

# The Bellagio Initiative

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the Pursuit of Human Wellbeing

## Commissioned Paper

### Values and Human Wellbeing

Tim Kasser  
Knox College, Galesburg, Illinois

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# Values and human wellbeing

Tim Kasser, Knox College, Galesburg, Illinois

Substantial empirical and theoretical work demonstrates that to the extent individuals prioritise values and goals for wealth, status, and image, they report lower levels of personal wellbeing and engage in social and ecological behaviours that can reduce other people's wellbeing. This essay reviews research and theory on how the prioritisation of money, image, and status is associated with wellbeing, describes a basic strategy for reducing the negative influences of these values, and sketches out ways that philanthropic and international development organisations might use this approach in their efforts.

## Extrinsic, self-enhancement values

Values and goals represent people's beliefs about what is important for an optimal life and world for themselves and others. Although it may seem that there are thousands of kinds of values and goals which people might prioritise, cross-cultural research documents that around a dozen basic types of values and goals are common across humans. In these studies, people are presented with a variety of different aims they might value or goals they might have, and then rate how important these aims are to them. Using a variety of statistical techniques, researchers have found that certain values and goals consistently cluster together across nations.

One such cluster includes aims for money, possessions, status, and image. The Israeli researcher Shalom Schwartz (1992, 2006) has called these *self-enhancement* values, focused as they on standing out from others through the acquisition of money, status, and the like. The first type of self-enhancement value, 'power', involves the desire to obtain resources and wealth, whereas the second type, 'achievement', involves the desire to seem successful by the definitions of one's society. Cross-cultural research my colleagues and I have conducted (e.g. Grouzet *et al.* 2005) similarly yields a materialistic or *extrinsic* cluster of three goal types: 'financial success', or the desire for money and possessions; 'image', or the desire to have an appealing appearance; and 'status', or the desire to be popular and admired by others.

These extrinsic, self-enhancing (E/SE) values and goals, are typically understood as representing one fundamental component of the human motivational system. Said differently, all individuals seem to hold E/SE values to some extent; as such these aims can come to the fore in any person and, at least temporarily, help determine one's behaviours and attitudes. E/SE values can also be strengthened by particular life experiences such that some people come to place a relatively high dispositional priority on these aims.

Because people's values influence people's attitudes and behaviours, the extent to which people dispositionally prioritise E/SE values has been shown to bear consistent associations with other aspects of their lives. For example, the literature documents that people report lower wellbeing when they view E/SE values as relatively important. What's more, the extent to which people endorse E/SE values or have these values momentarily activated in their minds also influences their social and ecological attitudes and behaviours, which, in turn, can influence the wellbeing of others who are affected by those attitudes and behaviours. The next three sub-sections provide brief overviews of this research literature.

Before turning to that literature, three important limitations should be noted. First, wellbeing is multiply determined by numerous factors, and I do not mean to suggest that E/SE values are the sole, or even most important, determinant of such outcomes. Second, most (but not all) of the studies have been conducted in relatively economically developed nations, so further research is needed to ensure that the dynamics described here generalise well to other social contexts. Third, many (but not all) of the studies have correlational designs, given the difficulties of conducting externally valid and ethical experiments on values; thus, while some evidence does suggest that E/SE values cause lower wellbeing, caution should be taken before firmly drawing that conclusion.

## **Personal wellbeing**

Findings from dozens of studies converge on the conclusion that the more that people prioritise money, image and status, the lower their personal wellbeing and the higher their distress (see Kasser 2002). For example, a strong focus on E/SE values has been associated with lower levels of self-actualisation – that Maslovian paragon of psychological functioning, and with lower vitality, i.e. feeling of aliveness and energy. Lower levels of satisfaction with life and of the day-to-day experience of pleasant emotions (e.g. happiness and contentment) are also related to E/SE values. The relative importance placed on these aims is also associated with more anxiety and depression, greater narcissism and substance abuse, and the relatively frequent daily experience of unpleasant emotions (e.g. anger and sadness). People also report higher levels of common physical symptoms (e.g. headaches and stomach-aches) to the extent they strongly endorse E/SE values. The robustness of these results is attested to by their replication in numerous labs around the world (e.g. Belk 1985; Cohen and Cohen 1996; Richins and Dawson 1992) and by a meta-analysis (Dittmar, Bond, Hurst and Kasser 2011) that examined over 400 effect sizes across dozens of published studies.

Importantly, such findings have also been replicated with a variety of samples in a variety of nations. Studies have documented negative associations between E/SE tendencies and personal wellbeing in children as young as age ten (Kasser 2005; Schor 2004), in numerous samples of college students, in adults up to age 80 (Sheldon and Kasser 2001), and across different levels of household income. Studies conducted in numerous nations around the world (including India, China, and former Soviet bloc nations) also consistently replicate the negative association.

More objective measures of wellbeing (e.g. health, safety, educational outcomes) have also related to E/SE values cross-culturally. Specifically, Kasser (2011a) correlated data assessing the values of citizens in 20 wealthy nations with UNICEF's rankings of the wellbeing of children in these same nations (based on 40 different objective and subjective indicators); after controlling for national wealth, the more that citizens of a nation were focused on E/SE values, the lower was children's wellbeing in the nation.

