Chapter 5

Making Sense of Western Approaches to Well-Being for an Educational Context

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The well-being of students has always been a concern in school education. However, such concern seems often more implicit than explicit, seems grounded in a more narrow rather than a more comprehensive and holistic conceptualization, and is generally not seen as the overarching goal of school education. Undertaking the task of making a more comprehensive and explicitly articulated concept of well-being the overarching goal of school education would be greatly supported by a conceptual analysis of the notion of well-being. This chapter provides such an analysis. It presents an inquiry into the notion of well-being by systematically analyzing approaches to this notion in different Western academic disciplines. The inquiry takes as its starting point three core aspects of the notion of well-being: where well-being is "located", who decides on who is well, and the individual-versus-social aspect of well-being. These three aspects will serve as the framework for the conceptual analysis.

The starting point for the inquiry presented in this chapter is a concern for the role of a notion of well-being for school education. While the main part of the chapter will not deal directly with this concern, it is this concern that motivates the inquiry. Accordingly, I start with a brief outlook on the connection between a notion of well-being and school education before addressing the inquiry itself.

The notion of well-being has been playing a central role in school education in Canada – although not always under the term of "well-being". For instance, the School Act of British Columbia (*School Act*, 1996) sees "the goal of a democratic society to ensure that all its members receive an education that enables them to become literate, personally fulfilled and publicly useful" (Section 1), where the goal of personal fulfillment can be understood as being concerned with (one component of) citizens' well-being. Well-being is also a major concern in school education in the larger policy context as well as in the context of the day-to-day activities in schools. Policies to address bullying and school safety are driven by a concern for the well-being of students. When teachers give students "another chance" or they meet on their own time with students over lunch to tutor them, the teachers are driven by a concern for students' well-being. However, judging by my observations of and experience with the Canadian school system, there are three shortcomings of this current role of well-being in the school system – relative to what I would like to see the role to be. First, the idea of well-being generally seems to play only an implicit rather than an explicit role as a focus in school education; as in the case of protection from bullying, well-being is often seen as

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linked to external conditions for learning rather than the focus of learning. Second, educating for well-being is not considered the overarching goal of school education; rather the focus is primarily on the learning of traditional academic subject content and skills (see the declaration Council of Ministers of Education Canada, 2008). Third, the notion of well-being is often too narrow compared to what is needed and suggested through the relevant literature.

There are educational theorists who propose well-being as the overarching and explicit focus of school education (e.g., Hostetler, 2011; Noddings, 2003; White, 2011); however, those educational theorists generally write from a philosophical perspective only and do not (sufficiently) draw on the whole range of disciplines that contribute to a more holistic conceptualization of human well-being. The inquiry in this chapter is to complement the work of those scholars, to give the concern for well-being a central and explicit role in school education by providing a conceptual analysis of the notion of well-being that draws on a range of disciplinary scholarship that is focused on well-being. Educational school success should be measured by the degree to which learners experience and are prepared for well-being in schools. The concept of well-being used to measure and assess such success needs to be developed in light of the scholarly work in a range of disciplines that deal with well-being. This chapter aims at providing a systematic analysis of approaches to well-being in different Western academic disciplines in order to help make sense of the range of approaches to well-being for the purpose of developing an assessment tool for well-being in schools and for education for well-being more generally.

Framing the Inquiry

Philosophers (e.g., Bai, 2006) and philosophically oriented psychologists (e.g., Martin, Sugarman, & Thompson, 2003) have been using the term "human agency" to capture a specifically human quality that the philosopher Frankfurt (1988) has called "second-order desires": to desire to desire something to be the case or not to be the case.

> It is my view that one essential difference between persons and other creatures is to be found in the structure of a person's will. . . . Besides wanting and choosing and being moved *to do* this or that, [humans] may also want to have (or not to have) certain desires and motives. They are capable of wanting to be different, in their preferences and purposes, from what they are. (Frankfurt, 1988, p. 12)

The following is an example of such a second order desire: I want to be a person that is concerned with the needs of other people. A person that is concerned for the needs of other people desires addressing the needs of other people; to want to be such a person means to desire to desire addressing the needs of other people.

Human agency – understood as humans' capacity to have second-order desires and be guided by those in decision making and action – provides one approach toward the notion of (human) well-being, an approach that I choose to follow here. Equipped with agency, humans face the challenge of having to decide what first order desires to have, or in other words, they have to decide how they want to live their lives. The notion of "human well-being" becomes relevant in the sense that it is the generic notion of what humans generally aim for when exerting their agency: to live well, to live a good life, to live happily, and so on. In other words, *the concept of well-being is to capture what humans aim for when they exert their agency to live their lives one way rather than another*. This concept of well-being has the

quality of "prospectivity" (Sumner, 1996, p. 133) or future directedness (Hostetler, 2011, p. 50). This identifies one central reason for the importance of the concept of well-being: What we conceptualize it to mean can and should direct our decisions and actions at the individual, socio-cultural, and socio-political level.[1]

If we understand "well-being" in the general sense outlined in the previous paragraph, the idea of well-being has been addressed in Western scholarship under a range of terms: "well-being" (e.g., Griffin, 1986; Haworth & Hart, 2007; Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999b), "happiness" (e.g., Almeder, 2000; Nettle, 2005), "flourishing" (e.g., Seligman, 2011), "welfare" (e.g., Sumner, 1996), "the good life" (e.g., Feldman, 2004), and a few others. Sometimes some of these terms have been used interchangeably, which is particularly the case for "happiness" and "well-being" (e.g., Mathews & Izquierdo, 2009), while in other cases a clear distinction is drawn between those two (e.g., Sumner, 1996). For the purpose of this chapter, I will use the term "well-being" as the generic term for this class of terms.

