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Wellbeing: grasping the social context

“Wellbeing” is a slippery term and one that is frequently used without thinking about the social, economic and cultural factors that influence a state of health and happiness.

This is the central argument behind a new book edited by University of Melbourne academic Lenore Manderson from the Key Centre for Women’s Health in Society. In “*Rethinking Wellbeing*” seven authors challenge conventional assumptions about measuring wellbeing and explore new ways of thinking about it in essays that cover economics, relationships, social capital and gender.

Professor Manderson said the book’s intention was to provide a critical account of various approaches to wellbeing, such as those used to calibrate the global burden of disease and other measures that seek to aggregate and minimize local differences. The flaws of many of the widely used instruments for measuring wellbeing such as the QALY (Quality-Adjusted Life Year) and the DALY (Disability Adjusted Life Year) are exposed by some contributors who argue the need to reform these frequently used tools to assess physical and mental health and quality of life.

“We cannot treat people as if they are all the same without listening to the noise of age, ethnicity, gender, class and the world and local political contexts in which they live,” says Professor Manderson. “It is as important now as it was 30 years ago to look at the factors that affect life choices, influencing social capital, agency and wellbeing.”

The task of defining, deconstructing and attaining wellbeing is not just an academic exercise. “Rather it serves a political and pragmatic purpose – the debate speaks to the heart of government,” says Professor Manderson in her introduction.

The authors come from a number of disciplines; anthropology, economics, social policy, sociology and philosophy. They include two prominent international thinkers Martha Nussbaum and Ian Gough. The papers in “*Rethinking wellbeing*” have resulted from an Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia research project funded by the Australian Research Council.

“*Rethinking Wellbeing*” (\$34.95) is published by the Australian Public Intellectual Network in association with Curtin University of Technology.
http://www.api-network.com/cgi-bin/page?books/new_releases