Of course, these correlational studies cannot convincingly answer whether E/SE values diminish happiness, unhappy people orient towards E/SE values, or some third variable is responsible for these associations. Although all three processes are likely at work (see Kasser 2002), people who increase the priority they place on financial success over time exhibit parallel decreases in their wellbeing (Kasser, Rosenblum, Sameroff, *et al.* 2011). Further, increases over time in the priority that cohorts of American college students (Twenge, Gentile, DeWall, Ma, Lacefield and Schurtz 2010) and Norwegian citizens (Hellevik 2003) place on money and wealth are associated with parallel increases in psychopathology and decreases in subjective wellbeing. What's more, one experimental study has shown that an intervention designed to decrease E/SE values yielded

increases in the self-esteem of adolescents who began the study high in this value orientation (Kasser *et al.* 2011).

## **Social attitudes and behaviours**

While wellbeing is certainly a function of one's own subjective sense of happiness, it also critically depends on the social context of one's life. As Deneulin and McGregor (2010) write, to live well it is necessary to 'generate the social understandings, agreements and institutions to live *together* in ways that do not cause us irreparable harms' (Deneulin and McGregor 2010: 511; emphasis added). Unfortunately, the research literature shows that the prioritisation of E/SE values not only diminishes people's personal wellbeing, but is also associated with holding attitudes and engaging in behaviours likely to diminish other people's wellbeing. For example, studies show that a strong focus on E/SE values is associated with engaging in fewer pro-social activities (like sharing and helping) and with having less empathy for others (i.e. being less interested in trying to understand another's point of view). People also tend towards more manipulative, Machiavellian, and competitive (vs. cooperative) behaviours to the extent they care about E/SE values (see Kasser, Cohn, Ryan and Kanner 2007). The prioritisation of E/SE values is also associated with greater prejudice towards people different from one's own group and with a preference for social inequality and hierarchy based on the belief that other groups are inferior to one's own (Duriez, Vansteenkiste, Soenens and De Witte 2007).

These associations between E/SE values and social behaviours are also notable at the national level. Kasser (2011a) demonstrated that the more a nation's citizens endorsed E/SE values, the less generous its parental leave laws, meaning that rather than being encouraged to care for their newborn children, parents were encouraged to return to work (and thus pursue E/SE values). In addition, nation-level E/SE values were also associated with the number of minutes per hour of children's television devoted to advertising; such marketing messages are well known to be problematic for a variety of wellbeing outcomes in children (see Schor 2004).

Experimental studies also show that caring about E/SE values decreases how much people help others in need. Vohs, Mead and Goode (2006) randomly assigned US college students to create phrases out of money-related words or out of neutral words; soon afterward, participants had the opportunity to behave in either a helpful or selfish manner. Those who had thoughts of money (and thus E/SE values) activated spent significantly less time helping a confused person who asked for aid, were less helpful to an experimenter who had dropped some pencils, and donated less of their study honorarium to a charity. Such findings have been conceptually replicated with other means of activating E/SE values and with other measures of pro-social outcomes (Maio, Pakizeh, Cheung and Rees 2009).

## **Ecological attitudes and behaviours**

Living well also requires a healthy habitat in which to live, but the evidence shows that E/SE values are associated with holding attitudes and behaving in ways that contribute to environmental degradation (for a review see Crompton and Kasser 2009). The more that individuals in Australia, Brazil, the Czech Republic, Germany, India, New Zealand, Russia and the United States prioritise E/SE values, the worse their environmental attitudes. The priority placed on E/SE values by US and UK adolescents and adults is also associated with less frequent engagement in ecologically friendly behaviours such as buying second-hand, recycling, riding a bicycle, reusing paper, etc. Findings from one study of 400 North American adults showed that those who cared more about E/SE values had substantially 'higher ecological

footprints', and thus used more of Earth's limited resources to meet their housing, food, and transportation lifestyle choices. Individuals high in E/SE values also act in greedier, more ecologically destructive, and less sustainable ways when they play forest-management simulation games in the laboratory. On a national scale, even after controlling for a nation's GDP per capita, the more a nation's citizens value status and achievement, the more CO<sub>2</sub> that nation emits (Kasser 2011a).

Experimental manipulations again support a causal role for values in these processes. In one study with Belgian education students (Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon and Deci 2004), recycling was framed either as being beneficial to one's community or as likely to save money. Individuals in the latter group (whose E/SE values had been activated) were less likely to take advantage of later opportunities to learn more about recycling.

## A strategy to enhance wellbeing by decreasing E/SE values

This literature suggests that E/SE values may undermine the wellbeing outcomes in which philanthropic and international development organisations are interested. The next portion of this essay therefore presents a two-armed strategy to enhance wellbeing by decreasing the extent to which people (and society) focus on E/SE values. The first arm involves removing the root causes of E/SE values to decrease how much people focus on such aims. The second arm involves encouraging the prioritisation of values that oppose E/SE values and that promote personal, social, and ecological wellbeing.

### Addressing the causes of E/SE values

Two primary pathways lead individuals to place a relatively high importance on E/SE values (Kasser, Ryan, Couchman, and Sheldon 2004). The first pathway is the rather obvious influence of social modelling and the second is the subtler route of responses to felt threats and insecurity.

Social modelling involves exposure to messages in the environment suggesting that money, power, possessions, achievement, image, and status are important aims to strive for in life. The empirical evidence clearly documents that people care more about E/SE values to the extent that their parents, friends, and peers also espouse such values (see Kasser *et al.* 2004 for a review, and Maio *et al.* 2009 for experimental evidence). Television also plays an important role in encouraging materialistic values, as documented by numerous studies (e.g. Schor 2004). Although it is difficult to test experimentally the effects of television in a meaningful way, one study found that children exposed to advertising in US schools have a stronger E/SE orientation than do children in districts without such advertising (Brand and Greenberg 1994).

