Wellbeing Frameworks and Future Generations

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Abstract
Increasingly, governments are moving from using GDP as the primary measure of economic progress to using wellbeing frameworks, which aim to measure wellbeing. The question I address in this essay is how wellbeing frameworks should be designed so they will better serve future generations. The question has two interpretations. Firstly, the question can ask how wellbeing frameworks should be designed so they better serve future generations when they inherit them. I identify two areas for improvement. One is that wellbeing frameworks have a list of things they're going to measure and promote as aspects of wellbeing but often have no rationale for what's included and excluded. The other is that they typically have no mechanism for revision. I argue that the best solution for these problems is to use an account of wellbeing I call the Reflective Value account. Secondly, the question of how wellbeing frameworks should be designed so they will better serve future generations can be understood as asking how wellbeing frameworks should be designed so they influence policy decisions now to better promote the wellbeing of future generations. I argue wellbeing frameworks should include measures of the resources future generations will need in order to achieve wellbeing, and that these resources should include resilience to existential and catastrophic risks.

§1 Introduction

Increasingly, governments are moving from using GDP as the primary indicator of national social and economic progress to using multi-dimensional economic indices called *wellbeing frameworks*. GDP is a measure of economic activity, and the motivation for its use is the idea that the greater the amount of economic activity in a country, the higher the wellbeing of its people. That has increasingly been called into question (Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi 2009), and wellbeing frameworks are thought by many to be a far better way to evaluate national wellbeing. Governments using wellbeing frameworks include those of New Zealand, Scotland, Finland, Iceland, Bhutan, Wales, the UK, Italy, Germany, and Australia.

The question I address in this essay is how wellbeing frameworks should be designed so they will better serve future generations. I interpret this question in two ways and give answers to both forms of the question. Under both forms of the question, I aim to identify areas for improvement in existing wellbeing frameworks. [1] The first interpretation of the question asks how wellbeing frameworks should be designed so they better serve future generations when they inherit them. The second interpretation of the question asks how wellbeing frameworks should be designed so that they influence policy decisions *now* in a way that will better promote the wellbeing of future generations. I'll explain these in turn.

Firstly, the question can ask how wellbeing frameworks should be designed so they better serve future generations when they inherit them. Some institutions and systems we've inherited from previous generations serve us better than others, and some serve us poorly. Likewise, those institutions and systems we develop now can serve future generations well or poorly when they inherit them. An assumption I make in this paper, one for which there isn't room to argue, is that future generations' lives will have moral value, so if we can benefit them or

[1] When referring to "future generations," I don't have a definite time frame in mind. Some time frames are so long that they're impractical for the design of national wellbeing frameworks. For example, a million years is too long, as we can't predict the effects of current actions then or even whether New Zealand will exist at that point. At the other end of the scale, a wellbeing framework designed for only a few decades doesn't take enough of the future into account to address the wellbeing of future generations. In between, there is some indeterminate amount of time for which it makes sense to design our wellbeing frameworks. A time frame of 100 years is useful to keep in mind; many of today's governmental structures and systems were in place in some form a century ago, so it's a period for which it makes sense to design such things, and yet it's long enough to span multiple generations and encompass significant changes in values, technologies, and ecological conditions.

avoid causing them harm at little cost to ourselves, we should do so. This means that it's better if we leave to future generations institutions and systems that work well for them than ones that don't.

Although future generations that inherit poor institutions and systems can always change them, it's better for those generations if they don't have to do so. If future generations inherit, say, crumbling transport infrastructure or a severely underfunded and badly designed education system, they can always fix those problems: they can replace the country's transport infrastructure and develop and fully fund a new education system. But just as we're glad if we don't have to do those things for ourselves now, because of the expense and effort, we can see that it's better for future generations if they don't have to do those things for themselves in the future. Similarly, it's better for future generations if they inherit wellbeing frameworks that they don't have to fix than if they inherit wellbeing frameworks that they do have to fix.

The work involved in overhauling or replacing a wellbeing framework can be significant. The Welsh wellbeing framework had a development history of up to 18 years (Messham and Sheard 2020), and in its final stages involved a year-long national consultation process with 6474 participants (Cynnal Cymru 2015). Australia's wellbeing framework was the culmination of a 23-year period of development (Gaukroger 2023). Both wellbeing frameworks represent an enormous effort on the part of many politicians, public servants, academics, and members of the public and required not just a great deal of technical work in public policy and economics, but a sustained effort to persuade politicians, government agencies, and the public that implementing a wellbeing framework was worthwhile. For example, not long before Australia's wellbeing framework was created the Australian Treasurer described those advocating for its introduction as wanting "to replace responsible economic management with a yoga mat [and] beads" (Frydenberg 2020). Thus, overhauling a wellbeing framework that doesn't work well could be a substantial task that requires considerable effort, persuasion, and political will, so it's good for future generations if wellbeing frameworks can be designed so they serve future generations well when they inherit them.

The kind of wellbeing framework I'll look for improvements in is what is called a *dashboard*, as these are strongly favoured by governments. In these frameworks, a set of aspects of life thought important for wellbeing, usually called *Domains*, is identified, and specific measures are used to assess how well people are doing in each Domain. There is no attempt to aggregate the Domains into a single metric; the primary reason for this is that it avoids having to either arbitrarily give each Domain the same weight or work out the relative importance of each Domain for wellbeing.[2]

There are two aspects of current wellbeing frameworks that will serve future generations poorly when they inherit them. One is that wellbeing frameworks often have no rationale for which Domains of wellbeing are included and excluded. That's a problem for future generations as they'll inherit frameworks that measure and promote certain things but not others for no clear reason. As I explain below, this is a problem for us now but is worse for future generations. The other, related problem is that wellbeing frameworks typically have no principled mechanisms for revision—no principled processes for changing their sets of Domains, which tends to instead happen on an ad hoc basis. Future generations might inherit wellbeing frameworks that promote things they find they have good reasons not to value, or not promote things they find they have good reasons *to* value; so, it's good for future generations if wellbeing frameworks have a mechanism for revision that allows them to easily undergo appropriate changes under these circumstances in a principled way.

I'll argue that the best solution for both of these problems is for wellbeing frameworks to use a particular account of wellbeing, which I call the Reflective Value account. According to this view, people have wellbeing when they have what they value as good for themselves on informed reflection. The Reflective Value account of wellbeing provides a rationale for what is or isn't included in the set of things a wellbeing framework counts as Domains of wellbeing: Domains of wellbeing are chosen because they are what the intended beneficiaries of wellbeing frameworks value as good for themselves as shown

[2] The other kind of wellbeing framework, an *aggregated* framework, represents wellbeing with a single metric. Though out of favour with governments, aggregated frameworks are commonly used by international bodies, as they are useful for comparing the wellbeing of different countries (e.g., (Barbier et al. 2023)). For an example of a national aggregated framework, see Bhutan's Gross National Happiness framework (GNH Centre Bhutan).

through consultative processes. Using the Reflective Value account also solves the problem of revisability: the consultative processes used to establish the set of Domains can be repeated on a regular basis, and thus the wellbeing framework can be regularly revised to ensure it reflects the values of the population.

Designing wellbeing frameworks so that they better serve future generations *when they inherit them* is thus one interpretation of the question of how wellbeing frameworks should be designed so they will better serve future generations. The other interpretation of the question is how wellbeing frameworks should be designed so that they influence policy decisions *now* in a way that will better promote the wellbeing of future generations.

