

Can Good Life Be Measured? The Dimensions and Measurability of a Life Worth Living

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Abstract While well-being and happiness have become focal topics of psychological research, questions of good life have been mainly left to philosophers. This is an untenable state of affairs, as it leads to an overemphasis on one dimension of good life while failing to acknowledge that there are centrally important sources of value beyond one's own happiness that people deeply care about. Therefore, we need more understanding and research on the other potential dimensions of good life. Accordingly, in this chapter I first argue that any proposed dimension of good life should be something that is intrinsically valuable, generally used when evaluating a life, and not derivative of other proposed dimensions. Based on these criteria, I suggest that at least well-being, moral praiseworthiness, meaning in life, and authenticity should be counted as independent dimensions of a good life. Accordingly, I examine these four dimensions in more detail, paying special attention to the question whether they can be measured using standard quantitative evaluation methods. It is concluded that most aspects of good life can in principle be measured, but certain important caveats apply to interpreting these results. All in all, this essay aims not to provide firm conclusions about the dimensions of good life, but rather invite other researchers into a serious discussion about the dimensions of good life and how psychology as a science can start to properly examine them.

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Humans strive to live a good life. This much can be granted, no matter what school of thought one comes from. Everyone wants their life to be good rather than bad. A good life is “a life that is desirable and choice worthy on the whole: not just morally good, or good *for* the individual leading it, but good, all things considered—good, *period*” (Haybron, 2008, p. 36). However, there are considerable

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disagreements about what makes a life good, and what are the “all things” that should be considered when evaluating a life as good or bad. Usually, psychology has concentrated on the question of well-being and its constituent elements (e.g., Bradburn, 1969; Keyes, 2002; Ryff, 1989), leaving the question of good life to philosophers. For example, the “ultimate goal of positive psychology is,” according to its founder, “to make people happier” by increasing scientific understanding of the dimensions and sources of well-being (Seligman et al., 2004, p. 1379). Accordingly, in recent decades, researchers have accumulated a much more nuanced view of what psychological well-being is about (see Forgeard et al., 2011; Huppert & So, 2013; Martela, 2016a) and hundreds or even thousands of studies have uncovered what factors are affecting it (see, e.g., Diener, 2012; Veenhoven, 2014). Simultaneously, national accounts of well-being that are meant to be used to evaluate various policy questions have been adopted and discussed in various countries (see Diener, 2012). These are welcome developments in societies and cultures that have been too obsessed with gross domestic production and financial prosperity.

However, the trouble with this focus on well-being is that it easily creates the illusion that personal well-being is all that matters in life. When one focuses only on well-being, other dimensions of good life are easily reduced to mere antecedents of well-being rather than being outcomes in their own right (King, 2001). Furthermore, Western culture is often depicted as individualistic and self-centered: We believe that individual is an “independent, self-contained, autonomous entity” (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 224). This has led to the norm of self-interest becoming dominant to the point where people “have difficulty articulating the richness of their commitments” as “the person who thinks in terms of the common good is a “sucker” in a situation where each individual is trying to pursue his or her own interests” (Bellah et al., 1985, pp. 20, 16). This reduction of human nature into a *homo economicus* (see, e.g., Bowles & Gintis, 1993) harmfully narrows people’s sphere of choices to the self-interested options and does not do justice to the real-life richness of human commitments and values. Within philosophy, many thinkers have dismissed the vanity of reducing the human condition into only one value dimension (see, e.g., Dewey, 1930; Williams, 1985). Nozick’s (1974, p. 42) famous pleasure machine thought experiment and other philosophical arguments (of which I say more later) have been used to demonstrate the separateness and irreducibility of various dimensions of good life—for example that pleasure is a separate intrinsic good from morality and meaningfulness (Wolf, 2014). As biological and cultural creatures, humans are subject to several separate influences from which there can arrive separate intrinsically valued issues that are not derivative to each other. Based on these discussions, it seems clear that humans care about other things than personal pleasure and well-being, and this should be reflected in the scientific theories about human nature and good life.