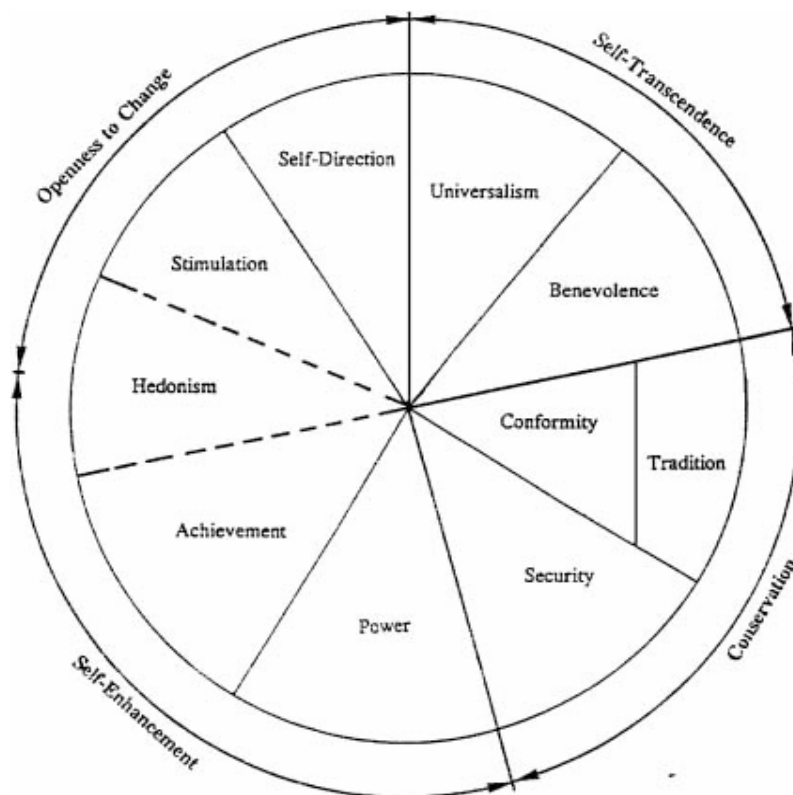
The second pathway that tends to increase E/SE values is that of insecurity and threat. When people experience threats to their survival, safety and security, they more highly prioritise E/SE values (see Kasser *et al.* 2004, or Sheldon and Kasser 2008, for review). This is the case for children who grew up in a family with a cold, controlling mother, whose parents divorced, and who were raised in situations of economic insecurity. Experimental manipulations also show that insecurity can cause increases in people's focus on E/SE values. For example, after thinking about economic hardship, poor interpersonal relationships, and their own death, people increase the priority they place on E/SE values. Similar results have been obtained after the experimental

induction of hunger (Briers, Pandelaere, Dewitte and Warlop, 2006), personal self-doubt (Chang and Arkin 2002), and social exclusion (Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco and Bartels 2007). Together these findings therefore suggest that one approach to promoting wellbeing is to reduce the extent to which E/SE values are modelled in society and to increase the extent to which people feel secure.

## Promoting an alternative set of values

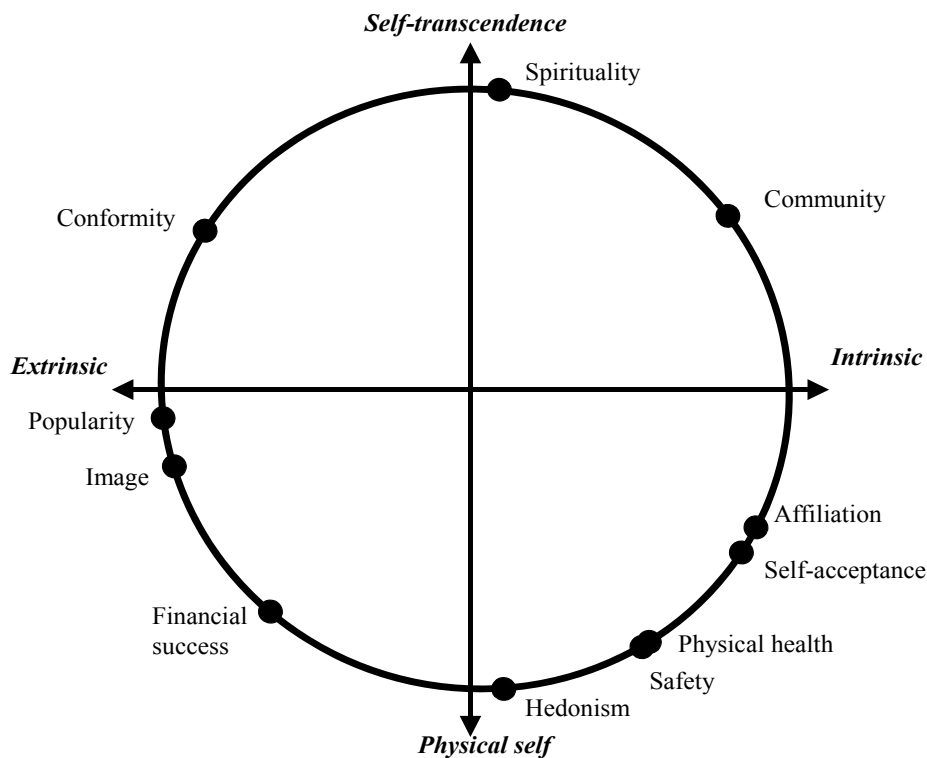
As noted at this essay's outset, E/SE values exist within broader systems of personal goals and values that are organised in fairly consistent ways across people living in diverse nations. Cross-cultural studies show that people typically experience certain values and goals as psychologically consistent with each other, but other values and goals as being in relative conflict with each other. Researchers statistically represent the extent of consistency or conflict among values and goals via a 'circumplex' structure: psychologically consistent goals are placed relatively adjacent to each other whereas psychologically opposing goals are placed opposite each other. Figures 1 and 2 present two circumplex models that have been well validated across different cultures; E/SE values are notable in each. In Figure 1 (based on Schwartz 1992, 2006), the self-enhancing values of achievement and power lie next to each other, representing their psychological compatibility. In Figure 2 (based on Grouzet *et al.* 2005), the extrinsic goals of financial success, image, and popularity (i.e. status) cluster together in a similar manner.