There are two improvements that can be made here. The first is that all wellbeing frameworks should include measures of the resources that future generations will need in order to achieve wellbeing; currently only a minority of wellbeing frameworks do so. The second improvement is that wellbeing frameworks should include measures of the resources future generations will need in order to be resilient to existential and catastrophic risks. An existential risk is an event that could cause the extinction of humanity or the unrecoverable collapse of civilisation, and a catastrophic risk is an event that could have terrible effects on humanity short of extinction or unrecoverable civilisational collapse.

In this essay I'm concerned to find practical and achievable solutions to inadequacies in how wellbeing frameworks serve future generations. For this reason, I take existing wellbeing frameworks as a starting point. Whether we should be using wellbeing as the primary economic measure, should instead use GDP, or should find some other measure, is not something I will discuss here. As countries are, as a matter of fact, increasingly using wellbeing frameworks, and are likely to continue to use those frameworks for at least some future generations, I'll address the problems raised by that continued use.[3]

§2 An example: The Living Standards Framework

To understand the problems and possible solutions for wellbeing frameworks and future generations, it's important to know how wellbeing frameworks

[3] For a summary of the arguments in favour of wellbeing frameworks over other measures, see (Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi 2009).

currently work. As an example, I'll use New Zealand's national wellbeing framework, the Living Standards Framework (LSF). The LSF is designed and maintained by the New Zealand Treasury, the agency primarily responsible for evaluating New Zealand's national policies and advising the government. The LSF guides the Treasury in its evaluations of policy, and on the introduction of the LSF the government called New Zealand's annual budget "The Wellbeing Budget" (e.g., (Government of New Zealand 2023)).

The LSF is a useful example because it has one part that is typical of wellbeing frameworks, which will be the focus of much of the discussion; and because it has another part that is unusual among wellbeing frameworks, which I'll later (in Section 6) argue they should have.

The part of the LSF that is a core feature of wellbeing frameworks is its *Domains* of wellbeing. Domains of wellbeing are aspects of life thought important for the population's current wellbeing. They are typically a mix of quite different kinds of thing: some are resources, such as income; some are likely constituents of wellbeing, such as health; some are means to wellbeing, such as the amount of time people have available for leisure and play; and some are capabilities, such as cultural capability, which is the ability for people to express their cultural identity. There are twelve Domains of wellbeing in the LSF: Cultural Capability and Belonging; Engagement and Voice; Environmental Amenity; Family and Friends; Health; Housing; Income, Consumption, and Wealth; Knowledge and Skills; Leisure and Play; Work, Care, and Volunteering; Safety; and Subjective Wellbeing.

For each Domain there are specific *Indicators*, which are measures for that Domain. For example, under the Domain of Health there are the Indicators Life Expectancy at Birth, Health Status, Mental Health, and the Suicide Rate; and under the Domain of Leisure and Play there are the Indicators Leisure and Personal Care (the average number of hours per day devoted to free time and personal care), Participation in Sport and Recreation, and Satisfaction with Work-Life Balance. The Treasury has specific data sources it uses for each of these Indicators.

The other part of the LSF, one not common among wellbeing frameworks, is a set of four *Capitals*.[4] These are stocks of resources that will be needed for the country to achieve wellbeing in the future, and are Financial and Physical Capital, Human Capability, the Natural Environment, and Social Cohesion. Financial and Physical Capital includes such things as infrastructure, net financial assets, research and development, and the arts. Human Capability includes the population's levels of education and physical and mental health. The Natural Environment includes all aspects of the natural environment necessary for life and those valued for spiritual, cultural, or economic reasons. Social Cohesion is people's level of trust and willingness to cooperate. Again, there are specific Indicators for each Capital.

The LSF also has a set of measures called "Our Institutions and Governance," intended to evaluate how well government and other institutions are functioning. This part of the LSF is not relevant to this discussion, so I'll leave it aside.

I'll now discuss two aspects of current wellbeing frameworks that will serve future generations poorly when they inherit them, before moving to the different question of how wellbeing frameworks should be designed so that they influence policy decisions now to better promote the wellbeing of future generations.

§3 Two reasons current wellbeing frameworks won't serve future generations well when they inherit them

The first reason wellbeing frameworks won't serve future generations well when they inherit them is that they tend to lack a rationale for what they include and exclude as Domains of wellbeing. For example, the New Zealand Treasury's Living Standards Framework includes no explicit rationale for its Domains of wellbeing.[5] The closest I can see is a statement in a supplementary document that

[4] A recent change to the LSF has renamed this section of the framework "The Wealth of Aotearoa New Zealand," but I'll use the original, simpler term "Capitals."

[5] The Treasury explains many aspects of its approach to the LSF, but at no point that I can see does this include an explicit rationale for what it includes in its set of Domains. Further, much of the Treasury's explanation that might give clues to such a rationale is at least obscure. Just as one example, an important discussion document says that the LSF follows the Capability Approach and not utilitarianism because utilitarianism, but not

the Domains are those things that "research and public engagement have shown are important for the wellbeing of both individuals and collectives" (Hughes 2021: 11). What that research and public engagement are, precisely, isn't clear. Similarly, no clear rationale is provided by the OECD's How's Life? Framework, beyond the statement that "[The framework] builds on a body of literature and a wide range of international examples, which together suggest an emerging consensus on several of the outcomes that contribute towards people's wellbeing" (OECD 2017: Ch. 1). As far as I can see, the OECD doesn't say what that literature and those examples are.[6] The influential Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi report on wellbeing frameworks gives as the complete rationale for its set of Domains that its selection is "Based on academic research and a number of concrete initiatives developed around the world" (Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi 2009: 14). Again, it does not say what that research and those initiatives are.

This lack of a rationale in wellbeing frameworks for their sets of Domains will not serve well the future generations who inherit them: they will inherit wellbeing frameworks that promote certain things and demote others without a clear reason. Again, while it may be in principle possible for future generations to overhaul or replace the wellbeing frameworks they inherit, it's better for them if they don't have to do that.[7]

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the Capability Approach, reduces wellbeing to the individual level (Hughes 2021: 15). But leading proponents of the Capability Approach say that reduction to the individual level is a *basic feature* of the approach, and that "we must treat each person as a holder of a set of capabilities and, ultimately, look at each person separately rather than on some aggregate level" (Robeyns 2016: 400) (see also (Nussbaum 2000: 55-59)). So, the LSF is presented as following the Capability Approach by rejecting a principle that Capability Approach theorists in fact strongly hold. In sum, what the Treasury gives by way of rationale for its set of Domains is obscure.

[6] The OECD's framework is not a national framework but has been influential on several national frameworks.

[7] The wellbeing frameworks of some countries, including the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Australia, Wales, Canada, and Ireland, claim that their set of Domains are based on what their relevant populations think is important for their wellbeing. This is a rationale for a set of Domains and is roughly in the direction of the Reflective Value approach I propose below but falls short. I'll explain how in Section 4.

The problem of a lack of rationale applies not only to Domains of wellbeing, but also to Indicators, the specific measures used for each Domain (see Section 2 above). Often, it's at the level of Indicators that the lack of rationale is most problematic. A Domain of Social Connectedness, for example, seems uncontroversial as an aspect of wellbeing, but a particular Indicator might only be a good measure for people from particular cultures. For example, an Indicator for Social Connectedness (recently renamed "Family and Friends") in the LSF is the percentage of adults who had face-to-face contact at least once a week with friends who do not live with them. For New Zealand Māori, who generally consider family a central component of wellbeing (Durie 1985, Ministry of Māori Development—Te Puni Kōkiri and The New Zealand Treasury 2019), this is not a good Indicator of social connectedness or strong relationships with family and friends.[8] For conciseness, I'll talk about the lack of a rationale for Domains, rather than for Domains and Indicators, but this should be read as including Indicators.

