Conceptualizing and Enhancing Human Flourishing: A Dialogue Between Economic, Psychological, Philosophical, and Theological Approaches

Wilco de Vries
Theological University Utrecht

Lans Bovenberg
Tilburg University

Johan Graafland
Tilburg University

Abstract. To help public policy enhance human flourishing at the societal level, this article seeks to improve interdisciplinary understanding of human flourishing. Four disciplinary approaches are discussed: first, the economic revealed-preference approach to welfare; second, the psychological approach to subjective well-being; third, the philosophical Aristotelian tradition of eudaimonia; and finally, the theological Augustinian tradition of blessedness. We explore how interdisciplinary collaboration on human flourishing can alleviate the limitations of each of the four approaches. We also discuss how interdisciplinary collaboration in constructing multidimensional measures of human flourishing can support cooperative decision-making when the effects of policy instruments on the various dimensions of human flourishing are uncertain and when citizens assign different weights to these dimensions.

Keywords: happiness, welfare, eudaimonia, well-being, flourishing, blessedness

1. Introduction

In recent decades, research on human flourishing, well-being, and happiness has increased exponentially (Diener et al. 2009; Huppert and So 2013; Seligman 2011). Influenced by publications such as the report of the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress (Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi 2009), statistics offices in multiple countries have developed multi-dimensional measures to assess well-being and "broad welfare" (Allin 2021; CBS 2018). At the same time, the precise definitions of concepts such as human flourishing, welfare, well-being, and happiness remain contested, and debates persist

about how best to measure and employ them in actual decision-making (Hone et al. 2014; Lee et al. 2021). As early as 2001, Ryan and Deci distinguished between research on hedonic well-being, which focuses on the subjective experiences of pleasure and life satisfaction, and research on eudaimonic well-being, which centers on meaning, self-realization, and the full functioning of an individual (Ryan and Deci 2001). Despite efforts to synthesize these different approaches (Ryff et al. 2021; Lee et al. 2021), a unified framework has yet to emerge.

This article aims to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration among economics, psychology, philosophy, and theology to develop measures of human flourishing that support public policies intended to enhance it. To that end, section two presents four influential interpretations of human flourishing, namely (1) the neo-classical welfare approach of revealed preference in economics, initiated by Pareto and formalized by Samuelson; (2) the method of measuring subjective well-being, as developed in psychology and behavioral economics; (3) eudaimonism (*eudaimonia*/happiness) as presented by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*; and (4) blessedness (*beatitudo*/happiness) as developed by Augustine. In describing these approaches, we pay attention to recent research in each tradition that has helped narrow the gap between the social sciences and the humanities by incorporating insights from philosophy and theology into empirical measures used by the social sciences. Section three discusses how these four approaches to human flourishing can collaborate to develop multidimensional measures of human flourishing. We show that the weaknesses of each of the four approaches can be addressed by the other three. Section four explores how multidimensional measures of human flourishing can aid collaborative decision-making to enhance societal well-being amid uncertainties about policy effects and differing views on human flourishing.

2. Defining human flourishing: four approaches

The economic approach of revealed preference

The dominant paradigm in 20th-century economics, and still important today, is the neoclassical method of revealed preference, introduced by Alfredo Pareto (1906) and later formalized by Paul Samuelson (1938; 1948). Influenced by behaviorism, economists in this neo-classical tradition study humans as animals; they limit their analysis of human behavior to external behavior, since the internal motivations of humans (and animals) cannot be directly observed. Consequently, they focus not on people's internal motivations but on what decision-makers actually choose (Binmore 1994), claiming that individuals' preferences can be inferred from their observable decisions. For example, if someone consistently chooses an apple over a pear under identical conditions, it implies a preference for apples on the part of the decision maker in those circumstances. Samuelson showed that a complete and transitive preference ranking can be constructed as long as individuals can order options as preferable,

inferior, or indifferent ("complete"). Moreover, if someone prefers A to B and B to C, that person should also prefer A to C ("transitive"). If these basic rationality requirements of transitivity, stability, consistency, and completeness are met, choices can be interpreted as if people maximize an ordinal welfare function.[1]

Despite its empirical focus, the revealed-preference approach contains implicit normative assumptions. People are assumed to make consistent decisions to maximize welfare in well-functioning markets, thereby achieving their highest possible welfare given their preferences. On a macroeconomic level, welfare is often measured in purely material terms by income: specifically, the market value of sold production factors reflected in national income (Weitzman 1976; 2003). So, while this method is rooted in empirical observation (inferring preferences from choices on markets), it cannot avoid a particular concept of human flourishing when it employs welfare as a normative criterion for decision-making.