**Figure 1 Circumplex model of values** (from Schwartz 1992)



Reprinted from Shalom H. Schwartz (1992) 'Universals in the Content and Structure of Values: Theoretical Advances and Empirical Tests in 20 Countries', in M. Zanna (ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol 25: 1–65, with permission from Elsevier.

**Figure 2 Circumplex model of goals** (from Grouzet *et al.* 2005)



Reprinted from Grouzet *et al.* (2005) 'The Structure of Goal Contents across 15 Cultures,' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol 89: 800–16, with permission from the American Psychological Association.

These circumplex models also reveal which values and goals stand in opposition to E/SE values. Figure 1 shows that self-enhancement values are opposed by two *self-transcendent* values: 'benevolence', which concerns helping friends and family, and 'universalism', which concerns improving the broader world. Figure 2 similarly shows that extrinsic goals are opposed by three *intrinsic* goals: 'self-acceptance' (or understanding one's self and striving to feel free); 'affiliation' (or having good relationships with family and friends); and 'community feeling' (or trying to make the wider world a better place).

These models, based on data from thousands of individuals across dozens of nations, thus suggest another strategy for reducing E/SE values: Encourage intrinsic and self-transcendent (I/ST) values and goals. Because it is relatively difficult for people to simultaneously pursue opposing sets of values (Schwartz 1992) and because activating one set of values suppresses the values on the opposite side of the circumplex (e.g. Maio *et al.* 2009), a relative de-emphasis on E/SE aims should occur to the extent individuals prioritise I/ST values.

The promise of this arm of the strategy is bolstered by the fact that the endorsement of I/ST values is associated with more positive wellbeing outcomes. For example, people who place a relatively high importance on I/ST values report higher personal wellbeing (e.g. more self-actualisation and vitality) and lower personal distress (e.g. less depression and anxiety; see Kasser 2002). Prioritising I/ST values is also associated with behaving in more pro-social ways,



sharing more, and being more empathic and less manipulative (see Kasser *et al.* 2004). And the endorsement of I/ST values is associated with more positive ecological attitudes and behaviours (see Crompton and Kasser 2009). All of these salutary relationships are also notable at the national level, as nations whose citizens highly prioritise I/ST values have children with greater wellbeing, provide new parents with more generous leave, and emit less carbon (Kasser 2011a).

## Applying the values-based strategy

The strategy just presented yields numerous concrete, practical activities that philanthropic and international development organisations might use in their efforts to improve wellbeing. This section explores three types of activities: direct interventions with individuals, campaigning, and policy initiatives.

From the outset, however, I acknowledge that substantially more work is necessary to increase the potential effectiveness of the suggestions provided below. For one, the interventions, campaigns, and policies all require the development of materials and procedures that are sensitive to people's understandings of values and wellbeing. Substantial attention to cultural and national norms and histories, as well as the resources available, will also be required to make these suggestions successful. For example, some social contexts may have policies, practices, and powerful constituencies already in place that would have to be confronted and altered, whereas in other contexts it might be more beneficial to focus on promoting and maintaining cultural characteristics that can resist E/SE values. Additionally, much thought would be necessary to articulate the optimal roles of philanthropic organisations, international development organisations, other types of civil society organisations, business, government, and the average citizen in working together to promote such changes.

I also acknowledge that it is unlikely that the proposals described below will be met with joyous reception by the many powerful individuals and organisations who have a strong stake in continuing and expanding the dominance of E/SE values. Indeed, many of the proposals that follow necessarily fly squarely in the face of multinational corporations' interest in maximising profit and governments' interests in maximising tax revenue via ever-expanding economic growth. As such, some of the proposals may seem politically unfeasible to people who might otherwise support them. I would reply with two observations. First, the data reviewed above suggest that it may be quite difficult to promote wellbeing in the twenty-first century if E/SE values continue their expansion unabated. Second, there are good theoretical reasons to believe that virtuous cycles can come into play to the extent that any of the approaches described yield success; that is, as individuals and institutions shift away from E/SE and towards I/ST values, they are likely to become increasingly open to and supportive of efforts to shift their lives and the functioning of society even further.

### **Direct interventions**

Sometimes philanthropic and international development organisations develop interventions that entail direct interactions with people to increase their wellbeing. Below I sketch out three interventions which derive from this values-based approach that seem to hold promise.

One rather obvious intervention is to educate parents about the problems of consumer culture – a primary source of E/SE values. Relatively few parents are aware of the numerous studies documenting associations between media exposure and a wide range of problems among children, including lower levels of school performance and happiness and higher levels of obesity,

sexual promiscuity, aggression, attention disorders, and E/SE values (Schor 2004). Further, although the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no screen time for children under age two and relatively little screen time thereafter, the vast majority of parents are unaware of these recommendations. As such, interventions can be conducted with mothers while they are pregnant or when they visit pediatricians to inform them about these recommendations and the research findings associated with media exposure. Such preventive efforts can be supplemented with interventions aimed at older children. For instance, Kasser *et al.* (2011) found that three, three-hour group meetings in which families discussed spending habits, consumer culture, and commercials (among other topics) resulted in decreases in adolescents' E/SE values relative to adolescents assigned to a no-treatment control group.