The lack of a rationale for sets of Domains is an aspect of wellbeing frameworks that serves current generations poorly, but the problem is worse for future generations. This is because when Domains of wellbeing are chosen without a rationale, the particular Domains appear to be selected because they seem to the designers to be, broadly speaking, *obviously* important for wellbeing for one reason or another: it seems to them uncontroversially important, it's something economists are currently very interested in measuring, it's already a Domain in some other wellbeing framework, it's something for which we happen to have data, or it's in some other way particularly salient to the designers. There is, however, significant cultural variation in what seems obviously important for wellbeing (Carlquist et al. 2017, Joshanloo 2014, Joshanloo and Weijers 2014, Sollis et al. 2024, Sollis et al. 2021), and we know from history that what seems to be obviously important for wellbeing can change significantly over time. For example, religiosity is now considered relatively unimportant for wellbeing by some cultures that valued it highly in the past. So, what seems obviously important for wellbeing now may well not seem obviously important to future

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[8] The LSF has recently adopted a separate wellbeing framework for Māori, called He Ara Waiora (Te Tai Ōhanga/The New Zealand Treasury 2023), to try to address the problem that the LSF does not reflect Māori views of wellbeing.

generations, which makes our selecting Domains because they now seem obvious problematic for those generations.

So, we need our wellbeing frameworks to have a rationale for their sets of Domains of wellbeing if they're to serve future generations well when they inherit them. The most straightforward kind of rationale for a set of Domains of wellbeing is an *account* of wellbeing, that is, a statement of what wellbeing is. If something importantly contributes to wellbeing, it should be included; and if something doesn't importantly contribute to wellbeing, it should be excluded. Whether something contributes to wellbeing or not depends on what wellbeing is; so, an account of wellbeing gives us a criterion for what to include and exclude. (I'll discuss proposals for providing a rationale for sets of Domains without using an account of wellbeing below, in Section 5.2.)

The second, related reason wellbeing frameworks won't serve future generations well when they inherit them is that wellbeing frameworks don't include any principled mechanism for revision. As noted above in this section, what we might believe should be included in a wellbeing framework now might be something future generations will think should be excluded, and something we exclude might be something they think important. This can be because of shifting values, different circumstances, or better information. Revision can always be done in an ad hoc way: a government can always add or subtract Domains of wellbeing if it wants to. But without a clear rationale for the set of Domains, there isn't a clear rationale for revising that list, and we don't want revision to occur just at the whim of government agencies.

In the following section I'll introduce the Reflective Value account and explain how it can solve these two problems current wellbeing frameworks cause for future generations who'll inherit them.

§4 The Reflective Value account as a solution to the problems future generations face when inheriting wellbeing frameworks[9]

We need an account of wellbeing to use in wellbeing frameworks, to provide a rationale for what they include and exclude as Domains of wellbeing. However,

[9] This and the following section draw on my ([Redacted for anonymity] Forthcoming), which argues in full for the Reflective Value account of wellbeing as the best account to

we face a serious problem in choosing an account of wellbeing for wellbeing frameworks: we don't know which account of wellbeing is correct. Governments and government agencies are not in a position to determine which is the correct account of wellbeing, and as philosophers of wellbeing are in deeply entrenched disagreement about which account is correct (Bishop 2014, Keller 2009a), there is no expert consensus to which we can turn.

My approach is to leave aside the question of which is the right account of wellbeing *simpliciter*, where an account of wellbeing simpliciter is an account of the ultimate constituents of wellbeing for all people, or all wellbeing subjects. Instead, I take up the more achievable aim of finding *the best account of wellbeing to use* just for this particular context, government measures of national wellbeing. This approach, which I call Contextual Prescriptivism, works to find the best account of wellbeing to use in a practical context (such as national wellbeing measurement, public health, clinical psychological care, poverty alleviation, social work, and so on) by identifying the purposes for an account of wellbeing in that context and the constraints on a good account of wellbeing in that context, and then finding the account that best serves those purposes within those constraints.[10]

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use in public policy for current generations, and my ([Redacted for anonymity] Unpublished), which argues in full for using the method of Contextual Prescriptivism in practical contexts.

[10] Note that, in my view, Contextual Prescriptivism is not a form of what Alexandrova calls Contextualism about wellbeing (Alexandrova 2017). Alexandrova's Contextualism is the view that the term "wellbeing" has different meanings in different contexts and that the meaning of "wellbeing" in a particular context is revealed in the assumptions of the scientific experts in that context (e.g., (Alexandrova 2017: 56)). Alexandrova's Contextualism doesn't purport to find the best account of wellbeing to use in a context, just to reveal the account that's already implicitly used (Alexandrova 2017: xxxix). In contrast, the purpose of Contextual Prescriptivism is not to find the meaning of the word "wellbeing" in a context, or what account of wellbeing is currently used in a context, but instead to find which account of wellbeing is best to use in that context. In doing so, it does not rely only on the assumptions of scientific experts, unlike Alexandrova's Contextualism; instead, it identifies the purposes for and constraints on an account of

The context of a wellbeing framework is not the same as the context or range of contexts in which we want the right account of wellbeing simpliciter. There are conditions on a good account of wellbeing for wellbeing frameworks that should not be applied to an account of wellbeing simpliciter. For example, a purpose of the LSF is to *measure* wellbeing, so under an account of wellbeing for the LSF, wellbeing must be measurable, not just in principle, but in practice, under the resources available to a government agency. This is not a plausible condition on an account of wellbeing simpliciter. For example, an account of wellbeing simpliciter might include being virtuous as a constituent of wellbeing (e.g., (Hursthouse 1991: 226, 1999: 169, 173-174, McDowell 1998: 17, Phillips 1964: 50)), but a government agency can't, in practice, determine what constitutes being virtuous and then measure the degree of virtuousness of a large number of people. Similarly, an account of wellbeing for wellbeing frameworks, being used in a political context, must be one that a government can apply without violating principles of political legitimacy. This is not a good restriction on an account of wellbeing simpliciter, as whether an account of wellbeing simpliciter is correct and whether governments should apply it are distinct questions (for an overview, see (Wall 2019)). So, the context of a wellbeing framework is different from contexts in which we require the right account of wellbeing simpliciter.

Contextual Prescriptivism is much more likely to arrive at a useful result that we can agree on than trying to determine the right account of wellbeing simpliciter, for two reasons. Firstly, it is much less ambitious to try to find the account that works best in wellbeing frameworks than the right account of the ultimate constituents of wellbeing in all contexts, so we are more likely to succeed with this approach. We are seeking just the account that works best, not the account that correctly identifies wellbeing's ultimate constituents, and we are seeking the best account for just one context, not for all contexts.

Secondly, we are more likely to arrive at a consensus on which is the best account of wellbeing to use in wellbeing frameworks than on which is the correct account of wellbeing simpliciter because finding the correct account of wellbeing

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wellbeing in the context at hand and draws on the views and practices of stakeholders and implementation experts, as well as the relevant scientists.

simpliciter relies heavily on intuitions about cases, intuitions which vary strongly between different people (Keller 2009a, Tiberius 2013). This use of intuitions is perfectly legitimate, and I make no argument against its use in finding the right account of wellbeing simpliciter. However, this method has arrived at deeply entrenched disagreement about the right account of wellbeing simpliciter, and a situation philosophers have even described as "depressing" (Keller 2009a: 660). So, it is not a promising method for finding accounts of wellbeing *for wellbeing frameworks*; we want to have wellbeing frameworks now, rather than wait for the impasse between philosophers' intuitions about wellbeing to be resolved. As Contextual Prescriptivism does not rely on such intuitions about cases or rely heavily on intuitions in any similar way, it is more likely to arrive at a useful result we can agree on than the method used for finding an account of wellbeing simpliciter.

