Is wellbeing and public policy on the same flight path as positive psychology?

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Positive Psychology in New Zealand

- Caring professions
- Positive education
- Positive organisations
- Positive leadership
- Positive parenting
- Focus on mental wellbeing

Academics

Public leaders

Practitioners
Wellbeing and public policy gets philosophical

- Wellbeing ~ good lives for individuals (and groups)
- Welfarism ~ public policies should aim at wellbeing
- NZ Treasury: Living Standards Framework ~ public policies should aim at equitable and sustainable wellbeing

- But what is the good life?
  - Wealth, power, & longevity?
  - Health, safety, & freedom?
  - Happiness, meaning, & respect?
These stocks and flows are probably instrumental prudential goods.

Where is mental wellbeing?
### Subjective & mixed approaches

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Alex Michalos</th>
<th>Low objective living conditions</th>
<th>High objective living conditions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low subjective wellbeing</td>
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<tr>
<td>High subjective wellbeing</td>
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- Low objective living conditions:
  - Real Hell
  - Fool's Hell

- High objective living conditions:
  - Real Paradise
  - Fool's Paradise
OECD Better Life (dashboard)

- Includes objective and subjective measures + mental wellbeing
- What about cultural factors?
- What about religion?
What is important for your wellbeing, the wellbeing of your whānau, your hapū, your iwi?

(He aha te mea nui mō te oranga o tō whānau, o tō hapū, o tō iwi hoki?)

Currently in Phase 3 “Data expert input”, but it will still take your view on wellbeing

A good measure of national progress, but how to use for policy-making?

Too many non-fungible goods to effectively use cost benefit analysis.
Positive psychologists have argued for dashboards with many mental and subjective well-being measures.

“Well-being economists” are starting to argue for a single ultimate measure of well-being: Life satisfaction.
Being precise about well-being has never been more important

- What should the ultimate measure of well-being be for policy?
  - Old school policymakers: Money
  - Well-being economists: Life satisfaction
  - Positive psychologists: Mental well-being index? PERMA?

- These flight paths are similar, but importantly different
- If life satisfaction is chosen, few positive psychologists will be involved in top-level policy

Answer to the titular qn
So many important interdisciplinary questions

- Wellbeing of **who/what?**
- **One or many** ultimate prudential goods?
- Can the **goods change** over time?
- **Average, total, lowest quintile?**
- **Who** should **decide**?
- What are the **causes** of the ultimate prudential good/s?
- Can they be efficiently **measured**?
- Can **policies affect** the good or its causes?

We should work together!
Further reading (open access)