Interventions can also be designed to help support people who want to live more materially simple lives. Throughout the economically developed world, many such 'downshifter' and 'Voluntary Simplifiers' have disengaged from the work-spend-work lifestyle to instead focus on the I/ST values of personal growth, family, and community (Elgin 1993; Pierce 2000). Brown and Kasser (2005) compared 200 self-identified Voluntary Simplifiers with a matched group of mainstream Americans, finding that the Voluntary Simplifiers were both significantly happier and living more ecologically sustainable lives than the mainstream Americans; statistical analyses showed that these benefits were largely due to Voluntary Simplifiers' stronger prioritisation of I/ST relative to E/SE values. Philanthropic and international development organisations could pursue many means of countering the dominant E/SE norms which suggest that a Voluntarily Simple lifestyle is odd, unpatriotic, and even 'subversive' (see Pierce 2000). For one, creative campaigns could be developed to educate people about the benefits of Voluntary Simplicity. Another, more direct intervention might be to create 'simplicity circles' (Andrews 1998) to share information and provide support for people who are interested in a more materially simple lifestyle.

A third intervention strategy could help people develop mindful, reflective practices. Several studies show that people who have developed the capacity to experience themselves and others in a non-judgemental, moment-to-moment way also report higher levels of wellbeing, stronger I/ST values, and more ecologically-sustainable lifestyles (Brown and Kasser 2005; Brown and Ryan 2003). What's more, an intervention designed to improve mindfulness skills increased how content participants felt with their material possessions and financial situation (i.e. E/SE values), with consequent improvements in personal wellbeing (Brown, Kasser, Ryan, Linley and Orzech 2009). Another promising type of reflective practice involves deeply and regularly considering the fact of one's own mortality. Although some studies have shown that *brief* reminders of death typically promote a focus on E/SE values, other studies suggest that *sustained* reflection on death shifts people away from E/SE and towards I/ST values (see Kasser 2009). There seem to be two reasons such reflective practices have these effects. First, rather than responding to threats by endorsing E/SE values, people who engage in reflective practices act less automatically and defensively, thereby derailing the largely unconscious processes that push them towards money, image and status as coping mechanisms. Second, reflective practices may help people become more attuned to the aims in life that actually meet their psychological needs (i.e. I/ST values), thereby improving their wellbeing.

## Campaigning

Given how much E/SE values dominate many aspects of the world, philanthropic and international development organisations sometimes 'work with' E/SE values by finding 'win-win' situations that meet both their own aims and the aims of those who prioritise E/SE values. For example, attempts to raise people out of poverty have sometimes been framed as worthwhile because doing so would expand the number of consumers and thus economic growth. Similarly,

people are sometimes sold eco-cars on the basis of status, and efforts towards a more ecologically sustainable world are often framed as beneficial because they can provide jobs. While such appeals have certainly yielded some successes, they clearly have not been a panacea for the wellbeing challenges facing humans. Additionally, there are at least two important reasons to be wary of such approaches (Crompton and Kasser 2009).

First, consider the possibility that Policy X might both increase the wellbeing of people in an economically underdeveloped area and increase the profits of certain corporations (thereby helping them attain their E/SE values). Imagine that philanthropic and international development organisations argue for Policy X on both of these grounds, gather the necessary support, and achieve the passage of Policy X. Now imagine that, later, Policy Y is proposed to increase the wellbeing of people in an economically underdeveloped area, but no feasible argument can be made that this policy yields profits for corporations; indeed, Policy Y might even undermine profits. Philanthropic and international development organisations interested in promoting Policy Y will find themselves in a bind, for in their campaign to pass Policy X they taught potential supporters and detractors that improving the wellbeing of people in poverty should be pursued primarily when a profit can be made (i.e. E/SE values). Similarly, appealing to consumers to 'buy green' because they will be fashionable might increase the sales of certain products, thereby benefiting the environment to some extent. But such appeals are also known to undermine how likely people are to engage in other, less status-oriented ecologically beneficial behaviours (see Griskevicius, Tybur and Van den Bergh 2010), given that little status is conveyed by certain lifestyle choices that have large environmental benefits (e.g. insulating one's attic).

The second problem with campaign appeals to E/SE values is that they activate, encourage, and reinforce such values. As such, philanthropic and international development organisations that use such appeals have added their voices to the chorus of other social models that encourage E/SE values. Furthermore, because people decrease their endorsement of I/ST values when they hear that others in their social surround prioritise E/SE values (Maio *et al.* 2009), such campaign strategies will have undermined the values that the research shows actually promote personal, social, and ecological wellbeing.

This values-based approach therefore suggests that, in the long term, it is preferable for campaigns to appeal to I/ST values. Supporting this, Maio *et al.* (2009) subtly activated different types of values by asking college students to sort lists of words into piles; amidst the words that all subjects had in common, some subjects sorted food-related words (i.e. the control group), some sorted self-enhancement words (e.g. ambitious, successful), and some sorted self-transcendent words (e.g. forgiving, honest). After this brief, unconscious activation of different types of values, subjects were then asked to volunteer their time. Participants whose self-transcendent values had been activated later volunteered more time than did people in the control group, who were in turn more generous with their time than were people whose self-enhancement values had been activated. Similar results have been reported for ecological outcomes (Sheldon, Nichols and Kasser 2011). American college students endorsed significantly more sustainable ecological policies for their nation after thinking of their American identity in intrinsic terms (i.e. America is a land with a long history of family values and being generous) than in extrinsic terms (i.e. America is a land where people can make money and become famous).