Economists increasingly acknowledge the limitations of income per capita as a measure of what human beings value in life. Stiglitz et al. (2009) not only criticized the use of income per capita to measure welfare but also proposed extending measures of well-being to other aspects of welfare beyond material welfare, so-called broad welfare. Operationalizing broad welfare leads to multidimensional measures in which income, as a measure of material welfare, is complemented by other dimensions of well-being or quality of life, such as life satisfaction, housing, jobs, community, education, civic engagement, environment, health, work-life balance, and safety (Mizobuchi 2014).[2] Broad welfare also considers that current welfare may come at the expense of future generations or people in other parts of the world.

The psychological approach of subjective well-being

Psychologists and behavioral economists such as Daniel Kahneman have demonstrated that various cognitive biases—such as framing, confirmation bias, and loss aversion—violate the rationality assumptions of the revealed preference tradition (Kahneman, Diener, and Schwarz 1999; Thaler 2015; Kahneman 2011). Since human rationality is bounded, choices and preferences may not align (Kahneman and Krueger 2006). Furthermore, people may not exhibit stable, context-independent, and internally consistent preferences (Sugden 2018). As a result, some behavioral economists argue that measuring subjective well-being (SWB) offers a more accurate insight into what people value than examining their revealed preferences. SWB measures reflective life assessments and positive and negative emotional responses to daily life (Diener et al. 2018). Common measures of life evaluation include life satisfaction

[1] For applications of this approach to choices outside the classical economic domain, see Becker (1976).
[2] For operationalizations of the recommendations by Stiglitz et al. (2009), see <stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?DataSetCode=BLI> and <www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/dossier/dossier-brede-welvaart-en-de-sustainable-development-goals/monitor-brede-welvaart-sustainable-development-goals-2022/toelichting/definities>.

surveys and the Cantril ladder, which asks respondents to rate their life on a scale from 0 (worst possible life) to 10 (best possible life). In this approach, human flourishing is defined in terms of experiences of pleasure, the absence of pain, and satisfaction with (aspects of) one's life. This approach is reminiscent of classical utilitarian economists (such as Bentham 1789). It derives optimal choices from cardinal utility as an independent psychological measure of welfare. The neoclassical tradition, in contrast, derives ordinal welfare from observed choices.

More recently, researchers have complemented SWB with other elements of well-being.[3] Seligman's (2011; 2018) well-known PERMA-model integrates elements of SWB with eudaimonic elements of well-being. Seligman identifies five core dimensions of well-being: positive emotion, engagement, relations, meaning, and achievements. In cooperation with other researchers, Ryff developed a eudaimonic scale which includes autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance (Ryff and Keyes 1995; Ryff and Singer 2008). As the name suggests, researchers who work with eudaimonic measures draw inspiration from the Aristotelian concept of happiness (*eudaimonia*), which we introduce in the next section.

The philosophical approach of Aristotle: eudaimonia

Philosophers from antiquity employed the term *eudaimonia* in discoursing about human flourishing.[4] As Julia Annas (1993) pointed out, there is a formal and substantive side to the ancient philosophical claim that everyone desires *eudaimonia*. Formally speaking, every rational human action has a reason, a goal, an end (in Greek: *telos*). If one consistently asks about the reasons behind the choices (e.g., why do you work? To earn a living and find some meaning in life. What do you think is the meaning of life? etc.), one ends up with a final end: the ultimate good for which people do all other things (Aristotle 2011, 1094a5–25). Philosophers from antiquity believed that the final end guides how to value things and what to choose since it specifies what it means to flourish: "When we know the final end, we have found a way of life, a chart of all the duties, and to which everything must be referred" (Cicero 1931, 5.6.16). However, there was significant disagreement on the nature of *eudaimonia* since people differed in their metaphysics; that is, they had different interpretations of the (highest) good, human nature, and what makes us flourish.