Psychology as a science, and positive psychology in particular, should thus broaden its scope to study also the other elements of good life beyond well-being. As Wong (2011, p. 69) has argued, the overarching mission of positive psychology should be “to answer the fundamental questions of what makes life worth living and

how to improve life for all people.” There have been a few studies that have examined lay conceptions of happiness, meaning in life, wealth, effort, and maturity as dimensions of good life (King, 2001; King & Napa, 1998; Scollon & King, 2004), a study examining lay conceptions of happiness, good life, and satisfaction (Carlquist et al., 2016), and a study examining the linguistic roots and the cross-cultural limitations of the concept “good life” (Wierzbicka, 2009). However, these studies have not even tried to offer any comprehensive typology of dimensions of good life. Others have suggested that quality of life should include both qualities internal to the subject such as well-being and qualities external to the subject such as its external utility to others (Veenhoven, 2000). Despite these suggestions and initial efforts, psychological research is still lacking a proper discussion of what makes a life good.

In order to seriously study the basic dimensions of good living, we need to know more about them. Most essentially, what are the potential basic dimensions of a good life and how can we recognize one? And is it possible to reliably measure and examine them using quantitative methods? These are the questions of the present essay, and in addition to psychological research, I borrow much from philosophy in aiming to answer them. I start by offering three criteria that any potential basic dimension of good life has to fulfill, followed by four suggestions of what these basic dimensions could be. After that, I examine each of these four dimensions in turn, looking especially at the question of how reliably one could measure them. As this is a relatively new topic, my suggestions and conclusions should be treated as preliminary, as an invitation into a more proper dialogue about the basic dimensions of good life and what could psychology in the future learn about them.

A Typology of Good Life

A life can be good in many ways. For example, a life high on well-being seems to be—other things being equal—better than a life full of misery. However, one can also evaluate a certain life based on its moral qualities: Certain life can include morally better choices and outcomes than another life. These two dimensions, well-being and moral praiseworthiness, seem to be separate evaluations (Martela, 2016b; see Wolf, 2014): One can easily think about behavior that increases personal well-being while decreasing moral praiseworthiness (e.g., a kid stealing candy from his brother), and vice versa (e.g., skipping a long-awaited holiday trip to care for a sick relative). As already Kant (1785) argued, the justification for why we should behave morally can’t rely on our own personal happiness. We seem to care about living morally not because it brings us happiness, but as something that is valuable as such (e.g., Wolf, 2014). Beyond modern Western societies, the clash between fulfilling one’s moral obligation and the temptation to pursue one’s personal well-being is present in folklore and stories around the world. A classical example is found in Plato who tells the story of shepherd Gyges who comes in possession of a magical ring that makes him invisible (Plato, 1968, 359d–360d). He uses the ring

to kill the king, seduce the queen, and take over the kingdom. Plato uses the story as an example that sometimes the temptation to do the immoral act is so strong that most everybody will give in: “no man can be imagined to be of such an iron nature that he would stand fast in justice.”

Thus, we have here already identified two qualities that seem to be important yet independent dimensions of what makes one life better than another, well-being and morality. “Better” here can be understood to mean more choice worthy: If any person has to make a choice between two different lives, what are the things one looks at in order to make that choice? In other words, what are the things that can make one life more attractive than another, and when making a choice within a life, what are the general sources of value we humans base this choice on?

More formally, and building on Haybron (2008), I see that every candidate dimension of good life should carry the following characteristics: (1) *It should be intrinsically valuable*. In other words, it should be something that is valued as such, independent of the other sources of intrinsic value. (2) *It should be something humans generally use when evaluating a life*. It should be natural to look at a life and make an evaluation based on how well it fulfills this dimension. If one is given a choice between two different life paths, this dimension should make a difference: If a person is told that a certain life is otherwise good, but lacks gravely in this dimension, this should count as a strong counterargument against choosing that kind of life. And this should not be the case only for a specific group of people, but various people across cultures should naturally care about whether or not the given dimension is present in a life. (3) *It should not be derivative of, or a subtype of another dimension*. We are looking for the most broad dimensions of a good life, and although many of these dimensions probably can be broken down into certain more specific subdimensions, it is important to keep the general overarching types and the subtypes separate. For example, although it is nice to have joy in life, joy should be treated as one subdimension of well-being rather than its own independent dimension.