Following this approach, the following account of wellbeing is one that serves future generations well as a rationale for a set of Domains.

> **The Reflective Value account**
> Wellbeing is having what you value as good for yourself, where to value something is to desire it on informed reflection.

The Reflective Value account is a kind of subjectivist account of wellbeing. Subjectivist accounts of wellbeing hold that your wellbeing always depends on your attitudes. In contrast, under objectivist accounts of wellbeing your wellbeing does not always depend on your attitudes.[11]

There are two main kinds of subjectivist account of wellbeing, unrestricted desire accounts, and restricted desire accounts. Under unrestricted desire accounts, the fulfilment of any desire counts towards your wellbeing. Under restricted desire accounts, it's only the fulfilment of certain desires that count towards your wellbeing. As the Reflective Value account counts only the fulfilment of what you *value* as good for you, that is, what you desire on informed

[11] Hedonism is often treated as a third category, but can be classified as either objectivist, if your pleasure is considered to be independent of your attitudes (Bramble 2013), or subjectivist, if your pleasure is considered to depend on your attitudes (Heathwood 2007) (see also Bradley 2014, Heathwood 2014).

reflection, it is not novel but instead draws on the tradition of restricted desire accounts.[12]

The reason the Reflective Value account treats wellbeing as having what you *value* as good for yourself—what you desire for yourself on informed reflection—and not what you simply *desire* as good for you, is that we want the attitudes public policy is based on to be those people have when they're reasoning well and well-informed; and so, likewise, we want the desires we count as mattering for wellbeing to be those people have when they're reasoning well and well-informed. This is why the account is preferable to using unrestricted desire accounts in a wellbeing framework.

The primary difference between the Reflective Value account and other restricted desire accounts is that in other such accounts informed reflection is an ideal state: what's good for a person is, for example, what they would want for themselves if they were *fully* informed and reasoning *perfectly*. For the purposes of a wellbeing framework, we cannot find out what people would value as good for themselves under conditions of full information and perfect reasoning: the degree of reasoning well and being well-informed a person must have for their desires to count as values must, for practical reasons, be vague and have a low threshold. However, when finding out what people value as good for themselves, government agencies developing wellbeing frameworks can do their best to provide important relevant information and facilitate good reasoning. One way this is done is through the consultative procedures used in *participatory wellbeing frameworks*, central to which is in-person facilitated consultation with the intended beneficiaries of the framework, usually in representative groups (Sollis et al. 2022). As it can include what people value as good for themselves under such restricted but realistic conditions, the Reflective Value account is preferable to other restricted desire accounts for use in a wellbeing framework.[13]

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[12] For various kinds of restricted desire accounts of wellbeing simpliciter see Baber (2007: 107), Brandt (1979: 113, 247, 268), Carson (2000: 94), Dworkin (1977: 234), Haji (2010), Hare (1981: 101-106), Heathwood (2019), Railton (1986: 17), Rawls (1971: 92–93, 417), Sidgwick (1907: 109-111), and Tiberius (2008, 2018).

[13] There is resemblance between the Reflective Value account and Tiberius's Value Fulfilment account of wellbeing simpliciter, according to which "[W]ell-being is served

As noted above, a number of wellbeing frameworks claim that their lists of Domains are based on what their relevant populations think is important for their wellbeing.[14] This approach is roughly in the direction of the Reflective Value approach but falls short in two main ways. Firstly, these frameworks are often conceptually confused. They often purport to "measure what matters" to their relevant populations, which is not the same thing as measuring what people value *for their wellbeing* unless the only thing that matters to people is their wellbeing. But there are good reasons to think that people care about other things as well, such as others' wellbeing, including others in different countries, and important goods such as liberty, autonomy, justice, and morality.[15] So, measuring what matters to people and measuring what they value for their wellbeing are not the same thing, and it isn't always clear that these frameworks are to do with wellbeing, specifically. Secondly, the consultation processes used to create these wellbeing frameworks tend to be inadequate (see, e.g., (Sollis, Campbell, and Drake 2025)), and the results are unlikely to reflect the population's views well, let alone to reflect what they value on informed reflection.

In sum, a wellbeing framework based on the Reflective Value account will include as Domains of wellbeing just those things that the population values as good for itself; so, likewise, policy based on the framework will promote as good for the population just what it values as good for itself. This is a principled

by the successful pursuit of a relatively stable set of values that are emotionally, motivationally, and cognitively suited to the person" (Tiberius 2018: 13). Unlike the Reflective Value account, Tiberius's account isn't suitable for wellbeing frameworks, because it isn't feasible for governments to determine what values are emotionally, motivationally, and cognitively suited to each of the large number and diverse range of subjects that make up a national population. In contrast, it is not difficult to find out what people value as good for themselves on non-ideal informed reflection, which is what's needed under the Reflective Value account.

[14] As noted above, these countries include the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Australia, Wales, Canada, and Ireland.

[15] Some thinkers, *welfarists*, think that all moral and political goods can be reduced to wellbeing, but that's a highly controversial position. See (Keller 2009b) for an introduction.

rationale for a wellbeing framework's set of Domains and so solves the first problem facing future generations who inherit wellbeing frameworks, the lack of such a rationale.

The Reflective Value account also solves the second problem facing future generations who inherit wellbeing frameworks, the lack of a principled mechanism for revision, as it gives a principled basis for revising a set of Domains. If a population comes to value as good for themselves something that isn't in the set of Domains, it can be added; and if a population comes to no longer value something on the set of Domains as good for themselves, it can be removed.

The process I propose, then, is this. The set of Domains of wellbeing in a framework is established through a process of consultation with the public that finds what they value as good for themselves, as described above. Once the wellbeing framework is established, the consultative process can be repeated at the regular interval of some particular number of years, though subsequent consultations need not be as extensive as those used to establish the initial list. (Which interval of years is the right one for revising wellbeing frameworks is not something I'll try to settle here and is to a large extent a practical matter that will vary between countries.) Let's imagine, though, that a participatory process will occur every few years in order to ensure the set of Domains continues to reflect what the population values as good for them.

This not only allows for revision, but means that revision will be gradual, so when a future generation inherits a wellbeing framework and values significantly different things than people some generations earlier, revising the framework will not require dramatic changes. The framework will have been gradually revised through the regularly repeated consultative process, so no generation will inherit a set of Domains dramatically different from the one they value (assuming, as seems the case, that a population's wellbeing values typically don't change dramatically over just a few years).

The process of regular revision under the Reflective Value account will mean wellbeing frameworks work well for future generations. If future generations find that they value different things as good for themselves than previous generations did, they will have a ready, principled means for revising their wellbeing frameworks accordingly. And as the revision process will have occurred regularly over the years, and populations' values do not typically undergo rapid, dramatic transformation, when future generations need to make revisions, we can expect those revisions to be moderate and manageable.[16]

§5 Why the Reflective Value account works better for future generations than alternatives

I've explained why the Reflective Value account works better in wellbeing frameworks than other subjectivist accounts of wellbeing, both unrestricted desire accounts (which count the fulfilment of *any* desire towards your wellbeing) and other restricted desire accounts (which tend to count only the fulfilment of desires you would have *in ideal circumstances* towards your wellbeing). I'll now explain why using the Reflective Value account works better than two other options, using an objectivist account of wellbeing and using no account of wellbeing at all.