In this section and the next, we discuss two thinkers who profoundly influenced Western philosophy and theology in their thinking on *eudaimonia* and *beatitudo*: Aristotle

[3] For an excellent overview of the historical development of well-being research, see McBride (2025).

[4] Ancient Greek also had the word *makarios* to speak about happiness or blessedness. However, taking Aristotle as an example, most commentators agree that Aristotle uses *eudaimonia* and *makarios* as synonyms. Hence, our choice in the main text for *eudaimonia*, the regular word scholars use to speak about Aristotle's account of human flourishing, or any other ancient philosophical account of human flourishing.

and Augustine. Due to the scope of this article, our descriptions must be brief and omit debates about certain aspects of Aristotle's and Augustine's accounts of *eudaimonia* and *beatitudo*. According to Aristotle (2011, 1097b22–98a20), *eudaimonia* results from rational activity in accordance with virtue. The backdrop of this view is that Aristotle believes that reason makes people distinctive: "We posit the work of a human being as a certain life, and this is an activity of soul and actions accompanied by reason" (1098a13–14). So, for Aristotle, if people want to flourish, they need to actualize the potentialities in their nature that make them human. Desires for money, profit, victories, status, and bodily pleasures are good but need to be restrained (1148a25–30). The virtues of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*), wisdom (*sophia*), and contemplation (*theōria*) are of a higher order since one needs an understanding and appreciation of reality and practical wisdom to know what to value and how to choose. Yet other goods like friendship, wealth, and beauty are important to act virtuously and seem, for Aristotle, to be an integral part of *eudaimonia* (1099a28–b5, 1153b15–20; Symons and Vanderweele 2024).

The Aristotelian concept of well-being underpins the capability approach developed by Sen (1984) and Nussbaum (2011). This approach defines well-being in terms of objective human capacities to do and become certain things, like being well-nourished, developing loving relationships, and participating in politics that affect one's life. Nussbaum has developed a list of ten central human capabilities: Life; Bodily Health; Bodily Integrity; Senses, Imagination, and Thought; Emotions; Practical Reason; Affiliation [social relationships]; [Relations to] Other Species; Play; Control over One's Environment (Nussbaum 2011, 33–4).

Nussbaum's list does not capture several important subjective, individual aspects of well-being emphasized in the economist and psychologist account, as it omits economic outcomes and SWB. Nussbaum is particularly antagonistic to 'utilitarian' concerns with trade-offs. Addressing this shortcoming in Nussbaum's list, the so-called human development index (HDI) combines economic indicators with other indicators inspired by Aristotelian philosophy. The HDI captures three essential components of human development: a long and healthy life, measured by life expectancy; access to knowledge (education); and a decent standard of living (Nikolaev 2014). By drawing on Sen's (1984) capability approach, the HDI seeks to measure people's capacity to exercise their freedom in pursuit of a better life.

The theological approach of Augustine: blessedness

In Augustine's metaphysics, all humans are created by God and find blessedness through loving God above all and their neighbors as themselves (O'Donovan 1980; de Vries 2023). According to Augustine, individuals cannot attain this blessedness by mere willpower since moral evil is too deeply rooted in human nature. Each individual needs divine grace to do good and become blessed. Given the reality of sin and death, Augustine distinguishes between happiness in hope (*spes*) and happiness in reality (*res*; Augustine 2013, 19.4). In this life,

people can be blessed or happy in hope when they follow God's ways (Matthew 5:1–12 and Psalm 119; Augustine 2003, 118.*s.*1-2). This happiness is in hope since those who follow God's ways are still tempted by evil, they sin, suffer pain, and eventually die (Augustine 2013, 19.5–10). Only in the life to come will happiness be perfect since temptation, sin, pain, and death will be absent, and the love of God and neighbor will reign supreme (22.30).