Given these criteria, the most obvious candidate for a dimension of good life is well-being. People in general care about how much well-being there is within their life. In making choices, well-being is one thing they are seeking after: People try to avoid various painful experiences and seek out various positive experiences. By well-being, I thus refer to the subjective sense of how a life is experienced. It includes all types of subjective experiences humans have within a life: feelings, emotions, sensory experiences, evaluations and so forth. This subjective experiential dimension of how a certain life feels is one important consideration to take into account when making an evaluation about the goodness and choice worthiness of a certain life, and thus one central dimension of what it means for a life to be good.

As already discussed, another central dimension of good life is moral goodness or praiseworthiness (Haybron, 2008; Wolf, 1997a). No matter the culture, humans seem to care about whether a certain choice leads to morally good or bad outcomes.

People sometimes abstain from doing something that could increase their well-being in order to not break some moral commitment. Being morally good—or at the very least avoiding being morally bad—is an important consideration for people, and something people frequently use in their everyday evaluations about the goodness of certain actions or certain persons. Excluding perhaps certain pathologies, if people would have to make a choice between two lives, were they to know that the other life is morally exemplary, while the other is particularly wicked, this would influence their choice. Thus, moral praiseworthiness should be seen as an independent source of value for a good life.

Thirdly, I argue that meaningfulness should be seen as a separate dimension of good life. Humans seem to care about the meaningfulness of their lives, and this seems to be true both in Western countries (Heintzelman & King, 2014) and in countries such as Russia (Leontiev, 2013; Tolstoy, 2000) and Japan (Sone et al., 2008; Steger et al., 2008). Furthermore, although meaning is connected to aspects of well-being such as positive affect (see, e.g., King et al., 2006), people seem to care about meaningfulness not only as a source of well-being, but as an independent dimension of value as such. Tolstoy, for example, seemed to have everything necessary to live a happy life, but as long as he felt that he was unable to settle the question about what makes life meaningful, “the best that I could do was to hang myself” (Tolstoy, 2000, p. 16). Life lacking in meaningfulness seems to lack something that cannot be compensated by simply increasing the happiness or well-being of such a life. Accordingly, many philosophers (Martela, 2016b; Metz, 2013, Chap. 4; Wolf, 1997b) and psychologists (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2013) have argued for the separateness of well-being and meaningfulness, and although well-being boils down to subjective states of the individual, meaningfulness of a life is often thought to be relatively independent of how a person feels about that life. Thus, I take meaningfulness to be a third independent intrinsic value that can be used in evaluating a life as good.

Fourthly, authenticity could be seen as a separate type of goodness a life can exhibit (see Taylor, 1991). Existential philosophers like Kierkegaard (1992) or Sartre (2007) and humanistic psychologists like Maslow (1968) and Rogers (1961) have endorsed authentic way of living and lifted it into a central value of a person’s life. Similarly Becker (1992, p. 20) stated that “autonomous lives have a dignity that is immeasurable, incommensurable, infinite, beyond price.” There thus seems to be something intrinsically valuable about authenticity, as people care about it not only as a source of well-being, but even in situations where it does not contribute to well-being. The classical philosophical thought experiment (Nozick, 1974, p. 42) asks us to imagine being plugged to a machine that would allow us to live—unbeknown to us—in a virtual reality where we would have all kinds of pleasurable experiences. Still, not many would choose such life as the well-being experienced would not be “authentic” but the result of an illusion. Authenticity thus means two things: One is aware of the real circumstances of one’s life, and one is able to live in a way that expresses who one truly is. Authenticity is thus about integrity,

autonomy, and self-expression being present within one's life, and I argue that they represent a fourth independent way a life can be good. Some might argue that authenticity is a peculiarly Western value and not endorsed in many other cultures, and I will get back to this issue later, aiming to show that it has more wide appeal than these critics admit.

