Beyond GDP without Indicators

Indicators, whether used singly or in combinations, can never measure progress in Well-being or Life Satisfaction. This limitation arises because indicators are always proxies for something, not that something.

Consider a fuel gauge, which indicates fuel level relative to tank fullness but does not reveal actual fuel volume. Just as fuel volume can exceed gauge indication, so Life Satisfaction and Well-being can exceed their scores. The volume of fuel in a three-quarters full tank for a series of automobiles having increasing automotive horsepower will rise even though their fuel level indicates the same in each. This fuel paradox is analogous to what Easterlin observed with Life Satisfaction indicators, and reveals that such scores have been previously treated in a conceptually flawed manner[†].

What we buy today has more 'horsepower' to do a better job differently than it did in the past. As a result Life Satisfaction and Well-being now have altered meanings that must be captured. Just consider the emerging 1950s teenage culture,

> Transistors made radios small enough to listen to secretly at night. Their parent's shellac 78s were fragile. PVC singles were inexpensive and could be lent or taken to parties. Synthetic fabrics made clothes more colorful and stylish. The advent of hairspray allowed new hair styles. Saturday jobs made it affordable. For the first time in cultural history young people could separate from their parents without leaving home. And the perceived qualities, by teenagers, of their new objects denoted that pursuit and change.

So when everyday objects evolve the meaning of Life Satisfaction evolves with them. To account for this and to properly measure and incorporate hedonic growth, an equivalent to fuel 'volume' in life must be found. Fortunately this measure now exists in the form of the variable Sum:**Q**. Taken further, a sum of perceived qualities (in life) net of associated burdens, net Sum:**Q can** indeed take us beyond GDP without indicators.

[†] Specifically, the flaw arises because Life Satisfaction is implicitly scored **relative** to the *status quo*. As such it should **not** be compared with **absolute** measures, such as income or GDP but to other relative measures, such as family income divided by average income, which wouldn't vary much either.