Different fields of study from the Western canon of academic disciplines have been dealing with the notion of well-being: philosophy (e.g., Griffin, 1986; Sumner, 1996), psychology (e.g., Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999b; Seligman, 2002, 2011), economy (e.g., Layard, 2005; Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2010), and, to a lesser extent, sociology (e.g., Veenhoven, 2008), and anthropology (e.g., Mathews & Izquierdo, 2009). The two Western academic disciplines in which well-being – under various names – has been studied quite extensively are philosophy with its ancient Greek tradition of engaging with the idea of the good life, and psychology, particularly since the emergence of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

While I would claim that the conceptualization of well-being, as the notion that captures what humans aim for when they exert their agency to live their lives, identifies the big idea of all those different approaches to well-being, the specific perspectives taken on well-being across different fields of study and even within the same field of study vary quite a bit. How can we make sense of a notion of well-being for educational purposes in light of such a range of perspectives? To respond to this question is the main task of the inquiry in this chapter.

This inquiry takes as its starting point three core aspects of the notion of well-being, which, will need to be considered in any conceptualization of well-being. As the inquiry will show, different approaches to well-being have different responses to these different core aspects. Framing the inquiry in this way will allow me to make sense of the different approaches to well-being in different fields of study by understanding the perspective that each approach takes with respect to those aspects. The three core aspects used in this inquiry are: (1) the "location" of well-being in being human; (2) who decides on whether someone lives well and whose ideas of well-being are employed; and (3) how individual well-being relates to communal well-being. The following sections will clarify each of these aspects further and outline how different approaches respond to the questions inherent in those aspects.

Aspect 1: Where Is Well-Being "Located"?

As human beings we engage in and with the world. In the literature on human well-being different capacities relevant for such engagement have been identified as being important or central

[1] The field of study that traditionally deals with such prospectivity and future directedness of our thinking is (philosophical) ethics (e.g., Appiah, 2008, p. 37; Aristotle, trans. 1976).

to our living well. We are able to feel emotions, feel sensory pleasures and pain, enjoy activities, have desires and needs, are satisfied or not with our lives, have ideas about how we prefer to or should live. In the literature on well-being all these capacities – plus socially constructed rights as human beings – have been identified as linked to the core of what well-being means – which I would like to call the "location" of well-being. This section deals with the question where the different Western approaches to well-being have "located" well-being in humans.

Locating Well-Being in Feelings

According to neuroscientists like Damasio (1994, p. 145) and LeDoux (1996, p. 329), feelings are conscious subjective experiences of emotions, where emotions are certain types of changes in body state. For instance, the basic emotion of distress is (in certain cases) linked to the secretion of tears of a certain biochemical composition (see, Evans, 2001, p. 5). *Feeling distressed* is the conscious subjective experience of this change in body state, e.g., the experience of shedding tears. Feelings are, thus, mental states of the person who has the subjective experience that is the feeling.

A number of philosophers and psychologists have located human well-being in feelings. Commonly, such authors characterize such well-being in terms of *pleasure and pain* (e.g., Feldman, 2002a; Kahneman, 1999). However, the term "pleasure(s)" is problematic, since the term has been used with quite different meanings, and it is sometimes not clear how the term fits within a feeling-emotion framework. Jonathan Bentham, the father of Western utilitarianism, "thought of pleasure, for instance, as embracing not merely bodily pleasures but all forms of gratifications, enjoyment, satisfaction, fulfillment, and the like" (Sumner, 1996, p. 88). Similarly, a modern version of classical hedonism, Hedonic Psychology (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999b), sees itself as "the study of what makes experiences and life pleasant or unpleasant. It is concerned with feelings of pleasure and pain, of interest and boredom, of joy and sorrow, and of satisfaction and dissatisfaction" (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999a, p. ix). Because of this ambiguity, some scholars have suggested narrowing the notion of pleasure to "sensory pleasures" and to keep those distinct from what some have called "pleasures of the mind" (e.g., Almeder, 2000, p. 155; Kubovy, 1999; Sumner, 1996, section 4.1).

Using LeDoux's (1996, p. 164) understanding of the pathway from emotional stimulus to emotional response, the following exemplifying picture emerges for the notion of "sensory pleasure". Being caressed by one's partner functions as an external emotional stimulus. Information about this stimulus is passed on to the sensory thalamus and from there to the sensory cortex to the amygdala, which then initiates the emotional response, i.e. a certain type of bodily change of state, for instance an increase of the heart rate and the forming of goose-bumps. One then has the conscious subjective experience of those bodily changes; this experience is the mental state that is one's feeling. We have learned to classify such mental states (feelings) that are experiences of such bodily changes as pleasurable – we are feeling sensory pleasure.