To be happy in hope, we must order our desires and loves rightly. For example, while it is rational to desire work and earn an income, Augustine believes our love for these things becomes disordered when money becomes the ultimate goal of our lives rather than merely an instrument for loving God and our neighbors as ourselves. Disordered love leads to inner and outer disunity (Ryan 2021, 64). Our desire for more money never finds satisfaction (inner disunity) and may lead us to withhold money from those who need it (outer disunity). Only if we order our desires in accordance with our ultimate *telos*—loving God and neighbor—can we become whole and find rest. Another way of putting the matter is that Augustine draws a distinction between penultimate and ultimate ends. We must relate, or nest, penultimate ends within ultimate ends.[5] For example, in *The City of God* 19.13, where Augustine speaks about various forms of peace, he clarifies that the desire for self-preservation should be nested within obedience to God, a person's personal peace to the peace of a household, which must be nested within the peace of the city, which must be ordered to the peace of the heavenly city. Mutuality and hierarchy are present in these different forms of peace. Whereas loving God is more important than self-preservation, God cares for those who give up their lives in martyrdom through (the promise of) the resurrection of the dead. Ultimately, there is no conflict of interest between God and humanity since loving God is necessarily good for us. Different yet related in hierarchy and mutuality, citizens should contribute to the peace of a community, while the state should be just towards citizens and their needs.

Although little work has been done on operationalizing Augustine's account of blessedness, there are recent developments that fit this approach well. One example is the Hope Project, in which theologians and social scientists developed multidimensional measures of hope and purpose.[6] Hope is defined as a desire for improvement that we are willing to act toward, but are never entirely certain we can achieve. The index comprises seven dimensions of hope: cognitive, emotional, virtue, social connections, economic expectations, institutional trust, and spirituality (ILSE/EHERO 2019).

[5] Augustine's own terminology is the famous distinction between *utor–fruor*, use–enjoyment. This distinction is prone to be misunderstood in an age where utilitarianism is influential, which is why we translate it here as penultimate and ultimate ends. For a detailed interpretation of the *utor–fruor* distinction, see De Vries (2023, 82–143.)

[6] <www.thehopeproject.nl/en/research/>.

3. Interdisciplinary collaboration

The Complementarity of the Four Approaches

Each of the four approaches to understanding human flourishing discussed above has strengths and weaknesses. The weakness of one approach often finds a mirror image in the strength of another. This section explores how the weaknesses of each approach are mirrored in the strengths of the others.

Regarding the weaknesses of the revealed-preference approach, Sen has pointed out that the criterion of consistency is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for rationality, since persons who are not all-knowing can choose what is not good for them (Sen 1987). An advantage of the SWB approach over the revealed-preference approach is that it does not require any assumptions about the consistency of choices. Furthermore, the revealed-preference approach lacks a basis for rejecting immoral preferences (Beauchamp 1982). For instance, someone who is solely driven by a desire for pleasure may violate another person's basic rights while offering financial compensation that the harmed person cannot refuse due to their desperate circumstances (Graafland 2022). Also, by limiting itself to the choices individuals have made, this approach overlooks the underlying intentions or motivations behind a person's actions (Graafland 2007), which may be crucial for human flourishing (see MacIntyre 1981, 207–10). By rejecting immoral preferences as a basis for human flourishing and by including people's intentions in their analysis of happiness, Aristotle's ethical approach and Augustine's theological approach address these weaknesses of the revealed-preference approach.

A weakness of SWB is that individual responses may be biased by social and moral pressure to report high levels of happiness. Especially in wealthy, meritocratic societies, reporting that one is not happy may be perceived as a moral failing. The revealed preference method overcomes this disadvantage of the SWB approach by relying on observable behavior, which is less susceptible to socially desirable responses. Another weakness of the SWB approach is that it presumes that human flourishing can be measured in terms of pleasure, the absence of pain, and subjective satisfaction with one's life. This presumption is not self-evident, as ancient philosophical debates between Epicureanism and Stoicism already illustrate (Cicero 1931). The danger in SWB is that the multi-faceted nature of human flourishing is reduced to subjective feelings of happiness and of life satisfaction.[7] Aristotle's *eudaimonia* and Augustine's *blessedness* overcome this disadvantage of SWB by incorporating

[7] It should be noted, however, that subjective well-being, measured through life satisfaction, has been found to correlate with items important to Aristotle and Augustine, such as virtues and religiosity, as well as moving in tandem with economic performance (Domínguez and López-Noval 2021; Garssen et al. 2021; Yaden et al. 2022; Graafland 2023a; 2023b). This suggests that this disadvantage of the SWB approach is not as important as one might think based on the adjective "subjective."

