requires an equal and deliberative process that includes and represents the views of relevant stakeholders, with technical experts classed as merely one stakeholder group among many. Power is shared by decision-makers with other participants in coproduction, and there is a strong emphasis on learning across the different participant groups. In the field of wellbeing, such coproduction exercises are common in the capabilities paradigm, especially in development policy and with indigenous communities (e.g., Dew et al., 2020; Greco et al., 2015). Charities and local authorities are also pioneers of the methodology (Mazzei et al., 2020). In contrast to the 'general' measures of wellbeing often sought by the SPP, these coproduction efforts often produce idiosyncratic wellbeing items and metrics reflecting nuanced

local circumstances. Indigenous groups collaborating with Yap and Yu (2016), for instance, emphasised the quality of recent fishing at local water holes.

Alexandrova and Fabian (2022) develop a framework and method for coproducing WPP specifically. The key element of their proposal is to combine different varieties of expertise. ‘Lived’ experts, whom we refer to as ‘citizens’, bring expertise over the value judgements WPP should serve and relevant contextual factors. Coproduction of a regional development plan in a county dense with retirees, for example, might find local disinterest in attracting job-creating investment despite the popularity of this idea in the wider region. This helps to create precisely tailored policy. ‘Practitioners’, in most cases bureaucrats or representatives of organisations delivering policy on the ground, bring expertise about the practical requirements of WPP in the context in question. For example, representatives from the UK anti-poverty charity Turn2us involved in a wellbeing coproduction exercise pointed out that many-item questionnaires, common in psychometrics and capabilities research, were inappropriate for measuring the baseline wellbeing of their service users (Fabian et al., 2021). This is because people experiencing life changing events and in desperate need of assistance are turned off from seeking help by long surveys. Finally, ‘Academics’ bring technical expertise about the logical consistency of wellbeing theories and the validity of metrics. They also bring domain knowledge relevant to a particular WPP context. For example, a coproduced development plan to promote a town’s wellbeing may benefit from expert input on what changes to local regulations are required to attract what sort of investment.

Coproduction has attractive ethical and epistemic features. First, power sharing on the part of decision makers and practitioners with those agents directly affected by public policy promotes political equality in public management. Government agents are required to actively seek out marginalised agents like welfare recipients and include them in the process of policy design. The acknowledgement of the need for two-way learning in coproduction, especially between citizens and experts, works against the technocratic co-option of policy processes. It means that knowledge brokers are required to work with citizens to translate citizens’ insights into acceptable outcomes, metrics, and data for policy, rather than being able to dismiss those same insights as lacking rigour or scientific validity. Furthermore, recognising that wellbeing policy requires an input of values into any analytical framework gives a central role to citizens in coproduction, and works against technocratic rhetoric of needing ‘objective’ scientific analysis.

Coproduction and related participatory methods necessarily involve *localism* and *contextualism* of a more robust kind than the SPP allows, and this is the second pillar of the CP. The centre should not be aiming to convey to the periphery how best to measure and advance wellbeing, but instead to empower citizens on their own terms and within their context. This requires

becoming more tolerant of locally specific indicators that do not translate straightforwardly to the standardised metrics ideal for central agencies. The latter have the advantage of being easily comparable and therefore amenable to aggregation (Allen et al., 2019). But participation at a local level may well result in idiosyncratic metrics and indeed in metrics that might change over time in line with cultural changes in each community. As the need for aggregate statistics is inherently a matter of scale, the local is the level to bring in individual experiences and discussion as a basis for policy action (Jenkins, 2018). It is important of course that, while sacrificing comparability, such metrics meet clear and transparent standards, such as reliability and validity. But recall that validity is relative to a context and a population, and it may therefore be appropriate to rely on different metrics at different scales (McGregor, 2018).