5.1 Why using the Reflective Value account is better than using an objectivist account of wellbeing

Recall that subjectivist accounts of wellbeing hold that your wellbeing always depends on your attitudes, whereas objectivist accounts of wellbeing hold that your wellbeing does not always depend on your attitudes. An objectivist account might hold that some kinds of value-satisfaction contribute to your wellbeing but will hold that there are constituents of wellbeing that do not depend on any of your values being satisfied. Typical value-independent constituents of wellbeing in objectivist theories are things like health, knowledge, autonomy, achievement, and relationships. These things are typically thought by objectivists to be good for you whether you value them or not. Less obvious purported objective constituents of wellbeing included by some accounts include such things as spirituality and being virtuous.

Recall that the aim here is not to find the correct account of wellbeing simpliciter—the correct account of the ultimate constituents of wellbeing for all people, or all wellbeing subjects—but to find the account of wellbeing that works

[16] Note that not just the Reflective Value account but subjectivist accounts of wellbeing, in general, can allow principled mechanisms of revision. Recall from pp. 13-15 that other subjectivist accounts do not work well in wellbeing frameworks for different reasons.

best in wellbeing frameworks, including for future generations. The problem with using an objectivist account of wellbeing for this purpose is that it would violate an important political principle of liberal democracies, the principle of political neutrality.

A state is politically neutral to the extent that what it promotes as good for its population accords with what the population approves of as good for itself.[17] The idea is that it isn't the state's role to decide what the population should pursue as good for themselves, and with regard to wellbeing frameworks, we don't want a framework that hinders people from pursuing any plausible view they might have of the good life.

Under the Reflective Value account, a wellbeing framework includes just what a population values as good for it. Thus, policy based on such a framework will promote as good for the population just what the population values as good for itself. As a state is politically neutral to the extent that what it promotes as good for its population accords with what the population approves of as good for itself, using the Reflective Value account is in keeping with political neutrality.[18]

In contrast, objectivist accounts of wellbeing hold that your wellbeing does not depend on your attitudes, so do not count as your wellbeing just what you value. Thus, using an objectivist account in a wellbeing framework would mean that the government promotes some things as good for the population and demotes other things as not good for the population whether or not the population values those things as good for themselves. It is thus not politically neutral, and so not suitable for a wellbeing framework in a liberal democracy.[19]

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[17] This formulation of political neutrality is based on the first two of three formulations identified in (Wall 2019: section 3.1). There are different views of what political neutrality entails, and this formulation aims to best express the principle as it applies to wellbeing frameworks. If the reader would use another term for the principle described, they should make the appropriate substitutions.

[18] Note that subjectivist accounts of wellbeing, in general, can be used in keeping with political neutrality. The Reflective Value account is preferable to other subjectivist accounts for other reasons (see above, pp. 13-15).

[19] It's possible there could be an objectivist account of wellbeing that just happens to coincide with those things the population values as good for themselves. However, in this circumstance political neutrality would not be *robust*, as it would only be a matter of

Violating political neutrality is a problem with using an objectivist account of wellbeing in wellbeing frameworks now, but the problem is worse for future generations. When discussing the need for a rationale for sets of Domains of wellbeing in Section 3, I pointed out that without such a rationale, sets of Domains tend to consist of what seems to framework designers to be *obviously* important for wellbeing, and that this is problematic as what seems obviously important for wellbeing varies between cultures and between generations. Likewise, when creating a set of Domains of wellbeing that are purportedly objectively good for people, the danger of the set reflecting its creators' time and culture is high. It's common for objectivist accounts of wellbeing to rely on their proponents' intuitions to identify the purported constituents of wellbeing, and such intuitions vary across times and cultures. As time goes on and cultures and beliefs change, there's an increasing chance that future generations will disagree with a set of purportedly objective constituents of wellbeing created now. And so, there's more and more chance that what governments will promote as good for people based on such an account will not be what those people would approve of. The likelihood of an objectivist wellbeing framework violating political neutrality thus increases over time.

This problem might be mitigated by an effective revision mechanism. But it is hard to see how a mechanism for revision would operate in a wellbeing framework based on an objectivist account of wellbeing.

Let's think about how such a mechanism for revision might work. Currently the LSF includes Cultural Capability and Belonging as a Domain. This Domain represents the ability to participate fully in your culture. Let's say we have an objectivist account of wellbeing in our wellbeing framework, and Cultural Capability and Belonging is not one of the Domains. Let's also say our society

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happenstance. If what the population values changed, the account of wellbeing would not change accordingly, as it is not based on the population's attitudes. And if the government decided the objectivist account was incorrect in some way, an objectivist approach would allow it to alter the account to one that does not accord with the population's values. Political neutrality must be robust, so an objectivist account that a population just happens to agree with is not properly neutral.

comes to highly value Cultural Capability and Belonging as something that's good for us. That we value Cultural Capability and Belonging as good for us isn't a reason for the wellbeing framework to include it, as under an objectivist approach to wellbeing frameworks we don't decide what's good for our society by seeing what it values. For the wellbeing framework to include Cultural Capability and Belonging, we would have to have a justification for including it other than that we value it.

The most obvious justification for including something in a wellbeing framework that isn't valued by the population is that it's objectively good for us. As we would need to know (or at least justifiably believe) that Cultural Capability and Belonging is objectively good for us, the government agencies that design and maintain wellbeing frameworks would need to have some process for working out whether something is objectively valuable or not. However, this is beyond the expertise of government agencies. Those agencies can't turn to philosophers to answer the question, as philosophers don't even agree that *anything* is objectively good for us—many are subjectivists about wellbeing. Thus, it's very unlikely that a practical process can be found for the principled revision of objectivist wellbeing frameworks.

There's a way in which it might be thought, incorrectly, that we could avoid the problems for using an objectivist account of wellbeing in a wellbeing framework of violating political neutrality and failing to have a principled mechanism for revision. This is to have an objectivist approach according to which whether something contributes to wellbeing doesn't depend on people's attitudes, but people's attitudes are the best *guide* to what wellbeing is. In that case, government agencies could think that as the population values Cultural Capability and Belonging, it's likely that Cultural Capability and Belonging is an objective constituent of wellbeing. Recalling that we're looking for the best account of wellbeing *for wellbeing frameworks*, the problem with this approach is that it amounts to taking a subjectivist approach and adding an unnecessary and confusing layer of metaphysical complexity. If a government wellbeing framework treats wellbeing as those things people value, we don't add anything to the function of the framework by holding that the things people value are *objectively good* for them. If what we include in a wellbeing framework is just what people value as good for them, it's much more straightforward to simply use the Reflective Value account of wellbeing.

So, using the Reflective Value account is better than using an objectivist account, in a wellbeing framework.

5.2 Why using the Reflective Value account is better than using no account

I've argued that using the Reflective Value account solves the problems that the lack of a rationale for the content of wellbeing frameworks causes for future generations. However, proposals have been made for ways to provide a rationale for the contents of wellbeing frameworks other than using an account of wellbeing. I'll discuss two of these, one of which is an interpretation of Haybron & Tiberius's Pragmatic Subjectivism and the other of which is Taylor's Markers of Wellbeing approach (my term for his view), and explain why they're not good alternatives to using the Reflective Value account in wellbeing frameworks.

Haybron and Tiberius (2015) argue for a view called *Pragmatic Subjectivism*, according to which governments shouldn't take a position on what wellbeing is and should instead promote just what the intended beneficiaries of policy value. The reason for this position is respect for persons, which requires allowing people the freedom to choose the lives they think best for themselves. Pragmatic Subjectivism, if used in a wellbeing framework, shares with the Reflective Value approach the central feature of measuring just what the population values.

I see two ways in which Pragmatic Subjectivism can be interpreted, a weaker version and a stronger version. Under the weaker version, Pragmatic Subjectivism holds that a government should take no stand on what wellbeing simpliciter is and that government wellbeing policy should promote just what people value as good for themselves, but allows governments to use accounts of wellbeing that aren't accounts of wellbeing simpliciter. It's consistent with this version of Pragmatic Subjectivism to use the Reflective Value account in a wellbeing framework, and using the Reflective Value account can be seen as a natural application of Pragmatic Subjectivism which identifies the account of wellbeing that can be used under the approach.