It is in such feelings of sensory pleasure that some scholars locate at least one aspect of human well-being. For instance, in some of the psychological and philosophical literature on happiness, the feeling of sensory pleasure is seen as the basis for at least one aspect of human well-being (e.g., Nettle, 2005, p. 18; Nozick, 1989, p. 108). In any version of hedonism, feelings of sensory pleasure play a central role in conceptualizing human well-being, be it classical hedonism (see the discussion in Sumner, 1996, section 4.1) or modern-day Hedonic Psychology (see Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999b). However, while the ancient Greek philosopher Aristippus of Cyrene, the father of the Cyrenaic form of hedonism, is said to have been a proponent of a concept of well-being that is

purely based on sensory pleasure (Almeder, 2000, pp. 154-155), I am not aware of any modern-day conceptualization of well-being that is *solely* based on the feeling of sensory pleasure. This might be so because of at least two core concerns with locating well-being *only* in the feeling of sensory pleasure. First, feeling sensory pleasure is not always our first choice; in some cases we might actually prefer a state of sensory pain over a state of sensory pleasure. Griffin (1986, p. 8), for instance, references Sigmund Freud's decision at the time he was terminally ill to rather be in sensory pain but mentally alert than to be drugged but not be able to think clearly. Second, we clearly find other mental states than feelings of sensory pleasure pleasurable. The next section deals with those other types of mental states in which human well-being has also been located.

Locating Well-Being in Attitudes toward Experiences

The concept of well-being presented in the previous section locates well-being in our having pleasurable *feelings* and, thus, we desire those experiences because of their *felt* qualities. Scholars, however, have pointed to the fact that we also often desire experiences not primarily for their felt qualities, but rather because of our *attitude* toward those experiences. Nozick (1989), writing on the notion of happiness, gives the following example, illustrating this distinction:

> A person who wants to write a poem needn't want (primarily) the felt qualities of writing, or the felt qualities of being known to have written the poem. He may want, primarily, *to write* such a poem – for example, because he thinks *it* is valuable, or the activity of doing so is, with no specific focus upon any felt qualities. (p. 104)

The concept linked to the positive attitude toward particular experiences, like the experience of writing a poem, is often denoted in the literature by the term "enjoyment" – with the term "suffering" used for negative attitudes (e.g., Nozick, 1989, p. 104; Sumner, 1996, p. 108).[2] In those terms we can say that we can enjoy the experience of certain types of pleasures, but it is our attitude toward those pleasures, not the feeling of those pleasures, that is our enjoyment and, thus, our well-being.

The attitude approach to well-being can reconstruct the view that our feeling of sensory pleasures at least contributes to our well-being, namely by suggesting that what contributes to our being well is our *attitudes toward* our feeling of sensory pleasures rather than our feeling of those pleasures. This point is made in the discussion about the meaning of pleasure and pain in classical Western utilitarian approaches to human well-being, in which utilitarians like Bentham and Mill have talked about pleasure and pain but linked those terms to a very diverse range of experiences of which sensory pleasures where only one type (e.g., Sumner, 1996, section 4.1; Feldman, 2004, chapter 4; Griffin, 1986, p. 8). The suggestion is that we look at the attitudes toward those experiences rather than at the experiences themselves.

The philosopher Feldman (2002a, 2004) is a modern-day proponent of, as he calls it, attitudinal hedonism, according to which the experience of attitudinal pleasures is at the core of "the good life".[3] Attitudinal pleasure is enjoyment in the sense just explicated, and "we know we have them

[2] Feldman (2004, chapter 4) has the same notion in mind, though uses the term *pleasure* to link his Attitudinal Hedonism to the hedonistic tradition.

[3] For a critique of Feldman's attitudinal hedonism, see Sumner (1998) and DePaul (2002); see Feldman (2002b) for a rejoinder.

[attitudinal pleasures] not by sensation, but in the same way . . . we know when we believe something, or hope for it, or fear that it might happen" (Feldman, 2004, p. 56).[4] Hedonic Psychology, characterized somewhat above, is an approach to well-being that includes not just bodily pleasures but also "mental pleasures", which Kubovy (1999) defines as "collections [sequences] of [basic] emotions" (p. 137). While such a definition of mental pleasures is technically different from, for instance, attitudinal pleasures, both reconstruct within their respective conceptual framework the Epicurean notion of pleasures of the mind as distinct from the pleasures of the body (e.g., Almeder, 2000, pp. 155-156).

Locating Well-Being in Desire and Need Fulfillment

Feelings and enjoyment are both *mental states* in the sense that instantiations of either type of mental states are "introspectively distinguishable experiences" (Sumner, 1996, p. 91). In other words, it is not any quality in the subject-external world that is part of the nature of well-being – even if it might be such quality that gives rise to the feeling that is the subject-internal mental state. Approaches that conceptualize well-being in our feelings or attitudes toward particular state-of-affairs or in both are what some have called mental state theories of well-being (see, Griffin, 1986, section I.1; Sumner, 1996; p. 82).[5] Desires and needs approaches to well-being, on the other hand, are both state-of-the-world approaches because they define well-being as the satisfaction of someone's desires and needs, respectively, and such satisfaction will depend on a particular state-of-the-world to be the case, namely that state that would satisfy the person's desire or need. Because desires and needs are human capacities that are closely linked, I will address them in the same section. However, desires and needs, are not the same:

> While 'desire' is, 'need' is not an intentional verb; I can only need a thing if I need anything identical with it. So, while 'desire' is, 'need' is not tied to a subject's perception of the object; if I need a thing because it will cure my headache, it really will cure it. Desires have to do with how a subject of experience looks out on the world; needs have to do with whether one thing is in fact a necessary condition of another. Needs do not even have to be attached to subjects of experience. (Griffin, 1986, p. 41)

Two types of desire accounts are distinguished (e.g., Griffin, 1986, pp. 10-15; Sumner, 1998, chapter 5): actual desire accounts and informed desire accounts. Actual desire accounts locate well-being in the fulfillment of people's "actual desires", as they express them verbally or behaviourally. Informed desire accounts, on the other hand, consider that "notoriously, we mistake our own interests" (Griffin, 1986, p. 10), so that it would be inappropriate to equate one's well-being with the fulfillment of one's actual desires. Informed desire accounts equate well-being with the fulfillment of one's *informed* desires, which is "the fulfillment of desires that persons would have if they appreciated the true nature of their objects [that is the objects of one's desire]" (Griffin, 1986, p. 12).

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[4] I am ignoring the technical details of Feldman's notion of attitudinal pleasure as it is relevant to his view of the good life, which would bring out some of the differences between Sumner's (1996) notion of enjoyment and Feldman's notion of attitudinal pleasure.

[5] The distinction of what counts as states of the mind and what as states of the world is not clear-cut, as Sumner (1996, pp. 110-111) suggests, when he proposes to consider enjoyment as not being purely a mental state since what we enjoy is a certain state of affairs (state of the world).

Needs accounts conceptualize well-being in the fulfillment of needs. Maslow (1954), for instance, considered the hierarchically relating needs as the foundation for human motivation for living one's life one way rather than another. Max-Neef (1991) established a non-hierarchical list of human needs which transcend time and place[6]: subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, idleness, creation, identity, and freedom. Within any culture and time, these needs manifest themselves in form of what Max-Neef calls "needs satisfiers", which are the ways through which people at that time in that particular culture seek to address the satisfaction of the respective generic human need. For instance, an insurance system is a cultural and temporal satisfier of people's needs for protection. Two features of Max-Neef's needs approach are of particular interest when considering his approach as the basis for a needs approach to well-being. First, the satisfaction of all nine generic needs are relevant to well-being, and the non-satisfaction of any one of them leads to being in "poverty", which diminishes a person's well-being:

> The proposed perspective allows for a reinterpretation of the concept of poverty. The traditional concept of poverty is limited and restricted, since it refers exclusively to the predicaments of people who may be classified below a certain income threshold. This concept is strictly economistic. It is suggested here that we should speak not of poverty but of poverties. In fact, any fundamental human need that is not adequately satisfied reveals a human poverty. (Max-Neef, 1991, p. 18)

Second, the needs are interrelated in the way that the culturally-based use of particular needs satisfiers intended to address a generic need can lead to poverty in regards to another need. For instance, Max-Neef (1991, p. 33) suggests that censorship, which in particular cultural contexts are intended by the authorities to address people's need for protection, leaves people impoverished with regards to their needs for understanding, participation, creation, identity, and freedom.

Locating Well-Being in Life Satisfaction

Locating well-being in our feelings (experiences of emotions) and our enjoyment (attitudes toward certain experiences) means to locate our well-being in *episodic* experiences or our attitudes toward episodic experiences, all of those experiences being relatively short in duration. These approaches to well-being are foundationally focused on the question of how well someone is doing at a given moment while having those episodic experiences. Other approaches to well-being are more general in terms of time and types of experiences and are focused on the question how one *is (currently) satisfied with one's life overall*. In this approach to well-being, the focus shifts away from episodic experiences toward a "global assessment of all aspects of a person's life" (Diener, 1984, p. 544).

An approach to human well-being that considers people's own *global* assessment of how their lives are going is generally called a *subjective well-being* approach, which has been developed and promoted particularly by Diener and his collaborators (see Diener, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c). Probably due to providing for a simple way of measuring well-being (happiness), subjective well-being approaches have been widely used to assess human well-being intra-nationally and particularly inter-nationally (e.g., Diener & Suh, 1999). Subjective well-being is the conceptual base for a wide range of

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[6] "With the sole exception of the need of subsistence, that is, to remain alive, no hierarchies exist within the system" (Max-Neef, 1991, p. 17).

studies linking inquiries into different aspects of quality of life, like consumerism (Kasser, 2002), economic notions like income, unemployment and inflation (Frey, 2008; Layard, 2005), and inequality (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009).

In the philosophical literature such global subjective life satisfaction as the basis for the notion of human well-being has been discussed under the term of *welfare*. For Sumner (1996), for instance, "welfare . . . consists in authentic happiness, the happiness of an informed and autonomous subject" (p. 172; I will discuss the qualifiers "informed" and "autonomous" below), where "being happy . . . means having a certain kind of positive attitude toward [one's] life, which in its fullest form has both a cognitive and an affective component" (p. 145).

Locating Well-Being in Rights and Capabilities

All of the approaches discussed so far have in common that they locate well-being solely in the individual herself – in her feelings, her attitudes, her desires and needs, and her judgment of how satisfied she is with her life overall. The approaches presented in this and the next section do not (only) locate well-being in the individual but rather (also) in *conditions* for an individual to live her life well. The approaches discussed in this section identify conditions that provide a kind of supportive and facilitating context within which then each individual can live her life well. The difference among those approaches lies in the level to which the rights – which shape the context for living well – are understood as entitlements and are linked to needed capacities in the individual herself.