Similar results obtain for individuals who strongly prioritise E/SE values. Recall that circumplex models assume (with empirical backing) that everyone holds each of the value types, even if some people prioritise certain values over others. Applying this logic, Chilton, Crompton, Kasser, Maio and Nolan (2011) activated E/SE or I/ST values in a sample of Welsh adults who scored in the top 10 per cent of a community sample on E/SE values. Participants were then interviewed about their opinions concerning climate change, child mortality in developing nations, and other

topics. Compared to their high E/SE peers who had been primed with E/SE values, individuals high in E/SE values whose I/ST values had been activated spoke about these topics in ways that an experienced psycholinguist (naïve to experimental condition) judged as being more reflective of I/ST values and as expressing a greater obligation to ameliorate these social and ecological problems.

The implications of this work for the campaigns of philanthropic and international development organisations is only now being articulated, but several case studies have been published (see [www.valuesandframes.org](http://www.valuesandframes.org)), and Crompton (2010) and Darnton and Kirk (2011) provide initial forays into applying this work to the environmental and international development contexts, respectively.

## Policy initiatives

A final set of actions that follow from this strategy concerns policies to change laws and practices to diminish the causes of E/SE values and to promote I/ST values. Some who have read the suggestions above may be likely to shake their heads even more strongly at the proposals that follow, as they may well see these proposals as impediments to economic growth, business profits and the consumer way of life. But if these proposals are to face such criticisms, it is crucial to recognise that those criticisms are based largely in a particular ideology derived from an economic system that focuses on the maximisation of those aims. That economic system is, of course, capitalism.

Like any other social system, capitalism's smooth and efficient functioning requires that the people living under it believe certain things, act certain ways, and support certain institutions and leaders to maintain that system (Kasser *et al.* 2007). That is, just as a religion needs its followers to believe in its tenets, to engage in the practices it prescribes, to attend its places of worship, and to listen to its ministers and priests, a capitalist economic system needs its followers to believe its tenets (e.g. economic growth, free market competition, and high levels of consumption are important), to engage in its practices (e.g. work long hours and consume a lot), to attend its places of worship (e.g. the mall, the couch in front of the television, the internet shopping sites), and to listen to its leaders (e.g. the CEOs and governmental officials whose job is to sell products and create economic growth to provide corporations with profit and governments with tax revenues). Capitalism needs these E/SE-oriented values, beliefs, and practices to be central to the functioning of individuals and society, for it would quickly falter without workers to work and consumers to consume and investors to invest and voters to vote for politicians who support the economic practices and policies that maintain the system.

Kasser *et al.* (2007) proposed that the Anglo variety of capitalism is especially likely to lead its citizens to prioritise E/SE values, and two empirical studies have directly supported this claim. Schwartz (2007) used a measure developed by economists Hall and Gingerich (2004) that assessed the extent to which institutions in 20 wealthy capitalist nations were oriented in a more competitive, liberal market fashion (e.g. the US and the UK) or a more cooperative, strategic fashion (e.g. Germany and Austria); results showed that to the extent a nation had a more liberal-market economy, citizens placed higher priority on self-enhancing values. Kasser (2011b) extended these results to the 'Index of Economic Freedom' ([www.heritage.org/index/](http://www.heritage.org/index/)), derived largely from measures of how much an economy is de-regulated (i.e. market- rather than government-driven); results showed that citizens living in more economically free, de-regulated nations placed higher priority on self-enhancing values.

These results and this values-based approach thus suggest that promoting wellbeing will require policies that adjust capitalist economies to be less oriented towards the encouragement of E/SE

values. Although numerous policy paths could be discussed, below I focus on five basic topics, each of which can generate numerous specific policies. The topics are organised approximately from least to most 'radical'.

### ***Economic indicators***

In many nations today, national progress and success are primarily measured by how the stock market is doing, where consumer confidence is this month, and trends in the size of the Gross National Product. In the short term (which is typically of most interest to CEOs and politicians), such measures privilege E/SE values, as they increase to the extent money changes hands. Thus, short-term GNP increases as a result of giving psychotherapy and SSRIs to depressed people, building prisons to house individuals alienated from the social system, and cleaning up wastes caused by industrial pollution, among other problematic economic exchanges.

Because of these and other problems with such indicators, several organisations have proposed a variety of alternatives for measuring national health and progress. These include the UNDP's Human Development Index, Redefining Progress' Genuine Progress Indicator, Bhutan's Gross National Happiness measures, and the new economics foundation's Happy Planet Index; recently, France's Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress has also added their suggestions. While each indicator has its own idiosyncratic computational formulas and assumptions, common to them all is that the privilege GNP accords to E/SE aims is diminished, and other values (typically I/ST values) are included in the calculations by considering outcomes such as health, volunteering, caring for family members, equality, living in sustainable ways, etc.

If nations, regions, and cities adopted such alternative indicators, and if these alternative indicators received nearly as much attention from politicians, the media, and citizens as stock market and GNP indices currently receive, then social models of what is important would shift substantially. That is, rather than being told that what matters most is economic activity, citizens would hear frequent mention of outcomes relevant to the I/ST values embodied in these alternative indices. What's more, as citizens began to recognise that increases in E/SE-based indicators do not generally improve societal wellbeing (at least in economically developed nations; Diener and Seligman 2004) and are generally associated with greater ecological damage (Jackson 2009), they might insist that government officials develop policies and laws to promote those aspects of these alternative indicators that reflect I/ST values (e.g. caring for others, leisure time, etc.).