Under the stronger interpretation, Pragmatic Subjectivism rules out using any account of wellbeing at all. It would then be incompatible with using the Reflective Value account. This approach of using no account of wellbeing at all, even one not an account of wellbeing simpliciter, is impractical, as I'll explain.

Governments and their agencies, in their discussions of wellbeing frameworks, frequently express judgements about wellbeing; they say things such as "This group has low wellbeing," "The wellbeing of this group is increasing," "This policy will increase wellbeing," and so on. Governments and their agencies report that members of the population have "high wellbeing," "decreasing wellbeing," and so on, depending on the extent to which they have the things included in the wellbeing framework. The New Zealand government even began calling its annual budget "The Wellbeing Budget." This language implies an account of wellbeing: "wellbeing" is used to refer to having those things that are represented in the wellbeing framework's Domains, which implies that having wellbeing is just having the things those Domains represent. As the stronger interpretation of Pragmatic Subjectivism does not permit using an account of wellbeing of any kind, it doesn't allow governments and their agencies to express judgements about wellbeing in the way they normally do, as doing so implies an account of wellbeing. This is impractical.

Say, for example, the Living Standards Framework is changed so that it includes just what the population values as good for itself, as both the Reflective Value approach and Pragmatic Subjectivism would have it do. Under Pragmatic Subjectivism, the New Zealand Treasury could no longer claim that it "measures wellbeing" or say that certain demographic groups have "high wellbeing" or "decreasing wellbeing," as those statements imply that having wellbeing is having the things represented by the wellbeing framework's Domains, and thus implies an account of wellbeing. The Treasury would instead need to say it measures "what New Zealanders value as good for them," or something similar, and say that groups are "high in what New Zealanders value as good for them," "have decreasing levels of what New Zealanders value as good for them," and so on. The word "wellbeing" would have to be replaced with "what New Zealanders value as good for them," or something similar, throughout copious government documents and in public statements by politicians and public servants. This would make talking about wellbeing frameworks awkward and wordy, and confusing for the general public. It's also not clear we could call the frameworks "wellbeing frameworks," as they would no longer purport to measure wellbeing. All this is impractical for wellbeing frameworks. So, if interpreted as ruling out the use of any account of wellbeing at all, Pragmatic Subjectivism is not a good alternative to using the Reflective Value account in wellbeing frameworks.[20]

Taylor (2015) also argues against using an account of wellbeing in wellbeing frameworks. His motivations for doing so are that using one of the main theories of wellbeing will be opposed by proponents of the other theories and that the alternative of using a mix of measures not tied to any particular theory results in an ad hoc wellbeing framework without a clear rationale for what it includes.

Taylor's approach is to include in wellbeing frameworks those things that there is substantial agreement on between what he calls the "mainstream" theories of wellbeing. A mainstream theory of wellbeing is one that has been around long enough to be tested through academic debate and is widely held among academics (Taylor 2015: 78). Something can be included in a wellbeing framework if it is a "marker" of wellbeing, that is, something that in relation to each of the mainstream theories of wellbeing is either a constituent of wellbeing, a contributor to wellbeing, or an indicator of wellbeing (which, exactly, depends on the mainstream theory in question) (Taylor 2015: 76).

There are two related problems with Taylor's approach, both problems of political legitimacy.

Firstly, Taylor aims to find a set of measures to include in wellbeing frameworks that will satisfy academic experts regardless of which account of wellbeing they favour. While expert input has an important role in public policy, in a democratic society expert opinion isn't sufficient for determining what should or should not be promoted as good for people through public policy. Wellbeing frameworks are intended to shape social and economic policy in general. The basis of social and economic policy in general, in a democratic society, cannot be decided by the views of academic experts, and is instead, as much as possible, based on the views of the population. This is similar to the way,

[20] The stronger interpretation of Pragmatic Subjectivism is Hersch's (2020) reading of the view. Hersch reaches the same conclusion as this section, that Pragmatic Subjectivism implicitly uses an account of wellbeing despite purporting not to, but uses a different argument. I believe his argument doesn't work, but there isn't space to discuss that here.

in a democratic society, leaders are chosen by popular vote rather than by a compromise among the views of political and policy experts.

The problem with basing wellbeing frameworks on the views of academic experts alone is illustrated by the second, related problem. Relying entirely on what Taylor calls "mainstream" theories, those which have been subject to academic debate and are widely held among academics, excludes views of wellbeing that are held by important segments of the population and which, for no principled reason, have not been considered by academics. For example, Māori make up around 18% of the New Zealand population, have special constitutional status under the Treaty of Waitangi, and have a particular view of wellbeing (see, e.g., (Durie 1985, O'Connell et al. 2018)). In keeping with this, the New Zealand Treasury uses a Māori wellbeing framework, He Ara Waiora, alongside its Living Standards Framework (Te Tai Ōhanga/The New Zealand Treasury 2023). Māori accounts of wellbeing do not meet Taylor's criteria, as they have not been long subject to academic debate and they are not widely held among academics. So, under Taylor's approach, the Treasury would have to stop using He Ara Waiora, as it expresses an account of wellbeing that does not fit his criteria.

There are two problems with the exclusion of Māori accounts of wellbeing from New Zealand's wellbeing frameworks. One is that it isn't a principled exclusion. It isn't the case that philosophers of wellbeing have considered Māori accounts of wellbeing and rejected them because they are flawed. Rather, for sociological reasons, philosophers haven't considered them at all: philosophy of wellbeing is dominated by Western philosophers, who tend to have paid little attention to any non-Western accounts of wellbeing, let alone Māori accounts.[21] The other problem with the exclusion of Māori accounts of wellbeing is that public policy based on the resulting wellbeing framework would mean promoting a set of things as good for Māori through public policy regardless of whether Māori believe those things are good for them. There are some minorities whose views governments may be justified in ignoring in making public policy, but Māori in New Zealand are not one of them: they make up a substantial

[21] For discussion of the exclusion of non-Western views in general in Western philosophy and whether it is justified, see (Van Norden 2017).

portion of the population, and policy is generally required to take Māori interests into account as a constitutional matter. There are similar minorities in other countries whose views of wellbeing would be wrongly excluded by Taylor's criteria.

This problem is illustrated by Taylor's list of the markers he believes should be included in wellbeing frameworks: happiness, health, life-satisfaction, success in realising central goals or values, supportive personal relationships, personal development, leisure, adequate income and resources, and rewarding employment. To give just one example among several, for Māori the health of the natural environment is central to wellbeing, not just instrumentally, but constitutively (Te Tai Ōhanga/The New Zealand Treasury 2023); but this view is largely alien to Western views of wellbeing, and accordingly the natural environment does not appear on Taylor's list.

Thus, Taylor's approach is not one we can use in wellbeing frameworks if they are to be politically legitimate, as it bypasses the population to instead decide the content of wellbeing frameworks based on the views of academic experts alone, and excludes accounts of wellbeing held by important sections of the population without a principled reason.

§6 Why wellbeing frameworks can't give more weight to the Capitals

The discussion so far has addressed the question of how wellbeing frameworks are best designed to serve future generations well when they inherit them. I'll now turn to the quite different question of how wellbeing frameworks should be designed so that they influence policy decisions now in a way that will better promote the wellbeing of future generations.

Before giving two ways in which wellbeing frameworks can be changed to better promote future generations' wellbeing, I'll explain why one change, which might seem attractive, is not in fact an option. This change involves the Capitals in a wellbeing framework.