The approaches discussed in this section locate well-being in rights that humans have; as the foundation for an approach to well-being. Human rights specify conditions that are to allow each individual to live her life as she considers it worth living. It is through having enforced and through enforceable rights that each person has a chance to live well. Rights approaches to well-being however range widely, depending on the types of rights considered, and, consequently, how "chance to live well" is understood. At one end of the spectrum are libertarian approaches to rights-based well-being. For libertarians there is more or less one fundamental right, and that is the right to liberty or freedom *from* interference with living the life one finds worth living – limited only to the degree that such freedom does not interfere with someone else's freedom (see, Nozick, 1974, for philosophical arguments for the libertarian position; see Sandel, 2009, chapter 3, for a critical view on the libertarian position). Well-being is here equated with living in freedom *from*, for instance, interference by the state in one's affairs, assuming that one does not use that freedom to interfere with someone else's freedom.

On the other end of the spectrum of rights-based well-being approaches are capabilities approaches to well-being. Human capabilities (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 2009, part III) are "a set of (usually interrelated) opportunities to choose and to act" and such opportunities are provided through what we are able to do and to be (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 20). Such opportunities are available to us when two things come together: our inner ability to be and act in certain ways *and* the potential to enact these abilities freely within the political, socio-cultural, and environmental context we are living in. Nussbaum (2011) calls the former the *internal capabilities* of a person, which are "traits and abilities, developed, in most cases, in interaction with the social, economic, familial, and political environment" (p. 21). The internal capabilities together with the political, socio-cultural, and economic freedoms and opportunities to choose (or not) to enact those capabilities in concrete situations is what Nussbaum (2011, pp. 20-21) calls *combined capabilities*. What is central to the capabilities approach to well-being is the idea that there is a *developmental* aspect to our capability to live our life as we choose to: in order to have the combined capabilities available that provide us with

the potential to live our life as we choose to, the powers we have as humans need to be developed, and such needed development is not solely in a person's own hands.

For instance, Nussbaum (2011, pp. 33-34) identifies a list of particular "Central Capabilities", each derived from a notion of human dignity: "The Capabilities Approach, in my version, focuses on the protection of areas of freedom so central that their removal makes a life not worthy of human dignity" (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 31). For illustrative purposes, here are two of the ten Central Capabilities identified by Nussbaum:

> 2. *Bodily health.* Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.
> 3. *Bodily integrity.* Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.
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> (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 33; emphasis in original)

As outlined above, the capability of bodily health requires the development of certain powers – for instance, the power to recognize and choose healthy food – without which the possibility to enact the capability of bodily health is not possible. However, as a case of a human rights approach to well-being, Nussbaum's capabilities approach *does not require* the enactment of that capability as an indication of living well; living well is characterized by people having those central capabilities and the ability to choose freely to enact them as they see fit. The group of approaches to well-being discussed in the next section, on the other hand, will link well-being to the actual enactment of a particular ideal of what it means to live well.

Locating Well-Being in Living toward an Ideal

For Aristotle happiness (*eudaimonia*) is "a first principle, since everything else that any of us do, we do for its sake; and we hold that the first principle and cause of what is good is precious and divine" (Aristotle, trans. 1976, p. 87). As MacIntyre (1998) points out, the notion *eudaimonia* "includes both the notion of behaving well and the notion of faring well" (p. 59). For Aristotle happiness is a quality of someone's life as assessed at the end of that person's life and not a quality of a person's state. Somewhat simplified, Aristotle suggests that a happy life is a life that someone has lived being virtuous (Aristotle, trans. 1976, p. 76).

Aristotle's approach to well-being is a type of approach called perfectionism according to which "the level of well-being for any person is in direct proportion to how near that person's life gets to this ideal [of human life]" (Griffin, 1986, p. 56). Perfectionist approaches to well-being are also called teleological approaches (e.g., Sumner, 1996, chapter 3.4), where *teleo* is the Greek word for *complete*. What is central to perfectionist approaches to well-being is the "what is good for its own sake for a person [the ideal] is fixed independently of her attitudes and opinion toward it" (Arneson, 2000, p. 38). This makes these approaches quite distinct from the first four types of approaches to well-being, which locate well-being in the individual's feelings, attitudes or judgments about how her life is going overall. But perfectionism approaches are also distinct from the rights and capabilities approaches in the sense that the former approaches articulate a quite specific way of living as *the* way of living well, while the latter type of approaches articulate contextual conditions (rights or capabilities) that allow for someone to live well in the way she considers appropriate for herself *having the rights provided or the capabilities developed.*

Multi-Locational Approaches to Well-Being

There are a number of approaches to well-being which draw on two or more of the different types of approaches discussed in the previous sections to locate human well-being. I will call those approaches multi-locational approaches to well-being. A prototypical multi-locational approach to well-being is the approach taken by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress and Rapporteurs (Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2010), a Commission set up by then French president Nicolas Sarkozy. The Commission draws on three different conceptual approaches to assessing the quality of life (Stiglitz et al., 2010, chapter 2): the subjective well-being approach, the capabilities approach, and the welfare economics approach. The latter approach to well-being is described as being similar to the capabilities approach by giving "prominence to people's objective conditions and the opportunities available to them, while differing [from the capabilities approach] in how these features are valued and ranged" (Stiglitz et al., 2010, p. 67). Stiglitz et al. do not elaborate on the economics approach further, but the "objective measures" used in the study (for instance, life expectancy at birth, school enrolment, participation in the political process) suggest that this approach locates well-being in human rights, like the right to life (birth rate), the right to education, and so on, even though Stiglitz et al. (2010) do not frame these measures in those terms.