Similarly, the CP should be open to variation on the actual wellbeing policies that are adopted. In contrast to the social planner's intent to calculate the average impact of a given policy on life satisfaction and apportion funds on this basis, localism embraces *multidimensionality*. Localism and participation also imply a different vision and a different expectation from wellbeing research: more of a toolbox of ideas about how to approach a social problem, rather than a clearing house of definitive, proven, or even probable claims about 'what works'. Wellbeing research should focus on creating an institutionalised process that ensures rigour and quality but can be developed and applied locally, rather than on setting the outcomes centrally. Such an approach promotes the localist and participatory nature of the CP, without shifting all responsibility and control from the social planner to the local communities.

This leads to the third pillar of the CP: that WPP should be *process*-first, rather than metrics-first. This is a recurring theme in the literature that challenges what we have been calling the SPP (Jenkins, 2018 Scott, 2014;). Scott and Bell (2013, p. 1) go as far as arguing that 'Policy makers and scholars should place more focus on the process of developing indicators rather than the indicators that are produced.' This procedural emphasis accords well with the literature in deliberative democracy. For example, referring to mini-publics, Setälä (2017) argues that they could be better connected to representative decision making through institutional arrangements, which institutionalise their use; involve representatives in deliberations; motivate public interactions between mini-publics and representatives; and provide opportunities for ex post scrutiny or suspensive veto powers. This points to two of the fundamental characteristics that an institutionalised process governing WPP should have to be effective: a formalised interaction between citizens and policy-makers, and ex post scrutiny of how citizens' inputs have been included in the policy process.

Fabian et al. (2021) offer an example of the form this can take in practice: first an initial wide survey to gauge broad issues of interest, second a working group to delve deeper, third a workshop to receive preliminary feedback from additional stakeholders on the outcomes of the working group, and then a final wide survey to elicit further feedback aimed at increasing representativeness. In this framework, the involvement of citizens in the initial survey and in the working group serve as the formalised interaction, while the workshop and the final survey serve as ex post scrutiny.

Critics of localism might legitimately raise concerns about the ignorance or parochialism of locals, whose views might benefit from an expert perspective. They might also chafe at the idea that locals should set policy that may have spillover effects on citizens at large, notably through taxation and public financing of local initiatives. For example, debates around re-zoning and other efforts to increase housing supply and renew urban landscapes in many OECD nations are hampered by well-organised local anti-development groups (Ahlfeldt, 2011). Yet the perspectives of locals and other lived experts are not sacrosanct nor taken as exogenous in the process we outlined. They are merely centred in the policy process, which involves coproduction with other stakeholders, practitioners, and experts. We would expect this process to frequently change locals' perspectives endogenously. Similar methodologies proved effective in ameliorating local opposition to waste sites in Canada (Kuhn & Ballard, 1998). Even pandemic management, a collective but technically complex problem par excellence, is now recognised to require public deliberation through inclusive local processes (Norheim et al., 2021).

Robust institutions that implement the processes of local participation are also essential for avoiding their misuse. Like any good idea, participatory approaches can be abused: they can serve as a mere instrument to gain the appearance of formal legitimacy, while furthering hidden agendas, vested interests, or even serving as corporate public relations (Blacker et al., 2021; Dahl & Soss, 2014; Glasner, 2001). Ideally, a well-designed and transparent process should prevent such abuses.

When to employ the social planner or citizen perspective

We have argued that the CP is the appropriate default mode for WPP. However, we would be remiss to claim that the SPP does not nonetheless have a substantial role to play. In this section, we provide some principles for thinking about when and why to employ each paradigm.

The first principle is *divergence*: the extent to which there are spillovers driving a wedge between *individual* and *collective* outcomes or interests. The economics of social choice, and the welfare theorems underpinning the SPP, derive from methodological individualism and assume an absence

of externalities or spillovers, among other conditions for optimality. Social welfare is constructed from individual welfare through a social welfare function expressing distributional choices assumed to be selected through political mechanisms. Absent spillovers, statistics on individual well-being, pooled by the planner according to the chosen social welfare function, are sufficient for good collective outcomes. But when there are spillovers, any social welfare calculation may be indeterminate because outcomes for a certain individual will depend on the choices made by others. Geographers, for example, have long noted that wellbeing is an emergent property of places, and is thus hard to analyse using only data on individuals (Pykett, 2022). Where collective and individual interests differ, policy choices need to be informed by participation and deliberation. Some individuals will need to compromise regarding what they perceive as their own well-being interests. Politics is inevitable here, and WPP advocacy emerging from scientific communities needs to be humble when straying into this territory, which is not their remit or expertise.