Recall that the Capitals, in New Zealand's LSF, represent the resources needed for future generations' wellbeing. These are Financial and Physical Capital, Human Capability, the Natural Environment, and Social Cohesion (see p. 7, above). Ensuring adequate levels of the different Capitals is the way the LSF aims to ensure that policy is promoting the wellbeing of future generations.

The option that might mistakenly be thought good for improving wellbeing frameworks to better promote future generations' wellbeing goes like this. Wellbeing frameworks are intended to shape policy, and in policy we make choices that give relative weight to the wellbeing of existing people and to the wellbeing of future generations. For example, if we massively reduce our fossil fuel consumption now, that might reduce the wellbeing of existing people in some ways; but it will be greatly beneficial for future generations, who won't then be as badly affected by climate change. A healthy environment and energy stocks are two of the resources that the Capitals aim to measure, so we can see the decision whether to use huge amounts of fossil fuels now or leave them in the ground as a question about whether the contribution using those fuels now makes to current wellbeing is more important than the contribution leaving them in the ground makes to future wellbeing. If wellbeing frameworks could be designed so that the wellbeing of future generations is given more weight than we currently give it, that would be an improvement for those coming generations. And it might seem like we could achieve this by allocating more of our resources to the Capitals of wellbeing than we currently do, and less to the Domains of wellbeing, which are used to measure current wellbeing.

However, there are two problems with changing wellbeing frameworks so that they give more weight to the Capitals and less to the Domains, problems for which I see no solution.

The first problem is that although wellbeing frameworks are intended to influence policy, they don't do so in a way that directs different amounts of resources to different ends. For example, a wellbeing framework with a Domain for health will typically include an Indicator for mental health. If the Indicator shows that mental health is decreasing or shows that mental health is poor compared to that in other countries, that should prompt policy makers to consider aiming resources at the problem. But there's no mechanism that *directs* policy makers to aim more resources towards mental health. One reason for this is that solving problems for wellbeing, whether poor mental health or a poor environment, isn't simply a matter of allocating resources; complex decisions must be made about the best way to use resources, and in some cases a change in how resources are used, or some other policy decision, is more effective than an increase in the amount of resources allocated. Another reason wellbeing frameworks don't direct policy makers to aim resources at particular problems is that decisions often have to be made about how limited resources are best distributed among the aspects of wellbeing in which people are doing poorly. The designers of wellbeing frameworks aren't in a position to know, for example, the relative importance for wellbeing of household crowding and participation in sport and recreation, to take two Indicators from the LSF. So, decisions about the allocation of resources and attention require decision-making through political processes, rather than directed responses to wellbeing metrics. This includes decisions about whether certain resources are best allocated to current or future generations: such decisions can't be solely determined by mechanisms within wellbeing frameworks. As wellbeing frameworks don't straightforwardly direct resources towards particular ends, they can't be used to direct more resources from the Domains to the Capitals.

The second, related problem with designing wellbeing frameworks so they allocate more resources to the Capitals is that getting the correct balance between the amount of resources that should be allocated to the wellbeing of future generations and the amount that should be allocated to the wellbeing of current generations requires knowing the answers to important questions about *future discounting*: Is it permissible to give the wellbeing of current generations more weight in our decisions than the wellbeing of future generations? If so, what is the rate by which the claims of future generations to resources held by current generations diminish over time? These are questions on which there is considerable disagreement among philosophers and economists, and which need to be settled before wellbeing frameworks can function to correctly distribute resources between current and future generations.[22] So, wellbeing frameworks cannot guide the weighting of present and future wellbeing.

For these two reasons, it is not possible to change wellbeing frameworks to better promote future wellbeing by having them allocate more resources to the Capitals.

However, it's common for wellbeing frameworks to not include Capitals at all; as far as I can tell, the only government wellbeing frameworks that include them are those of New Zealand and the United Kingdom. Thus, the first of two

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[22] For an overview of issues of future discounting, see (Brennan 2007, Broome 1994, Caney 2009, and Mintz-Woo 2021).

ways in which wellbeing frameworks can be improved to better promote the wellbeing of future generations is for all wellbeing frameworks to include Capitals, so that countries can see whether they are developing and maintaining the resources future generations will need for their wellbeing.

§7 Incorporating resilience to existential and catastrophic risks

The second way in which wellbeing frameworks can be improved to better promote the wellbeing of future generations is to change the Capitals so that they include resilience to existential and catastrophic risks among the resources they measure. An existential risk is an event that could cause the extinction of humanity or the unrecoverable collapse of civilisation.[23] Existential risks include among other things nuclear war, climate change, collision with asteroids and comets, and according to some, some forms of artificial intelligence (Ord 2020). By "catastrophic risk" I mean an event that could have terrible effects on humanity short of extinction or unrecoverable civilisational collapse. This is intentionally vague, as I don't want to identify a threshold at which a risk becomes great enough to fall in this category. The sources of catastrophic risk are largely the same as the sources of existential risk; whether the risk of nuclear war, for example, is catastrophic or existential is a matter of the extent and severity of the event. The likelihood of future generations' wellbeing depends in part on their resilience to existential and catastrophic risks. By "resilience," I mean the ability to prevent such events from occurring or prevent great losses to wellbeing if such events do occur.

Resilience to risk *in general* is to some extent part of the Capitals: the more of these resources future generations have, the less precarious their wellbeing will be and the better placed they'll be to deal with severe risks, including those we can't foresee now. However, aspects of resilience specific to particular risks to future generations are rarely included in wellbeing frameworks. For example, the LSF includes resilience as one of four "analytical prompts," lenses through which the effects of policy should be assessed, which it describes like this: "Do individuals, collectives, institutions, organisations and the environment have an

[23] For explanation of this and competing definitions of existential risk see (Torres 2023).

ability to adapt to or absorb stresses and shocks?" (Te Tai Ōhanga/The New Zealand Treasury 2021: 16). Here resilience seems to be primarily a desirable characteristic of current generations. The LSF does include Indicators related to climate change in its Capital of Natural Environment, but these are measures of how bad the current effects of climate change are (such as sea level rise) and current contributions to climate change (such as greenhouse gas emissions), and—as important for future generations as these things are—these are not measures of the resources future generations need to be resilient to the effects of climate change. No other existential or catastrophic risk is explicitly addressed in the LSF (though it does mention the Covid-19 pandemic as one of its reasons for increasing its emphasis on institutions in 2021 (Te Tai Ōhanga/The New Zealand Treasury 2021: 41)).

This is something that should be changed. We don't sufficiently prepare or retain resources for the wellbeing of future generations if those resources are precarious in the face of risks we know are significant. And currently, little in the way of attention and resources is directed at reducing such risks. (This is a problem for current generations too, of course.) For example, biological warfare and engineered pandemics are two sources of existential risk, yet the international body responsible for the continued prohibition of bioweapons (the Biological Weapons Convention) has an annual budget smaller than that of the average McDonald's restaurant (Ord 2020).[24]

Although, as discussed above, including something as a measure in a wellbeing framework doesn't itself directly move resources or directly shape policy, it should prompt policy makers and government agencies to pay attention to the thing being measured in policy and resourcing decisions. Including something in a wellbeing framework can also be a tool for a population to put pressure on a government to direct resources to or develop policies to support it.

The best way to address the lack of attention paid to existential risk is to treat resilience to risk as a resource, and so add a new Capital to the list, which might be called, say, *Resilience*. To construct this Capital, we would identify the most important existential and catastrophic risks, determine the resources needed for

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[24] For an argument that additional monetary resources would not in fact be helpful in strengthening the Biological Weapons Convention, see (Thorstad 2023).

resilience against each risk, and find Indicators—specific measures—for each of those resources. (What those risks, resources, and Indicators are is beyond the scope of this essay.) This is an improvement we can make to wellbeing frameworks now that will better promote the wellbeing of future generations.