Beyond these four dimensions (see Fig. 1), I am not aware of other strong candidates for independent qualities that could be used to evaluate a life as better or worse (see, however, Becker, 1992). Haybron (2008) suggests that perhaps even some aesthetics qualities in a life could form a separate dimension of the goodness of a life. We might say that a certain life is more beautiful than another life, and perhaps this beauty exhibited in a life is separate from the other dimensions of a good life. But this idea would need to be elaborated in more detail before it can be evaluated properly. At the face value, it seems hard to think how this evaluation of the aesthetic quality of a life is made. Thus, at present point I would not include aesthetics as a dimension of a good life, even though the idea has some intuitive merit.

More generally, the list of the four dimensions of good life is not meant to be exhaustive, but could be revised in the future if a strong enough case is made for some other dimensions of a good life. I am merely arguing that these four dimensions should *at least* be taken into account when evaluating the goodness and choice worthiness of a certain life. In particular, the potential cultural bias of the suggested four factors must be acknowledged. In coming up with the four dimensions, I have mainly drawn from Western philosophy and Western psychology, and thus, it would be crucial to examine other traditions and cultures more carefully to see whether all of these four dimensions are consistently found in other cultures. Also, it is important to consider whether there are other dimensions of good life that are more strongly present in some other cultures, but that remain less acknowledged in Western cultures. For example, fulfilling one's role in society has been a central dimension through which the successfulness of a life has been examined in ancient Greece and other cultures (see, e.g., MacIntyre, 1966), and accordingly, it would be interesting to examine whether the notion of morality is enough to cover that dimension or whether we should see it as an independent potential dimension of a good life.

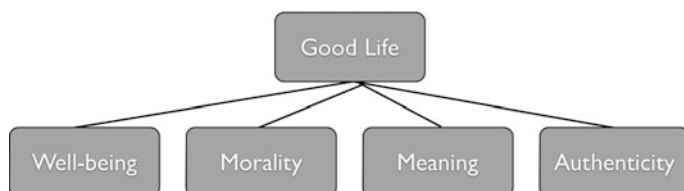


Fig. 1 Four dimensions of a good life

Nevertheless, let us proceed with the preliminary list of four dimensions of a good life and take a look at each of them in more detail paying special attention to the question whether they could be measured.

Measuring Well-Being

There are in essence three distinct things psychologists tend to measure when they want to measure subjective dimensions of psychological well-being (see Haybron, 2008). First, one can measure a subject's overall cognitive evaluation of one's life. Most often this cognitive evaluation is referred to as *life satisfaction*. Second, one can aim to measure the affective states of the subject: How much the subject is feeling various *positive and negative affects*. Third, instead of measuring these general subjective states, one can determine a more objective list of things that should be present in order for there to be well-being. Then, one measures the subject's status against this *objective list*. I'll assess each in turn.

Starting with life satisfaction, it is classically defined as "a global assessment of a person's quality of life according to his own chosen criteria" (Shin & Johnson, 1978, p. 478). The idea is to give the subject freedom to choose one's own standards against which to assess one's life, rather than imposing researchers' own standards (Diener et al., 1985). Subjects are typically asked to rate their life on one or a few general questions (e.g., where on a ladder between "the best possible life for you" and "the worst possible life for you" your current life stands), and these ratings should then produce a holistic evaluation of the subject's overall quality of life.