The second principle is *proportionality*: the balance between how consequential the policy at issue will be for those affected – in terms of ethical or practical impacts – and the logistical challenges of staging participatory processes. Citizen-led policymaking is slow and costly compared to collecting regular survey data on well-being and analysing it. Nevertheless, it will be worthwhile for most significant policy decisions, both in outcome terms (improving well-being in the aggregate) and legitimacy of the process. The procedural justice aspect is especially important for ethically fraught decisions. Ireland's experience with citizens' assemblies is often cited as an example of successful participatory processes changing policy in some contentious areas (particularly repealing the constitutional ban on abortion) that could not have come about through a standard policy-shaping process. In general, the policy under consideration needs to be 'significant' enough to justify the cost in time and money of a citizen-based process. From this point of view, it makes sense that early efforts at WPP like the ONS4 consultations in the UK, the recent Nordic Council report, the OECD's better life index, or New Zealand's first wellbeing budget, were principally executed from the SPP: it makes such exploratory efforts easier to get off the ground. Looking longer term, these initial efforts should not be used to entrench the SPP but rather to make space for the CP to be steadily implemented.

A final principle is *scale*. The logistical demands of the CP are much easier to implement at the local scales to which it is suited more generally. The contextual policy objectives and bespoke measures that it gives rise to are similarly easier to apply at small scale. There are of course areas of policy that are fundamentally high scale, such as national statistics, defence and foreign affairs, or industrial relations. Here, the SPP has a comparative advantage. However, the CP can eventually evolve from small to large scale provided

the policy has a small-scale dimension where the CP can gain traction to begin with. A national wellbeing index, for example, could begin with numerous local wellbeing indexes that express contextual values and use tailored metrics. Many of these values will generalise across contexts, and so coproduction efforts at medium scales could identify a more parsimonious set of items and measures that apply to a larger area (Fabian et al., 2021). Repeat this until you arrive at a national index. There is no reason why the conveniences of central departments should dictate what paradigm is most appropriate for WPP.

Conclusion

While the SPP has understandable appeal to those concerned with budgets and statistics, if WPP is to constitute a transformative shift 'beyond GDP' and away from the deformations of economic analysis, it should pay greater heed to the CP. WPP aspires to redefine the goals of public policy. This is highly political and value-laden objective. It cannot be prosecuted legitimately without substantial involvement of the public, which must go beyond ticking boxes on surveys. Coproducing the outcomes and measures of WPP through collaboration between citizens, practitioners, and academics is one way to balance the political, practical, and technical issues inherent to WPP. As a methodology, it is especially well suited to issues of local governance and context-specific nodes of public policy like aged care, disability services, natural assets, and public amenities. Where the SPP rests substantially on outmoded ideas about the nature of public administration and technocratic advice, the CP embraces cutting edge developments in deliberation, participation, and co-design. It is thus well-suited to a future-oriented and transformative agenda like WPP.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank seminar participants at the University of East Anglia and International Institute for Islamic Thought, Magdalena Soffia, and four anonymous reviewers for constructive comments that improved the paper.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

The authors gratefully acknowledge funding from United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Grant number: ES/T005556/1.

Notes on contributors

Mark Fabian is Senior Lecturer in Political Science at the University of Tasmania.

Anna Alexandrova is Professor in Philosophy of Science at the University of Cambridge.

Diane Coyle is Bennett Professor of Public Policy at the University of Cambridge.