There are a number of approaches in psychology that also qualify as multi-locational approaches to well-being. One such example is Ryff's work on psychological well-being (e.g., Ryff & Singer, 2000). Another example is Seligman's (2011) latest perspective on positive psychology according to which it is flourishing or well-being that is the topic of positive psychology – rather than authentic happiness (Seligman, 2002). For Seligman there are five "elements of well-being": positive emotion (pleasant feelings), engagement (being in flow), meaning (belonging to and serving something bigger than oneself), accomplishment (achieving something one finds worth achieving), and positive relationships (Seligman, 2011, pp. 16-20). The positive emotion component locates well-being in feelings. The engagement component locates well-being in attitudes toward experiences. The meaning and accomplishment components, which each have an "objective" aspect to them (Seligman, 2011, p. 25), might be understood as locating well-being in an ideal, where that ideal might partially be established by the individual herself. The positive relationship component might be more difficult to relate to just one of the locations identified above. Having positive relationships to other people can be an aspect of well-being as it is understood in at least the feelings approach to well-being, in the needs approach, in the life satisfaction approach, or the capabilities approach. Seligman's list of elements of well-being is an example of what is called in philosophy an objective list account of well-being (e.g., Parfit, 1987), and Griffin (1986, p. 67-68; 2000) provides one such account that has elements listed similar to the ones Seligman has.

Aspect 2: Whose Concept? Whose Judgment?

In the academic philosophical tradition of writing about well-being (often under different terms) a distinction is made between subjective and objective theories of well-being (e.g., Griffin, 1986; Sumner, 1996), although there has been some doubt expressed of the value of such distinction (e.g., Griffin, 1986, p. 33).[7] The distinction is generally made as follows: "By 'subjective', I mean an

[7] For an argument for the salience of the subjective-objective distinction for theories of well-being, see Sumner (1996, chapter 2).

account that makes well-being depend upon an individual's own desires, and by 'objective' one that makes well-being independent of desires" (Griffin, 1986, p. 32).[8] This definition of subjective approaches to well-being leaves it open who is actually judging an individual's state of well-being, while in psychological approaches to well-being, subjective well-being is generally understood as well-being as judged from the individual's own perspective (e.g., Diener, 1984). While the philosophical approach to the subjective-objective definition is focused on the concept of well-being (a person's desire is to be considered or not), the subjective versus non-subjective distinction in psychological approaches to well-being is more focused on who judges how well someone is.

In order to use the distinction between subjective and objective approaches to well-being to help understand the substance in the differences between different approaches to well-being, I will draw on the ideas behind both the philosophical and psychological perspectives on the subjective-objective distinction. I suggest to distinguish between subjective and objective approaches along *two dimensions* (see Figure 1). The first dimension is about who decides how well an individual is. The further to the left an approach is with respect to this dimension, the more this approach relies on the individual's judgement on her own well-being; the further to the right an approach is, the less the individual's judgment is considered. The second dimension is about whose concept of well-being is considered when assessing an individual's well-being. The further below an approach is with respect to this dimension, the more it is the individual's understanding of what well-being is that is considered; the further up an approach is, the less the individual's view on what well-being is considered when assessing that individual's well-being.

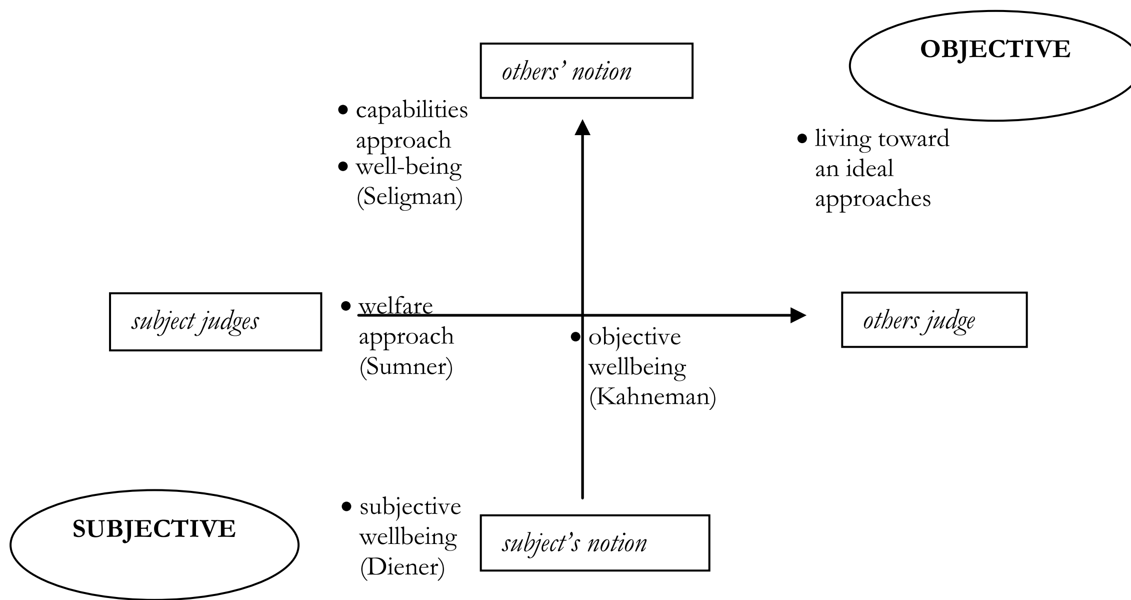

Figure 1. The subjective-objective dimensions of well-being approaches.