Despite its simplicity, life satisfaction has faced its own critics as several potential biases have been identified (see, e.g., Brulé & Veenhoven, 2017). Some have claimed that "being satisfied" with one's life is not high enough end point for the measure as one can be "merely" satisfied with one's life without being enthusiastic about it (Andrews & Withey, 1976, p. 19). More seriously, it has been claimed that people's life satisfaction evaluations do not seem to exhibit the sort of stability that would be expected of them. For example, participants reporting their overall life satisfaction and happiness on a rainy day were significantly less satisfied and happy than participants reporting them on a sunny day (Schwarz & Clore, 1983), and participant's who found a single coin on the floor before reporting their life satisfaction had significantly higher scores on the measure (Schwarz, 1983; reported in Schwarz & Strack, 1991). These results, significant question-order effects, and low test-retest correlations made Schwarz and Strack (1999, pp. 79, 80) to conclude that instead of being informed judgments of one's life as a whole, life satisfaction judgments are "best considered constructions in response to particular questions posed at a particular time," and too "context-dependent to provide reliable information about a population's well-being." However, later research has failed to replicate some of the pessimistic findings of Schwarz and colleagues (e.g., the question-order effect, Schimmack & Oishi, 2005), and meta-analysis of test-retest

correlations found retest correlations to be relatively high, especially over shorter time periods of up to 1 year (Schimmack & Oishi, 2005). The convergent validity of life satisfaction judgments has also been demonstrated as it is consistently found to be correlated positively with many valued outcomes such as health, wealth, and being active, and negatively with depression and mortality (see Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). On the other hand, some novel cultural biases have been identified more recently, such as the curious finding that in some countries, but not others, number 10 is chosen more often than number 9 on a scale from 1 to 10 (Brulé & Veenhoven, 2017). Nevertheless—despite criticism and aware of the potential biases—it is fair to say that life satisfaction judgments seem to be stable enough and not too influenced by contextual factors so that they are in this sense up to the task of measuring subject's well-being (Eid & Diener, 2004; Schimmack & Oishi, 2005).

Turning to affective accounts of well-being, they generally aim to measure various types of positive and negative affects to settle how much the individual is experiencing them in their lives. Most common approaches ask people to recall how much they have experienced a specific list of affects during the last few weeks or longer time periods (e.g., PANAS, see Watson et al., 1988). Some researchers have, however, challenged human ability to recall past affect, showing that we can be surprisingly inept and biased at recalling how much positive and negative affect we experienced during a recent holiday or other event (Mitchell et al., 1997; Wirtz et al., 2003). Thus, another popular approach is experience sampling method, where people are asked to rate their current affect daily or during random times within a day (Csikszentmihalyi & Hunter, 2003). Similarly, Day Reconstruction Method asks participants to divide their previous day into episodes and rate their affect within each of these episodes (Kahneman et al., 2004). These methods thus aim to overcome the problems with recall by asking people to rate their current or very recent affects. Even such methods can be biased by response styles and other issues (see Watson & Tellegen, 2002) and lack of self-awareness as regards one's emotions (see Haybron, 2008), but should generally provide relatively reliable information about the affective situation of the person in question. Thus, if affects is all that we are interested in, self-reports can provide quite reliable information for research purposes even though we must be aware that there might be special cases where people are especially blind to their own emotions.

Objective list theories of well-being have challenged the focus on affects and life satisfaction as too narrow arguing that there is more to well-being than these factors. For example, based on a wide reading of theoretical literature on psychological functioning, Ryff (1989) proposed that there are six core dimensions of well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and personal growth. More recently, Huppert and So (2013) deduced ten symptoms of well-being by looking at the mirror opposites of the symptoms for depression and generalized anxiety. The logic behind these theories is that there are certain theoretical reasons to conclude that well-being consists of certain elements, and thus instead of asking about general well-being, it makes sense to ask people to rate their lives as regards these dimensions. The