Matthew Agarwala is Senior Research Fellow in Public Policy at the University of Cambridge.

Marco Felici is a Doctoral Candidate in Land Economy at the University of Cambridge.

ORCID

Mark Fabian  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4675-2526>

References

- Adler, M. (2013). Happiness surveys and public policy: What's the use? *Duke Law Journal*, 62(8), 1509–1601.
- Adler, M. (2019). *Measuring Social Welfare: An Introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Agarwala, M., Atkinson, G., Palmer Fry, B., Homewood, K., Mourato, S., Rowcliffe, M., Wallace, G., & Milner-Gulland, E. (2014). Assessing the relationship between human wellbeing and ecosystem services: A review of frameworks. *Conservation and Society*, 12(4), 437–449. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0972-4923.155592>
- Ahlfeldt, G. M. (2011). Blessing or curse? Appreciation, amenities, and resistance to urban renewal. *Regional Science and Urban Economics*, 41(1), 32–45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.regsciurbeco.2010.07.006>
- Alexandrova, A., & Fabian, M. (2022). Democratising measurement: Or Why thick concepts call for coproduction. *European Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 12(7), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13194-021-00437-7>
- Alexandrova, A., & Haybron, D. (2016). Is construct validation valid? *Philosophy of Science*, 83(5), 1098–1109. <https://doi.org/10.1086/687941>
- Allen, K., Needham, C., Hall, K., & Tanner, D. (2019). Participatory research meets validated outcome measures: Tensions in the coproduction of social care evaluation. *Social Policy Administration*, 53(2), 311–325. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12468>
- Austin, A. (2016). On well-being and public policy: Are we capable of questioning the hegemony of happiness? *Social Indicators Research*, 127(1), 123–138. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-015-0955-0>
- Bache, I. (2020). *Evidence, Policy, and Wellbeing*. Springer.
- Bache, I., & Reardon, L. (2016). *The politics and policy of wellbeing: Understanding the rise and significance of a New Agenda*. Edward Elgar.
- Badano, G. (2020). The principle of restraint: Public reason and the reform of public administration. *Political Studies*, 68(1), 110–127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321719831984>
- Bellet, C., De Neve, J., & Ward, G. (2019). Does employee happiness have an impact on productivity? *Said Business School Working Paper #*, 2019–2013. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3470734>
- Benjamin, D., Cooper, K., Heffetz, O., & Kimball, M. (2020). Self-reported wellbeing indicators are a valuable complement to traditional economic indicators but are not