[8] See also Sumner (1996, p. 38).

As Figure 1 shows, the two dimensions provide four quadrants in which an approach to well-being can be located. This makes an approach more subjective with respect to both dimensions the further it is in the bottom left quadrant, and more objective, the further it is in the top right quadrant. The two-dimension conceptualization of the subjective-objective distinction allows for a more differentiated understanding of approaches to well-being. For instance, the capabilities approach is more subjective with respect to the question who judges on an individual's well-being, while it is more objective with respect to the source of the concept used for such judgment.

Two points need to be raised in light of the subjective-objective dimensions of well-being approaches. The first concerns the "Whose notion?" dimension, represented by the vertical axis in Figure 1. There is no "pure" subjective understanding of well-being, because our conceptualization of what it means for us to be well is at least in part *enculturated*, a point that I will elaborate further upon in the next section.

The second point concerns the "Who judges?" dimension, represented by the horizontal axis in Figure 1. Kahneman (1999, 2011 part V) distinguishes between "the experiencing self" and "the remembering self" when it comes to judging the quality of one's experiencing an event. In a number of ingenious experiments, he and his collaborators have demonstrated how our judgment of one and the same event often varies quite a bit depending on whether we judge the event at the moment of experiencing or in retrospect (e.g., Kahneman, 1999). Life satisfaction approaches to well-being, then, draw exclusively on the remembering self for judging well-being. On the other hand, Kahneman (1999) has developed a notion of "objective well-being", for which he draws on a sequence of instant judgments by a person of the quality of an experience over the time of an event. This sequence of "good/bad" judgments are then used by an "objective outsider" to calculate an overall "objective" judgment about the person's well-being during the event. However, conceptually such "objective" well-being is still grounded in a sequence of *subjective* judgments, which is the reason why Kahneman's objective well-being approach is placed around the central point of the horizontal axis in Figure 1.

Kahneman's work, however, should not suggest that it is only our experiencing self that can "really" establish our well-being. Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 1997) has studied and analysed experiences in which people were completely absorbed in an activity to the degree that they lost track of time while engaged in the activity. He has used the term "flow" to describe such states of the mind, and "being in flow" – sometimes called "engagement" – is one aspect of the conceptualization of well-being in a number of approaches (e.g., Seligman, 2011). As Csikszentmihalyi found, people who are in a state of flow do not experience anything that they would describe as pleasurable; their mind is so focused on the task(s) at hand, that there is not any cognitive capacity left for the mind to experience (consciously) a feeling of pleasure or well-being. Quite to the contrary, an athlete who is in flow while engaging in her sport, for instance, might actually feel pain while she is running, swimming, or the like. It is when she *looks back* to her having been engaged in the task that she feels a deep sense of well-being. In the case of well-being derived from flow experiences, it is the experience of the remembering self at the time of remembering that is experienced as pleasurable, satisfying, or a state of well-being.

Aspect 3: Individual versus Social Perspectives on Well-Being

Three discourses in the literature on well-being give rise to including a "social perspective" on well-being, which is a perspective included in some but not all approaches to well-being. What this means, will become clear from the following discussion.

The first discourse in the literature on well-being relevant here concerns the question how universal or culture-transcendent a concept of well-being and the way it is measured can be. In the well-being literature different answers have been given to this question. At one end of the spectrum of responses to the question are those which propose that well-being can be conceptualized in a descriptive rather than prescriptive way and can be universal and neutral with respect to different cultures. Such a position, for instance, has been taken by Seligman (2002, p. 303), one of the founders of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

At the other end of the spectrum are those who argue for the view that all theories, and particularly those heavily value-laden theories of well-being, are culturally embedded and, thus, cannot be culturally neutral or universal. For instance, Christopher and his collaborators (Christopher, 1999; Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008; Christopher, Richardson, & Slife, 2008) have made a strong case for the cultural embeddedness of notions like well-being against the idea of a trans-cultural understanding of well-being as it is proposed in positive psychology. They particularly point to the "disguised ideology of individualism" that generally frames Western approaches to well-being (Christopher, 1999, p. 142).[9] Historical studies, like McMahon's (2006) study of the different understandings of *happiness* throughout Western history, and cross-cultural studies (e.g., the relevant work referenced in Christopher, 1999) strongly suggest that Christopher's position is more appropriate than Seligman's. In such case, we better heed Christopher's (1999) warning:

> Understandings of psychological well-being necessarily rely upon moral visions that are culturally embedded and frequently culture specific. If we forget this point and believe that we are discovering universal and ahistorical psychological truths rather than reinterpreting and extending our society's or community's moral visions, then we run the high risk of casting non-Western people, ethnic minorities, and women as inherently less psychologically healthy. (p. 149)