obvious counterargument is that here the researcher is defining the central elements of well-being *for* the subject, instead of allowing the subject to define well-being as they wish. This could be countered, if the researcher could offer a compelling enough argument based on psychology, biology and other sciences for the inclusion of certain elements into well-being. However, we are not there yet. Instead, there are a number of competing theories of well-being—in addition to Ryff’s six elements and Huppert and So’s ten elements, Seligman (2011) offered five elements of well-being, and Keyes (2002) offered thirteen elements—without there existing any clear theoretical criteria that could be used to settle which of these elements really should be counted as part of well-being and which not (see Martela, 2016a). What is needed is thus theoretical work that would aim to settle which of the proposed elements have the most compelling theoretical backing to be included as constitutive elements of human well-being. Until that, we have to settle with the competing and variously grounded lists offered by different theorists.

Given that all measures reviewed seem to have some challenges, but still seem to tap into something important about human well-being, I see that it would be best to move beyond measuring a single construct and instead measure multiple dimensions of well-being simultaneously. SWB already does this as it measures both positive and negative affect as well as life satisfaction, but we could go beyond SWB in two ways. First, there seem to be important factors beyond these three that could be measured also, especially as regards psychological functioning. Accordingly, I suggest (see Martela, 2016a) that we should also measure the satisfaction of the three psychological needs for autonomy, competence, relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000) along with positive affect, negative affect, life satisfaction, and vitality. Perhaps we should also measure some attitudes such as optimism or self-worth. This kind of a broader measurement of dimensions of well-being would provide more holistic information about the nature of well-being of an individual.

Additionally, instead of only reporting the aggregate scores, it would be important to report separately the scores on different elements of well-being. This would yield much richer picture of the individual’s state of well-being as compared to a single overall score. Two persons can have the same overall score, but one can be high on autonomy and low on relatedness, while the situation can be the opposite for the other, and thus, the nature of their well-being can be quite different. Overall then, I believe that—although various biases contaminate the answers—with rich enough self-reporting instruments, researchers can get a relatively good picture of the individual’s state of psychological well-being.

Measuring Morality

Morality is about the general code of conduct that guides how people should behave, especially toward each other. As Wong (2006, p. 39) has argued, morality “functions to promote beneficial social cooperation” thus enabling communal life through “requiring behavior that is cooperative and considerate of the interests of

others” and through refining and giving expression to feelings that make people promising partners in social cooperation.

As well-being is primarily about the subjective states of the individual, we can get relatively good information about those states by simply asking the subject. However, morality is more about how well the subject’s behavior fits with some external standards. This is a kind of question that lends itself less to self-reports, as people are prone to exhibit several biases when judging their own moral behavior (see Haidt, 2001). More generally, if we want to measure how morally good an individual is, we first need to settle two questions: (1) What are the relevant standards against which the subjects behavior should be assessed? (2) Who can serve as a reliable judge in making this assessment?

Starting with the first question, it is readily acknowledged that different societies and different individuals uphold very different moral standards. Behavior that is considered morally virtuous in one society can be judged as morally wrong in another. There are some commonalities: Hurting or killing innocent people is quite universally considered wrong, and being unfair or breaking agreements is condemned by virtually all. But what is considered fair distribution of resources can vary significantly between different societies (e.g., Henrich et al., 2005), and similarly, the conditions under which it is justified to hurt or kill others can be very different in different societies. Thus, we do not have any universally accepted standard of ethics that could be used to evaluate the moral goodness of a particular life. Instead, the best we can have are a number of culturally bound standards that could be used to evaluate how ethically acceptable a person’s behavior is. There might be cases where most cultures’ ethical standards converge to condemn a certain behavior, but there are also situations where they would offer contradictory judgments.

One way to circumvent the problem with the lack of commonly accepted standard is to use the person’s own ethical standard as the basis for making the judgment whether that person is living morally virtuously or not. However, here we face another problem. People have a great need of seeing their actions as morally acceptable and thus can go to great lengths to justify whatever actions they have conducted. As Haidt (2001) has argued, in evaluating their own lives and actions, people are rarely impartial judges but more like hypocritical defense lawyers trying to make the case for their own moral goodness. Thus, a self-report of one’s moral goodness could not be considered reliable and would most probably have quite remote correlations with any third-party judgments.