- ready To compete with them. *Behavioural Public Policy*, 4(2), 198–209. <https://doi.org/10.1017/bpp.2019.43>
- Bevir, M., Needham, C., & Waring, J. (2019). Inside coproduction: Ruling, resistance, and practice. *Social Policy Administration*, 53(2), 197–202. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12483>
- Birkjær, M., Gæmderinger, A., & El-Abd, S. (2021). *Towards a Nordic wellbeing economy*. Nordic Council of Ministers. <https://pub.norden.org/nord2021-049/>.
- Blacker, S., Kimura, A. H., & Kinchy, A. (2021). When citizen science is public relations. *Social Studies of Science*, 51(5), 780–796. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03063127211027662>
- Blanchflower, D. (2009). International evidence on wellbeing. In A. Krueger (Ed.), *Measuring the subjective wellbeing of nations: National accounts of time use and wellbeing* (pp. 155–226). University of Chicago Press.
- Boswell, J., & Corbett, J. (2018). Deliberative bureaucracy: Reconciling democracy's trade-off between inclusion and economy. *Political Studies*, 66(3), 618–634. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321717723512>
- Bovaird, T. (2007). Beyond engagement and participation: User and community coproduction of public services. *Public Administration Review*, 67(5), 846–860. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2007.00773.x>
- Breunig, R. (2018). Why do we need evidence-based policy? In M. Fabian, & R. Breunig (Eds.), *Hybrid public policy innovations: Contemporary policy beyond ideology* (pp. 63–81). Routledge.
- Brown, H., Abdallah, S., & Townsley, R. (2017). *Understanding Local Needs for Wellbeing Data: Measures and Indicators*. What Works Wellbeing. https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/understanding-wellbeing-locally-Nov-2017-links_0216388900.pdf.
- Buchanan, J. (1964). What should economists do? *Southern Economic Journal*, 30(3), 213–222. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1055931>
- Cartwright, N., & Hardie, J. (2012). *Evidence-based policy: A practical guide to doing it better*. Oxford University Press.
- Clark, A., Flèche, S., Layard, R., Powdthavee, N., & Ward, G. (2018). *The origins of happiness*. Princeton University Press.
- Coyle, D. (2020). *Markets, state, and people: Economics for public policy*. Princeton University Press.
- Coyle, D. (2021). *Cogs and Monsters: What economics is, and what it should be*. Princeton University Press.
- CPI. (2021). *Human learning systems: Public service for the real world*. Centre for Public Impact.
- Dahl, A., & Soss, J. (2014). Neoliberalism for the common good? Public value governance and the downsizing of democracy. *Public Administration Review*, 74(4), 496–504. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12191>
- Daniels, K., Connolly, S., Ogonnaya, C., Tregaskis, O., Bryan, M., Robinson-Pant, A., & Street, J. (2018). Democratisation of wellbeing: Stakeholder perspectives on policy priorities for improving national wellbeing through paid employment and adult learning. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 46(4), 492–511. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2017.1408776>
- Davies, W. (2015). *The happiness industry: How big government and big business sold us Wellbeing*. Verso.
- Dew, A., Barton, R., Gilroy, J., Ryall, L., Lincoln, M., Jensen, H., et al. (2020). Importance of land, family and culture for a good life: Remote aboriginal people with disability

- and carers. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 55(4), 418–438. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajs4.96>
- Diener, E., Lucas, R., Schimmack, W., & Helliwell, R. (2009). *Wellbeing for public policy*. Oxford University Press.
- Diener, E., Oishi, S., & Tay, L. (2018). Advances in subjective wellbeing research. *Nature: Human Behaviour*, 2(1), 253–260. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-018-0307-6>
- Diener, E., & Seligman, M. (2004). Beyond money: Toward an economy of wellbeing. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 5(1), 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0963-7214.2004.00501001.x>
- Dobes, L. (2018). Making facts and telling furbies with economic modelling. In M. Fabian, & R. Breunig (Eds.), *Hybrid Public Policy Innovations: Contemporary Policy Beyond Ideology* (pp. 82–96). Routledge.
- Duflo, E. (2017). The economist as plumber. *American Economic Review*, 107(5), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.p20171153>
- Emerson, K., Nabatachi, T., & Balogh, S. (2012). An integrative framework for collaborative governance. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 22(1), 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mur011>
- Eversole, R. (2011). Community agency and community engagement: Rethorising participation in governance. *Journal of Public Policy*, 31(1), 51–71. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0143814X10000206>
- Fabian, M. (2021). Scale norming undermines the use of life satisfaction data for welfare analysis. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 23(4), 1509–1541. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-021-00460-8>
- Fabian, M., Alexandrova, A., & Cinamon-Nair, Y. (2021). A coproduced theory of thriving for people facing financial hardship. Bennett Institute for Public Policy Working Paper.
- Fabian, M., & Pykett, J. (2021). Be happy: Navigating normative issues in wellbeing public policy. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 17(1), 169–182. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691620984395>
- Friedman, M. (1953). *Essays in Positive Economics*. University of Chicago Press.
- Frijters, P., Clark, A., Krekel, C., & Layard, R. (2020). A happy choice: Wellbeing as the goal of government. *Behavioural Public Policy*, 4(2), 42–53. <https://doi.org/10.1017/bpp.2019.39>
- Frijters, P., & Krekel, K. (2021). *A handbook for wellbeing policy-making: History, theory, measurement, implementation, and examples*. Oxford University Press.
- Fujiwara, D., & Campbell, R. (2011). Valuation Techniques for Social Cost-Benefit Analysis: Stated Preference, Revealed Preference and Subjective Wellbeing Approaches: A Discussion of the Current Issues. HM Treasury.
- Fung, A. (2015). Putting the public back into governance: The challenges of citizen participation and its future. *Public Administration Review*, 75(4), 513–522. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12361>
- Glasner, P. (2001). Rights or rituals? Why juries can do more harm than good. *Participatory Learning and Action*, 40(1), 43–45.
- Graham, C. (2011). *The Pursuit of Happiness: An Economy of Wellbeing*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Greco, G., Skordis-Worrall, J., Mkandawire, B., & Mills, A. (2015). What is a good life? Selecting capabilities to assess women's quality of life in rural Malawi. *Social Science & Medicine*, 130(1), 69–78. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2015.01.042>

