ON THE DEFINITION AND VARIETIES OF ATTITUDE AND WELLBEING

(Received 13 January, 1981)

ABSTRACT. In a paper published in Social Indicators Research in 1975, Levy and Guttman proved the proposition that wellbeing is a special case of attitude. They exploited this result for establishing a certain lawfulness for wellbeing behavior, and built on this for revealing more specialized features of the lawfulness. Five years later in the same journal, Andrews and McKennell published two papers on exactly the same proposition, but without proving it, without building on known relevant lawfulness of attitudinal behavior, and without mentioning (neither positively nor negatively) the Levy-Guttman work. The Andrews-McKennell papers are shown to be a retrogression rather than a scientific advance, being conceptually confused, using inappropriate data analysis, and dealing with arbitrary assumptions which are either untested, untestable or false.

Well over a decade ago it was pointed out that, despite the numerous publications on the topic, there has been no generally accepted definition for ‘wellbeing’ nor well-defined procedures for assessing it; see for example, Bradburn and Caplovitz (1965) and Chapter 1 in Bradburn (1969).

Five years ago in Social Indicators Research, Levy and Guttman (1975) attempted to help fill the conceptual lacuna. They proposed a formal definition of wellbeing that immediately served several purposes, among them: (1) design of observations on varieties of wellbeing, (2) developing and testing a systematic theory for the structure of interrelationships among varieties of wellbeing, (3) integration of wellbeing theory with the ongoing cumulative theory development in the fields of attitude and related research. Achieving the second and third purposes just listed was facilitated by a formal proof of the proposition that wellbeing is a special case of attitude. This proof, in turn, was made possible by the formal definitional systems provided for wellbeing and for attitude.

In a recent paper in Social Indicators Research, Andrews and McKennell (1980) address themselves to the distinction between cognitive and affective wellbeing, basing themselves on the ‘assumption’ that wellbeing is a special case of attitude. They give no justification for this ‘assumption’, and it does not appear to be consistent with Andrew’s previous discussions of the concept of wellbeing (cf. Andrews, 1974). They do not mention that the proposi-
tion was proffered five years earlier—in this same journal—by Levy and Guttman, nor do they refer to the fact that the proposition was actually proved then. Indeed, Andrews and McKennell (1980) take no cognizance at all of the 1975 paper, nor of the substantial related literature also available to them.

Careful analysis of the Andrews—McKennell paper gives reason to believe that it represents no advance in the field of research on wellbeing, neither in terms of definitional rigor and theoretical fruitfulness, nor in terms of replicated data analysis. To the contrary, theirs appears to be a good example of scientific retrogression. Such a lapse in scholarship on the part of such prominent researchers suggests that there may be merit in contrasting some details of that 1980 paper of Andrews—McKennell with the 1975 treatment of Levy—Guttman, to see wherein lies the retrogression.

Among major points that could well be enlarged on, two seem most important for illuminating basic issues. First: Andrews and McKennell appear to have fallen victim to a widespread looseness of terminology in confusing ‘varieties’ of behavior with ‘components’ of behavior. Second: they have embarked on a peculiar boot-strap type of estimation of ‘contributions to variance’ made by concepts which were never defined in the first place. The results of the Andrews—McKennell paper turn out to be mere artifacts of arbitrary assumptions—some untested, some untestable, and some false—and are not integrated with any cumulative substantive theory.

Let us discuss first the definitional problem, then the data analysis, and finally the integration of definitions and data analysis into the process of cumulative theory construction and theory testing.

I. THREE VARIETIES OF BEHAVIOR

From ancient times to the present, distinction has been made among three varieties of behavior: cognitive, affective, and instrumental. Behavior, of course, can be classified by many further facets, yielding subvarieties of behavior such as attitude, intelligence, involvement and others. To distinguish the classical trio from other facets for classifying behavior, we have called it the behavioral modality facet. Accordingly, each subvariety of behavior defined by other facets can be subdivided further into the three modalities: cognitive, affective and instrumental.