a broader range of factors that contribute to a flourishing life. For example, the notion of contemplating truth and acting truthfully is integral to eudaimonia, while such aspects are usually absent in measures of SWB (compare Case and VanderWeele 2024). A rich understanding of true flourishing is vital for avoiding self-deception—thinking one is happy when one is not—and for developing practical wisdom, a central feature of the *eudaimonic* life. A strength of Aristotle's and Augustine's approaches, and a weakness of SWB, is that it is often unclear to what timeframe, social circle, or goods questions about SWB refer. Over time, individuals might adapt to new situations, making any true improvements or declines in their circumstances only temporarily visible in their SWB. This makes it challenging to reliably compare SWB ratings over time (Benjamin et al. 2024). In contrast, Aristotle's and Augustine's concepts of human flourishing encompass the entire span of a person's life, integrating past, present, and future. In Aristotle's view, a fulfilled life requires acting in accordance with one's *telos*, which takes a lifetime (Aristotle 2011, 1098a18–19).

A weakness of Aristotle's and Augustine's perspectives on human flourishing is that, in liberal, pluralistic societies, people hold divergent views on what constitutes a flourishing life. While, for example, Augustine's interpretation of blessedness could be advanced in the church, civil society, and political debate, this perspective is only one among many and may conflict with the autonomy of individuals to choose their own conceptions of well-being. People may find it an infringement on their individual freedom when their well-being is evaluated on how Aristotle or Augustine understands human flourishing. In liberal, pluralistic societies, respect for individual autonomy in defining human flourishing is an advantage of the revealed-preference and SWB approaches over the frameworks developed by Aristotle and Augustine. Observing what people choose and deem to contribute to their own well-being respects the sovereignty of decision-makers and avoids potential conflicts of interest when people evaluate the welfare of others. Similarly, relying on people's own judgments about well-being avoids a paternalistic stance in which researchers provide criteria to respondents about what constitutes a 'flourishing life.'

Another significant limitation of Aristotle's and Augustine's approaches is the difficulty of assessing human flourishing according to their criteria. While one could argue that happiness should be evaluated based on the virtues Aristotle describes, successfully operationalizing these virtues so that they can be measured empirically presents significant challenges. For instance, how should one measure the extent to which an individual embodies justice or exercises practical wisdom (VanderWeele 2022, 174)? Many economists favor the revealed preference method because it relies on observable behavior, which is objectively measurable. A similar strength holds for the SWB approach, as the SWB of people can be measured.

Finally, a disadvantage of Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia, overcome by Augustine's concept of blessedness, is that Augustine accounts more for humans' bounded rationality and for human dependence on others. For Aristotle, a free, civilized person is, in principle, able

to attain *eudaimonia*. Moreover, while Aristotle argues that friendship is indispensable for the virtuous life, his account of the virtuous, magnanimous man comes close to the later-developed Stoic view of self-sufficiency (Smith 2020; Herdt 2008). In contrast, Augustine believes that while reason and philosophy can bring true insights, we are also prone to error and bound by desires that harm genuine flourishing. We need God's help and the help of others to become truly free. For this reason, Augustine emphasizes in his account of human flourishing the value of humility and gratitude for what one has received from God and others (Smith 2020). It is significant that empirical research on well-being has found that gratitude is a key determinant of well-being (Emmons and McCullough 2003; Wood et al. 2010).

Integration of four approaches

Having described the complementarity of the four perspectives' strengths and limitations, this section offers suggestions for further integrating them. Relating these perspectives to the concept of the hermeneutical circle is a starting point for integration. The hermeneutical circle entails that understanding is a circular process in which we understand the whole from the parts and the parts from the whole. In this context, the whole is human flourishing; the parts are the different methods and approaches to understanding and measuring it.

An illustrative example of how the various views on human flourishing can be integrated is the OECD "Better Life Index" (Durand 2015; Balestra et al. 2018). Drawing upon recommendations made by Stiglitz et al. (2009), the OECD constructed an index which combines an economic measure of human flourishing (income per capita) with an psychological measure (life satisfaction) and nine other dimensions of well-being or quality of life: housing, jobs, community, education, civic engagement, environment, health, work–life balance, and safety (Mizobuchi 2014).[8] These other dimensions include several aspects informed by Sen's capability approach that are related to the eudaimonic concept of human flourishing (e.g., community, education, health). Thus, the OECD Better Life Index presents a holistic approach to measuring well-being across different countries, combining both economic, psychological, and philosophical dimensions of human flourishing.