- Haybron, D. M., & Alexandrova, A. (2013). Paternalism in economics. In C. Coons, & M. Weber (Eds.), *Paternalism: Theory and Practice* (pp. 157–177). Cambridge University Press.
- Heath, J. (2020). *The machinery of government: Public administration and the liberal state*. Oxford University Press.
- Herbert-Cheshire, L., & Higgins, V. (2004). From risky to responsible: Expert knowledge and the governing of community-led rural development. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 20(3), 289–302. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2003.10.006>
- HM Treasury. (2021). Wellbeing Guidance for Policy Appraisal: Supplementary Green Book Guidance.
- Jenkins, M. (2018). The politics of the official statistics: The UK ‘Measuring national well-being’ programme. In I. Bache, & K. Scott (Eds.), *The Politics of Wellbeing: Theory, Policy and Practice* (pp. 279–300). Palgrave.
- Kahneman, D., Diener, E., & Schwartz, N. (1999). *Wellbeing: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- Kapteyn, A., Smith, J., & Van Soest, A. (2013). Are Americans really less happy with their incomes? *Review of Income and Wealth*, 59(1), 44–65. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4991.2012.00532.x>
- Kasman, M., Hammond, R. A., Heuberger, B., Mack-Crane, A., Purcell, R., Economos, C., et al. (2019). Activating a community: An agent-based model of Romp & Chomp, a whole-of-community childhood obesity intervention. *Obesity*, 27(9), 1494–1502. <https://doi.org/10.1002/oby.22553>
- Kuhn, R. G., & Ballard, K. R. (1998). Canadian innovations in siting hazardous waste management facilities. *Environmental Management*, 22(4), 533–545. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s002679900126>
- Lane, J. (2000). *New public management: An introduction*. Taylor and Francis.
- Layard, R. (2005). *Happiness: Lessons from a new science*. Penguin.
- Littell, J. H., & White, H. (2018). The Campbell collaboration: Providing better evidence for a better world. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 28(1), 6–12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731517703748>
- Mazzei, M., Teasdale, S., Calò, F., & Roy, M. J. (2020). Co-production and the third sector: Conceptualising different approaches to service-user involvement. *Public Management Review*, 22(9), 1265–1283. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2019.1630135>
- McGregor, J. A. (2018). Reconciling universal frameworks and local realities in understanding and measuring wellbeing. In I. Bache, & K. Scott (Eds.), *The Politics of Wellbeing: Theory, Policy and Practice* (pp. 197–224). Palgrave.
- Moore, A., Invernizzi-Accetti, C., Markovitz, E., Pamuk, Z., & Rosenfeld, S. (2020). Beyond populism and technocracy: The challenges of democratic epistemology. *Contemporary Political Theory*, 19(4), 730–752. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41296-020-00398-1>
- Muller, J. (2019). *The Tyranny of Metrics*. Princeton University Press.
- Nagel, T. (1989). *The View from Nowhere*. Oxford University Press.
- Norheim, O. F., Abi-Rached, J. M., Bright, L. K., Bærøe, K., Ferraz, O. L. M., Gloppen, S., & Voorhoeve, A. (2021). Difficult trade-offs in response to COVID-19: The case for open and inclusive decision making. *Nature: Medicine*, 27(1), 10–13. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41591-020-01204-6>
- O'Donnell, G., Deaton, A., Durand, M., Halpern, D., & Layard, R. (2014). *Wellbeing and policy*. Legatum Institute.
- OECD. (2013). *Guidelines for measuring subjective wellbeing*. Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