Linked to but different from this first discourse is *the second discourse*, which arose around the question, how people whose well-being is assessed actually understand what well-being is. Such a question is of particular importance to more subjective theories of well-being, in which it is the person herself who judges how well her life or aspects thereof go for her and who uses her own understanding of what "well-being" means. The desire accounts of well-being by Griffin (1986) and Sumner (1996) illustrate the importance of the question. In both approaches it is a person's judgment about the fulfillment of her desires (Griffin) and the level of happiness with her life overall (Sumner), respectively, that is central in establishing her well-being. Both, however, recognize, that people can be mistaken in their assessment of how relevant the respective desire is for their well-being (Griffin, 1986, p. 12), and that people sometimes err in their judgment about how well their life is going (Sumner, 1996, pp. 158-171). In order to account for these concerns, Griffin stipulates that the desire

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[9] For examples of Eastern perspectives on well-being see the contributions in Kosaka (2006) and Mathews and Izquierdo (2009), and for examples of Indigenous perspectives, see Adelson (2009) and Hart (2002, chapter 3).

has to be *informed* desire, and Sumner requires a person's judgment about how her life goes to be *informed and autonomous*. Most of the cases that Griffin and Sumner reference as examples for a desire or happiness to be *un*informed draw substantially on the social state of affairs of the culture individuals are embedded in. For instance, someone might be mistaken about her well-being derived from the fulfillment of her desire for being rich, because she actually desires people's respect and erroneously assumes that having money would get her people's respect (Griffin, 1986, p. 12). That people did not have respect for someone based on the person's financial wealth is a socio-cultural phenomenon. Thus, informed desires accounts of well-being require a social perspective that links a person's well-being to the socio-cultural context in which the person is embedded. The same applies to other subjective approaches to well-being, since they all will need to deal with the issue of uninformed and non-autonomous judgments by the person whose well-being is in question.

The third discourse deals with a more fundamental question than the previous two. While the previous discourses took as their starting point concern for *individual* well-being, this third discourse raises the question whether there is something like "societal well-being" *next to* individual well-being. Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky (2007), for instance, write about well-being of organizations and communities. They see organizations and communities as *sites of well-being* as they see individual persons as another site of well-being. They suggest an interconnection between those different sites of well-being. With reference to relevant literature, Prilleltensky and Prilleltensky (2007) argue that and show in what way the well-being of families, organizations, communities, and so on impact the well-being of individual persons. It is generally social determinants / indicators research that establishes such relationships between the well-being of individual persons and the well-being of those other sites of well-being (e.g., Kimweli & Stilwell, 2002). The discussion of the literature in this chapter so far gave only consideration to approaches to individual well-being.

The third aspect of such well-being explored in this section suggests that concern for individual well-being will have to give consideration to ideas of the well-being of other entities, like families, communities, etc. and to the question how individual well-being relates to the well-being of those other entities. Two points might illustrate the importance of such a question. First, individual well-being can be understood in a way that there can be tensions between these different sites of well-being and the well-being of individual persons. What might contribute to the well-being of one person or a particular group of persons, might impact negatively on the communal well-being. On the other hand, one might be able to conceptualize individual well-being in such a way that, for instance, communal well-being is an integral component of the former. Second, the concern for the well-being of a particular site of well-being – for instance the well-being of a state's economy ("economic well-being") – might originally be justified by its importance for the well-being of individual persons, like the citizens of the state. However, at some point in time the primary focus of concern might shift away from the well-being of individual persons to the other site of well-being. The concern for "economic well-being" in Western societies, for instance, is generally justified for its impact on the well-being of all citizens. However, some economists (e.g., Jackson, 2009; Schumacher, 1973) have argued that the concern for the economy in the West is now decoupled from the (original) concern for the well-being of its citizens.

Conclusion

This chapter provides a systematic analysis of approaches to well-being in different Western academic disciplines. The conceptual understanding of the notion of well-being that is to result from this analysis is to serve as the basis for a systematic approach to assessing well-being in schools and for education for well-being more generally. The analysis suggests that the notion of well-being is interdisciplinary and complex. It is interdisciplinary in the sense that different academic disciplines have valuable contributions to make to our understanding of the notion. It is complex in terms of at least the three aspects discussed here: where to "locate" well-being; identifying who decides on people's well-being using whose idea of well-being; and the tensions and interaction between enculturated individual and social perspectives on well-being. Concretizing the idea of well-being to assess educational contexts will need to give consideration to the interdisciplinarity and complexity of the notion of well-being. Because of the interdisciplinarity, any such concretization will need to be holistic, giving due consideration to the different perspectives provided in the different approaches to well-being with respect to the three aspects used in the analysis. Because of the complexity of the notion of well-being, any concretization of the notion of well-being will have to (a) include judgment calls on which of the "locales" of well-being to give preference over which others, (b) consider power issues concerning those decisions and concerning decisions on who decides on students' well-being and their adequate preparation for living well in the future, and (c) deal adequately with the cultural embededness of any perspective on well-being.

The interdisciplinary and complex nature of the notion of well-being can make the task of conceptualizing well-being in an explicit way as an overarching goal for school education seem daunting; however, because of the importance of the task, we need to engage in this endeavour. The analysis presented in this chapter is to help such an endeavour start out with a more comprehensive and deeper understanding of the notion of well-being.

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