Still, the OECD Better Life Index lacks other important dimensions from the SWB, Aristotelian, and Augustine traditions. These include, for example, dimensions from Seligman's PERMA-model (2011; 2018)—in particular the dimension of meaning[9]—and Ryff's eudaemonic scale (Ryff and Keyes 1995; Ryff and Singer 2008)—particularly autonomy,

[8] See <stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?DataSetCode=BLI> for a detailed description of the underlying indicators of the Better Life Index.

[9] The other dimensions of the PERMA model (positive emotion, engagement, relations and achievements) may be assumed to relate to the dimensions of life satisfaction, civic engagement, community and income, jobs and housing in the OECD Better Life Index, respectively.

personal growth, again meaning (purpose in life), and self-acceptance.[10] The Hope Project's measure of hope could also be added. Inclusion of hope and purpose would also give official recognition to the steady growth of depression and anxiety among young people, especially in the Western world.

More generally, the approaches discussed so far are rooted in Western philosophy and theology. While these traditions have been highly influential in positive psychology and well-being economics, they disregard accounts from other non-Western traditions, including Buddhist notions of suffering (Dahlsgard et al. 2005; Ricard 2014; Shakya 2019; Segall and Kristeller 2023; Davey 2024; Harvey 2022), Hinduist higher states of pure consciousness, which require managing one's desires and renouncing one's ego (Sugirtharajah 2022; Singh et al. 2023), and Islamic conceptions of spiritual and moral success (Joshanloo 2013; Nasr 2014; Dastmalchian 2022; Saritoprak and Abu-Raiya 2023; Syed and Kazi 2024). Interestingly, although these non-Western aspects of human flourishing seem to differ strongly from Western dimensions of human flourishing, research has shown that they can correlate in important ways. For example, Singh et al. (2014) report that a Hinduist measure of well-being (*sat-cit-ānanda*), comprising consciousness, inner strength, truthfulness, and bliss contributes to life satisfaction.

4. Collective decision making

It is one thing to acknowledge the various dimensions of human flourishing; it is another to determine which public policies to adopt in a complex world that faces, first, uncertainty about the impacts of policy instruments on these dimensions and, second, trade-offs among various goals and interests. This section discusses these two complications for designing public policies aimed at enhancing human flourishing.

Uncertainty about the impact of policy instruments on dimensions of human flourishing

Public efforts to improve human flourishing often face uncertainty, or even a complete lack of information, about the impact of specific policy instruments on the various dimensions of human flourishing. For example, if policymakers have information on the effects of policy instruments on only three dimensions of human flourishing and know nothing else about the effects of these policy instruments on other dimensions, the most rational course of action may be to base the decision that must be taken on only those three dimensions for which information is available (Sen 1981). The extent to which disregarding the effects of policies on other dimensions of human flourishing can lead to a satisfactory analysis depends on

[10] The other dimensions of Ryff's scale (environmental mastery, positive relations with others) may be assumed to be crudely related to the dimensions of environment and community in the OECD Better Life Index, respectively.

several considerations. For example, the impacts of particular policy instruments on some dimensions of welfare may be neglected if those impacts are expected to be small. However, when information is lacking, it will be difficult to judge whether the impact is indeed small.

The functioning of the Management Outbreak Team (MOT) during the COVID-19 crisis in the Netherlands from 2020-2022 illustrates this last point. At the beginning of the crisis, the MOT consisted primarily of epidemiologists and virologists. The most important and readily available information seemed to be the hospitals' ability to manage the crisis. Daily, the NOS—the Dutch Public Broadcasting Company—reported how many hospital beds were in use. Later, the MOT expanded to include economists, psychologists, and ethicists because the epidemic affected not only physical health but also economic and mental health. Lockdown, intended to keep the death toll as low as possible, had serious impacts on other dimensions of human flourishing, especially the mental health of adolescents. Society faced a trade-off between those who benefited from the lockdowns (generally, older and more vulnerable people) and those who did not (generally, younger people). The MOT needed to consider how policy instruments affected not only the number of infections but also other dimensions beyond physical health. The COVID-19 crisis illustrates why a thick understanding of human flourishing is important, as it prevents politicians from focusing solely on the impacts on more easily measurable aspects of human flourishing.