- Oman, S. (2016). Measuring national wellbeing: What matters to you? What matters to whom? In S. C. White, & C. Blackmore (Eds.), *Cultures of wellbeing: Method, Place, Policy* (pp. 66–94). Springer.
- Oman, S. (2020). Leisure pursuits: Uncovering the ‘selective tradition’ in culture and wellbeing evidence for policy. *Leisure Studies*, 39(1), 11–25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2019.1607536>
- Oman, S., & Taylor, M. (2018). Subjective wellbeing in cultural advocacy: A politics of research between the market and the academy. *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 11(3), 225–243. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17530350.2018.1435422>
- ONS. (2019). UK National Wellbeing Index. Office for National Statistics. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/transparencyandgovernance/freedomofinformationfoi/uknationalwellbeingindex>.
- Podger, A. (2018). Government-market mixes in health care. In M. Fabian, & R. Breunig (Eds.), *Hybrid Public Policy Innovations: Public Policy Beyond Ideology* (pp. 185–203). Routledge.
- Pykett, J. (2022). Why is emotional data failing to produce more humane cities? Urban governance and the (interdisciplinary) problem of wellbeing. Online first in *Urban Geography*.
- Rawlins, M. D. (2005). Pharmacopolitics and deliberative democracy. *Clinical Medicine*, 5(5), 471–475. <https://doi.org/10.7861/clinmedicine.5-5-471>
- Scott, J. C. (1999). *Seeing like a state: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed*. Yale University Press.
- Scott, K. (2014). Happiness on your doorstep: Disputing the boundaries of wellbeing and localism. *The Geographic Journal*, 181(2), 129–137. <https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12076>
- Scott, K., & Bell, D. (2013). Trying to measure local wellbeing: Indicator development as a site of discursive struggle. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 31(3), 522–539. <https://doi.org/10.1068/c10127>
- Setälä, M. (2017). Connecting deliberative mini-publics to representative decision making. *European Journal of Political Research*, 56(4), 846–863. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12207>
- Singh, R., & Alexandrova, A. (2020). Happiness economics as technocracy. *Behavioural Public Policy*, 4(2), 236–244. <https://doi.org/10.1017/bpp.2019.46>
- Smart, J. C. C., & Williams, B. (1973). *Utilitarianism: For and Against*. Cambridge University Press.
- Stone, A., & Mackie, C. (2013). *Subjective wellbeing: Measuring wellbeing, suffering and other dimensions of experience*. The National Academies Press.
- Sumner, L. (1996). *Welfare, happiness and ethics*. Oxford University Press.
- Taylor, M. (2007). Community participation in the real world: Opportunities and pitfalls in new governance spaces. *Urban Studies*, 44(2), 297–317. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00420980601074987>
- Tullock, G. (1965). *The politics of bureaucracy*. Public Affairs Press.
- Van Praag, B., & Ferrer-i-Carbonell, A. (2004). *Happiness quantified: A social calculus approach*. Oxford University Press.
- Van Thiel, S., & Leeuw, F. L. (2002). The performance paradox in the public sector. *Public Performance and Management Review*, 25(3), 267–281. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15309576.2002.11643661>
- Yap, M., & Yu, E. (2016). Operationalising the capability approach: Developing culturally-relevant indicators of indigenous wellbeing – an Australian example. *Oxford Development Studies*, 44(3), 315–331. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600818.2016.1178223>