### ***Time affluence***

As just noted, most nations with capitalist economic organisations mark progress by measures of material affluence. If material affluence cannot fulfil all of its promise, then perhaps 'time affluence' should be considered as another model (de Graaf 2003; Schor 2010). That is, while it is clearly necessary to ensure that people's basic material needs for food, housing, shelter, etc. are met, research suggests that wellbeing also depends on having enough time to pursue activities that promote wellbeing. For example, people who work shorter hours and feel time affluent report higher levels of wellbeing (Kasser and Sheldon 2009), wellbeing is higher on weekends than on weekdays (Ryan, Bernstein and Brown 2010), and even brief activations of the thought of time (vs. money) increase people's happiness (Mogilner 2010). Time affluence and low work hours also provide more opportunities to engage in behaviours that promote job satisfaction and physical health, good parenting, civil society, and ecological sustainability (see for example Burke, Koyuncu, Fiksenbaum and Demirer 2009; deGraaf 2003; Rosnick and Weisbrot 2006).

In terms of the values-based strategy, policies to support time affluence are useful in at least two ways. First, time affluence seems to directly promote I/ST values. Pursuing one's hobbies (self-acceptance aspirations), caring for others (affiliation aspirations), and volunteering (community feeling aspirations) all take time to do and can fall to the wayside when people are quite busy. Indeed, the studies cited above show that one pathway by which time affluence creates greater wellbeing is via opportunities to engage in activities relevant to I/ST values, particularly those associated with one's interests and social relationships. Second, policies that promote time affluence could act as counterweights to models of E/SE values by suggesting that time is equally important to money. Consider, for example, that the United States is one of only a few nations without laws mandating a minimum paid vacation for all workers or providing new mothers with paid leave. This lack sends a clear message to citizens that it is more important to work and make money (E/SE values) than to pursue one's own interests and be with one's family (I/ST values). In contrast, most other nations require that workers receive some minimum amount of paid vacation (e.g. three weeks per year in China) and that new mothers receive adequate paid leave (e.g. fourteen weeks at full wages).

### **Localisation**

The logic of corporate capitalism and the quest for profit have been among the primary drivers of economic globalisation (Kanner and Soule 2004). Given the ecological damage wrought by globalisation, environmentalists often propose the development of local purchasing, currencies, and food systems to reduce how far products travel and thus the amount of greenhouse gas emitted (Cavanagh and Mander 2004; Helleiner 2002). Localisation can also reduce the experience of 'distancing' (Princen 2002), which occurs when people fail to see the environmentally degrading ways in which products are produced or thrown away because these acts occur outside of their own community; the result of distancing is that people often unknowingly engage in and support ecologically degrading consumption and production patterns.

Policies that support localisation are certainly beneficial for these reasons, but they are also consistent with the values-based strategy. For example, localisation can promote feelings of security, given that communities with more localised economies are less beholden to the dictates of corporate offices or government bureaucracies hundreds or thousands of miles away; as such, localised communities are better placed to have a bigger say in the decisions that affect them. Relatedly, when goods (particularly food) are produced locally, communities and nations would seem to be less susceptible to the kinds of shortages and increases in prices that caused riots in Haiti, Bangladesh, Egypt, and elsewhere in 2008. These considerations are important because, as described above, improving perceived security helps people shift towards I/ST and away from E/SE values.

Second, localisation naturally promotes the self-transcendent value of universalism and the intrinsic goal of community feeling. Myers (2007), for example, shared case studies of business people who rejected the temptations to place profit at the forefront of their concerns and instead focused their business efforts on helping the community in which they lived. Notably, all of these business people had grown up in the community where they now worked and employed others, and the fact of having 'rubbed elbows' all their lives with members of the community encouraged the activation of these I/ST values. (The fact that the businesses were, in addition, privately owned was probably also important, as will be discussed below.) Although more empirical work is necessary to test these ideas, it seems that localisation might build the 'moral virtues' of community and neighbourliness that Adam Smith (1776/1976) believed were necessary to balance and contain the self-interested desires that he feared would otherwise run amok in highly competitive marketplaces (see also Whybrow 2007).

A useful principle to keep in mind in efforts to promote localisation is what the International Forum on Globalization calls *subsidiarity*:

Whatever decisions and actions can be undertaken locally should be. Whatever power can reside at the local level should reside there. Only when additional activity is required that cannot be satisfied locally should power and activity move to the next level, that of region, nation, and finally the world.

(Cavanagh and Mander 2004: 83)

The implications of this principle for policy are manifold in terms of how to structure governmental decision-making, financial and business operations, ownership of resources, the creation of food, energy, products, and other services, etc. Cavanagh and Mander (2004) provide an excellent starting point for more details about these and other issues regarding localisation. Supporting the promise of such policies, Frey (2008) has found that wellbeing and life satisfaction are highest in the cantons of Switzerland that have the greatest local autonomy and the most opportunities for direct democracy (i.e. opportunities to pursue intrinsic values relevant to choice and freedom).