Another solution to address gaps in information about the effects of specific policy instruments on human flourishing is to analyze the extent to which the dimensions for which information is available are correlated with dimensions for which information is lacking. Sen, for example, developed a concise index of human development that includes only three dimensions of human flourishing (income per capita, life expectancy, and education) for which much more information is available than for other dimensions. Based on a sample of 35 OECD members, Brazil, Russia, and South Africa for the years 2011-2017, Graafland and Verbruggen (2022) showed that these three dimensions of HDI substantially correlate with other dimensions of human flourishing as measured in the OECD Better Life Index (BLI), as can be seen in Table 1.

Interpersonal differences in valuation in pluriform societies

An additional complication in enhancing human flourishing is that both the value weights and views on policy impacts may diverge among citizens in liberal, pluralistic societies. This point can be illustrated by the OECD Better Life Index. The OECD provides an interactive tool that allows users to see how countries perform on overall human flourishing, depending on the importance users attach to the 11 dimensions of well-being in the OECD Better Life Index. When evaluating a set of policies (assuming that information of policy effects on the 11 dimensions is available), the ranking of the policies will depend on the weights that are

	Housing	*Jobs*	*Community*	*Environment*	*Civic engagement*	*Life satisfaction*	*Safety*	*Work life balance*
Income	0.27***	0.47***	0.03	0.18**	0.07	0.17**	0.01***	0.07
Education	0.18***	0.26***	0.38***	0.42***	0.08	0.15**	0.64***	0.44***
Life expectancy	0.31***	0.13***	0.37***	0.19**	0.35***	0.42***	0.24***	0.08
R^2	0.35	0.46	0.37	0.37	0.08	0.45	0.50	0.23

[a] * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001.

Table 1. Results of regression analysis between HDI and BLI[a]

given to each of these dimensions. Yet, in a democratic, pluralistic society, different citizens may attach different weights to the 11 dimensions.

However, even if weights diverge across citizens, a relatively uniform ranking of policies may result if one policy clearly outperforms others on important dimensions. An adjacent example illustrates this point. Graafland and Eijffinger (2004) constructed an index of corporate social responsibility (CSR) comprising more than 40 value dimensions. They used weights based on the preferences of companies and NGOs for these CSR dimensions. Although the weights differed between companies and NGOs, the CSR rankings of companies and NGOs were very similar, regardless of whether company or NGO weights were used. Likewise, despite differences in weights, political parties in democratic and pluralistic societies may still agree on a policy instrument if it outperforms others on important dimensions of human flourishing.

If diversity in value weights leads to different evaluations of policy instruments and a different order of preferred policies, policymakers could overcome these interpersonal differences through a mutually beneficial exchange of interests. As representatives of citizens, politicians can negotiate policy packages that benefit overall human flourishing as perceived by all citizens, even though their values (and hence the weights they assign to the dimensions of human flourishing) differ. Effective negotiations that reconcile collective interests with individual interests meet two conditions. First, once all parties have negotiated a policy package, they should support the collective outcome and consider not only their own views on the weights of the various dimensions of human flourishing, but also those of others. Second, intragroup transfers should ensure that all parties benefit from the policy package.

For negotiations to be successful, citizens must share a robust, forbearing belief that, overall, the presence of fellow citizens in their lives is a good thing, even when they sometimes unintentionally harm them. Mutual trust and regard allow liberal societies to reconcile individual freedom with the self-constraint and commitment required for cooperation. Here, Aristotle's and Augustine's views on human flourishing reenter the debate about human flourishing in liberal, pluriform societies. To flourish, we must trust each other, fostering hope that conflicts of interest can be resolved through cooperation. Such trust and hope benefit everyone, as they encourage each person to give up goods so that other citizens can flourish as well. The degree of overlap between the social virtues of trust, hope, and love and the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love remains a subject of debate. Engaging in this debate enables society and science to develop a more comprehensive understanding and measurement of human flourishing. This, in turn, can guide public policies designed to promote well-being for everyone. In light of the ecological, economic, and (mental) health challenges that beset our pluriform societies, a robust understanding of human flourishing, in conjunction with policies aimed at enhancing it, is essential.

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