In Section 6 I argued that the revision of wellbeing frameworks should be based on a principled mechanism, and that this is enabled by use of the Reflective Value account. It might seem that the suggestion of adding a Capital of Resilience outside of that revision mechanism is inconsistent. However, that revision mechanism is for a wellbeing framework's set of Domains, not its Capitals. The Domains and the Indicators they include are a range of things (resources, capabilities, means to wellbeing, and constituents of wellbeing) that are specific in nature and much more subject to variation than the Capitals. For example, one Indicator in the LSF is participation in the arts, and it's possible a future generation in New Zealand might not value participation in the arts very highly as an aspect of wellbeing; and it includes household expenditure as a measure of wellbeing, and future generations might come to value living simply and cheaply. In contrast, the Capitals are very broadly described resources that are necessary for a population to achieve wellbeing however we conceive it. For example, the Capital of Natural Environment is intended to include "all aspects of the natural environment needed to support life and human activity" (Te Tai Ōhanga/The New Zealand Treasury). Regardless of what things a population values as important for its wellbeing (far-fetched hypotheticals aside), it will need those aspects of the natural environment to achieve them. Similarly, regardless of what a population values as important for its wellbeing, it will need resilience to existential and catastrophic risks. So, while the mechanism for principled revision based on the population's wellbeing values is important for the Domains, we don't need to treat the Capitals in the same way.

§8 Is Wales's wellbeing framework designed well for future generations?

Wales's wellbeing framework was established under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015), along with the office of Future Generations Commissioner for Wales and requirements on public bodies to take future wellbeing into account in policies and planning. It might seem, then, that Wales's wellbeing framework would have features that could usefully be adopted by other wellbeing frameworks so that they work better for future generations. However, the office of Future Generations Commissioner and the requirements on public bodies, while worthwhile additions to the public policy system in Wales, are not part of the wellbeing framework itself. Wales's wellbeing framework is in fact very similar to the wellbeing frameworks of other countries and is designed in a way that doesn't serve future generations better than other wellbeing frameworks do.

Firstly, the Welsh framework purports to further the wellbeing of future generations by measuring what people currently want future generations to have: the consultation process used in creating the framework's list of Domains asked people what kind of Wales they wanted to leave for their children and grandchildren (Cynnal Cymru 2015). It's problematic to try to promote future generations' wellbeing by trying to ensure that they have what we value as good for ourselves now. For example, if a wellbeing framework had been created on that basis in Australia in the 19th century, it might promote Christianity, being part of a strong British Empire, and strict gender roles, which Australians tend not to value highly for their wellbeing now. This problem is mitigated by the relatively short timeframe of the Welsh framework, which purports to look forward just two generations. However, that the timeframe for the wellbeing framework is only two generations also weakens it as a mechanism for promoting future generations' wellbeing.

Secondly, the Domains and Indicators the Welsh framework includes are extremely similar to those in wellbeing frameworks that *don't* purport to focus on future generations. It could be that there's no practical difference between a wellbeing framework that promotes current wellbeing and one that promotes future generations' wellbeing, but this seems unlikely.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the wellbeing framework doesn't include a set of Capitals, so it doesn't aim to measure the resources future generations will need in order to achieve wellbeing. This omission is a grave defect in a framework that purports to promote the wellbeing of future generations.

The Welsh wellbeing framework does include "A Resilient Wales" as a Domain in its wellbeing framework, and while resilience here is included as a Domain, rather than as a Capital as I argue for above, this might seem to be a similar approach. (Recall that in Section 7 I argue that wellbeing frameworks should include a Capital that measures the resources future generations will need to be resilient to catastrophic and existential risks.) However, "resilience" here refers just to resilience to risks from the state of the environment; the aim of this Domain is for Wales to be "A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change (for example climate change)" (Llywodraeth Cymru Welsh Government 2024). As important as it is, environmental risk is only one form of catastrophic and existential risk.

Further, it's not clear that the Indicators Wales's wellbeing framework has selected to be measures of environmental resilience are well chosen. They include Innovative Businesses, People Satisfied With Where They Live, Participation In Sporting Activities, Looking After Our Cultural Heritage, and Active Global Citizenship**.** There is not always a clear or strong link between these Indicators and environmental resilience; for example, Active Global Citizenship measures the percentage of people who have donated or raised money, campaigned, volunteered, or changed what they buy, to help with poverty, human rights, war, refugees, or climate change. It isn't clear that the percentage of Welsh people who engage in these activities correlates with Wales's resilience to environmental risks. With Indicators such as Participation in Sporting Activities, the connection is even less clear.

Each Indicator for A Resilient Wales is also an Indicator for several other Domains. For example, as well as being an Indicator for A Resilient Wales, Active Global Citizenship is an Indicator for the following Domains: A Prosperous Wales, A Healthier Wales, A More Equal Wales, A Wales Of Cohesive Communities, A Wales Of Vibrant Culture And Thriving Welsh Language, and A Globally Responsible Wales. The impression you get is very much of a framework designed by finding what Indicators can be drawn from existing data sources, creating a set of Domains, and then labelling each of the Indicators with as many as possible of the Domains that it might relate to, however loosely; rather than of a framework designed by creating a set of Domains and then finding the best Indicators to measure each Domain. The latter would be the way to ensure that a wellbeing framework includes just the best measures for environmental resilience.

Thus, the Welsh wellbeing framework doesn't include any features that enable it to function better for future generations than most other wellbeing frameworks, and functions worse for future generations than some other wellbeing frameworks in some respects.

§9 Conclusion

I've looked at how wellbeing frameworks should be designed so they will better serve future generations. The question has two interpretations. Firstly, the question can ask how wellbeing frameworks should be designed so they better serve future generations when they inherit them. Secondly, the question can ask how wellbeing frameworks should be designed so they influence policy decisions now to better promote the wellbeing of future generations.

I identified two problems future generations will face with wellbeing frameworks if they inherit them in their present form. One of those problems is that future generations will inherit wellbeing frameworks that have no clear rationale for the set of Domains of wellbeing they include, and which as a result will include as Domains just those things that seemed obviously important to those of an earlier generation who designed the framework. The other, related problem is that future generations will inherit wellbeing frameworks with no principled mechanism for revision. The lack of such a mechanism means that future generations might inherit wellbeing frameworks with sets of Domains they might disagree with for good reason and have no readily available way to make principled changes to them.

The solutions to these problems are related. The lack of a rationale for a wellbeing framework's set of Domains is solved by having an account of wellbeing. We don't know which account of wellbeing simpliciter is correct, but we can leave that aside and find the account of wellbeing that works best for wellbeing frameworks. That account, I've argued, is the Reflective Value account, according to which you have wellbeing when you have what you value as good for yourself on informed reflection. The Reflective Value account provides a rationale for what a wellbeing framework includes that works well for future generations, as well as current ones. And the Reflective Value account also provides a basis for a principled mechanism for revising wellbeing frameworks: the Domains of wellbeing included can change as what people value as good for themselves changes.

I also identified two changes that can be made to wellbeing frameworks so that they influence policy decisions now to better promote the wellbeing of future generations. The first of these changes is to include a set of Capitals, which most wellbeing frameworks lack. This means we will have measures of the resources future generations will need in order to achieve wellbeing. The second of these changes is for wellbeing frameworks to include in their Capitals a Capital of Resilience, comprised of Indicators of those things that will help future generations be resilient to existential and catastrophic risks.[25]

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