## **Advertising**

In their pursuit of profit, businesses jointly spend millions of dollars yearly to study how to maximise the effectiveness of advertising messages, and billions of dollars more to pay for-profit media corporations to deliver these messages to children, adolescents, and adults. Nowadays advertising messages appear in almost every possible media venue; through developments in stealth marketing, ads are now even covertly placed in songs, books, and conversations people have with friends and strangers (Schor 2004; Walker 2004). As reviewed above, frequent exposure to such messages via television is associated with the prioritisation of E/SE values; this association is probably due to people's exposure to social models suggesting that happiness rests on the successful accumulation of particular possessions and the attainment of a particular image that is largely mediated through consumer purchases. Advertisements are also likely to contribute to the promotion of E/SE values by creating feelings of insecurity, given that the prototypical advertisement narrative presents people who lack the advertised product as unhappy, unsuccessful, socially outcast, or otherwise insufficient humans, whereas individuals with the product are happy, beautiful, loved, and/or successful. As Richins (1995) has shown, such advertisements play on humans' tendency to compare themselves to others and can lead them to wonder whether they too are insufficient. Of course, these advertisements give an easy solution for alleviating such insecurities: imitate those in the advertisement and purchase the product or service (i.e. pursue E/SE values).

These arguments suggest that philanthropic and international development organisations might attempt to support policies that diminish the omnipresence of advertising. For example, they might help cities imitate the efforts of other localities that have successfully removed outdoor advertisements (including billboards and business signs over a certain size) and advertisements in public spaces (including subways, buses and schools); by doing so, people would no longer be forced to view advertising as they went about their daily lives and thus would be less likely to be exposed to social models promoting E/SE values (and suppressing I/ST values; see Maio *et al.* 2009). Banning all forms of marketing to children under the age of 12, as has been done in some areas of the world, would also be a particularly forceful policy to pursue, as it would end advertisers' ability to prey on youth whose identities are still in the process of formation and whose incomplete cognitive development makes them more susceptible to the strategies that marketers implement. Another promising policy is to remove the deduction that businesses in some nations currently enjoy for expenditures on marketing and advertising. Governments

currently provide such subsidies because advertising stimulates consumption (and thus tax revenue), but this policy sends the message that ads are equivalent to charitable donations (which are also typically deductible). Ending the subsidy on advertising expenses would give businesses less incentive and more disincentive to advertise, and would also establish a fundamentally different social norm about the worth of advertising (i.e. that it is more akin to a form of value pollution). Ideally, the resulting revenues from taxes on advertising would be used to fund the kinds of interventions described above, to more strongly encourage I/ST values.

## **Corporations**

When Adam Smith wrote *The Wealth of Nations* in the 1700s, his description of capitalism was based largely on local merchants who baked bread, sold shoes, or perhaps built ships. Over the last two and a half centuries, corporations have far surpassed local trades people to become the dominant players in capitalism. Consider, for example, that in 2000, 52 of the world's 100 largest economic organisations were not nations, but were actually corporations (Cavanagh and Mander 2004). The expansion of corporate power has been facilitated by legal decisions giving corporations the same rights as individual people (e.g. *Santa Clara County vs. Southern Pacific Railroad*, 1886; *Citizens United vs. Federal Election Commission*, 2010) and by the creation of numerous international laws, practices, and institutions (e.g. NAFTA, the WTO) that help corporations extend their reach around the globe. Although some corporations are privately owned, generally speaking the most powerful ones are publicly traded; government policies and legal decisions since the late 1800s have ensured that such corporations no longer bear responsibility to the community but instead are primarily beholden to a single aim: maximise profit for shareholders (see for example *Dodge vs. Ford*, 1919; Kelly 2003; Korten 1995). Put in terms of values, then, publicly traded corporations are legally mandated to prioritise E/SE values over I/ST values.

Given the enormous capital at their disposal, and their ability to use that capital to influence governments and consumers/citizens, corporations must clearly be seen as a major factor promoting E/SE values in the twenty-first century. As such, policies would ideally be developed to adjust how corporations exist in the world. One set of options involves the creation and nurturance of alternate business organisations that are not driven to maximise profit at all costs. These include privately held corporations (in which owners have the choice to de-prioritise profit) and B-corporations (whose charters state that the profit motive must be balanced with other types of values, typically ones consistent with I/ST aims and with the promotion of personal, social, and ecological wellbeing). Similarly, credit unions and cooperatives can be supported given that they are organised to serve the interests of their constituents/members, not to maximise profits for shareholders.

Other types of regional and national policies that have been suggested (by, for example, Cavanagh and Mander 2004; Kelly 2003; Korten 1995) include: (a) supporting efforts of localities who want to deny certain corporations from entering their area or to revoke the charters of certain corporations; (b) supporting legal scholars and grassroots efforts to amend constitutions to ensure that other aims and values take precedence over corporate efforts to make a profit (e.g. Ecuador's recognition of the rights of nature); (c) promoting efforts to pass constitutional amendments that would differentiate the rights of persons from the rights of corporations (see for example, Liberty Tree's 'Move to Amend' campaign); and (d) passing laws that would return community responsibility to the list of values that publicly traded corporations must consider in their decision-making process. At the international level, policy efforts could also work to replace institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade



Organization with new organisations whose operations are more transparent and whose aims are more oriented towards promoting I/ST values in their decision-making processes.

## Conclusion

There are numerous barriers to personal wellbeing, social justice, and ecological sustainability in the twenty-first century. Individuals and organisations interested in promoting wellbeing sometimes consider each barrier as if it was independent of all others, and as such try to surmount or tear down each barrier in a piecemeal fashion. I hope that one contribution of the current essay is to show that many of the barriers to wellbeing are symptoms and results of an underlying system of values that operates both within individuals and societies. It is my hope that the values-based approach proposed here shows that many different types of efforts that have been used in the past and that could be tried in the future can be integrated under a coherent, empirically supported theory. Keeping this theoretical approach in mind and using it to derive numerous interventions, campaigns, and policy efforts of the type described here could help to create synergisms and virtuous cycles that might facilitate broad shifts in values and thereby promote wellbeing.

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