This self-evaluation bias could in principle be sidestepped by asking the persons to first articulate the moral standards that they live by. And then ask an outside observer to evaluate their lives against their chosen standards. This, however, is quite cumbersome strategy, especially as people’s moral standards might not be too explicit even to themselves. When asked, most people probably could not articulate all the rules and standards that they see as morally relevant, and thus, the list of standards produced in this way would remain incomplete.

Furthermore, it is not straightforward that the moral standard of any person would do. If we would find out that a serial murderer has moral standards that

endorse murdering innocent people, and thus according to the murderer's own standards no moral harm is done, I assume that most people would still be reluctant to state that the person is living a morally good life. The idea that morality is about some shared standards seems to be inbuilt into at least the Western understanding of morality, inherent already in the etymological origin of the word in the latin *mores*, which translates as customs (Williams, 1985, p. 6). Although my knowledge of how morality is understood in other cultures is limited at best, from the anthropological accounts I've read (e.g., Hirschkind, 2006; Turner, 1969), I have come to understand that seeing morality as a shared standard for conduct rather than something that anybody can choose for themselves is a relatively universal way of understanding morality. Thus, merely relying on a person's subjective standards seems not to be enough for evaluating the moral goodness of a life.

Another strategy would be to use the moral standards of the person's culture or society as the basis of the judgment. However, this approach also faces two problems. First, as regards cultures, they do not have too exact boundaries, and there can be several different, overlapping, and partially disagreeing subcultures that a certain person is more or less part of. Thus, "culture" might be too ambiguous to be used as the relevant source of moral standard. This problem could be side-stepped if, instead of culture, we would use the moral standards of a certain country. If a person is a resident in a certain country, it sounds relevant to evaluate how well that person is adhering to the general moral standards of that country. However, this approach faces the second problem: Countries (or cultures for that matter) usually do not have any clearly defined and widely agreed moral standards that could be used in this judgment. The laws of the country are explicit, but the morality of a country is more or less implicit and there are prone to be several tensions and disagreements within a certain country as regards both specific moral questions and more broad moral frameworks. Furthermore, even if there would be an "official" morality within a country—announced by some religious authority for example—it is a complicated question whether and to what degree all the citizens of that country are supporting it. In some cases, people might be forced to comply with the given standards whether or not they privately subscribe to them (see Glover, 2001). If the "official" morality of a country is oppressive, it seems imperialistic to take that morality as the standard against which an individual's conduct is judged.

Instead of these relativistic alternatives where the morality of a certain individual, culture, or country is taken as definitive, one could argue that the only way to make this judgment is to rely on some more objective moral standard. One could for example take the utilitarian principle of maximizing general utility as the objective standard and then ask the individual oneself, or some relevant observer, to rate the individual's behavior against this principle. Thus, we would be asking one to make an evaluation of how much good and how much harm one's behavior has caused in general. This would then be used to evaluate the person's moral goodness from a utilitarian perspective. However, there are things that make this judgment more complicated such as the significant role of luck in determining the outcomes of a behavior (see Williams, 1981). In responding to various complications, utilitarianism itself has split into various versions, most famous being the distinction

between act utilitarianism (who evaluate the utility of single acts) and rule utilitarianism (who evaluate the utility of behavioral rules). Furthermore, utilitarianism is not the only moral theory in town, deontological ethics and virtue ethics are two influential alternatives, and there are other normative theories beyond them.

Here is not the place to settle the disputes between different versions of utilitarianism or between utilitarianism and its alternatives. The more general point is that while a single definitive moral framework is not available for researchers or for societies, certain moral frameworks and principles have wide cross-cultural appeal and they could be used as the basis of a judgment about moral goodness. Of course, we could not get a judgment of the person's moral goodness *as such*. But we could get a judgment of the person's moral goodness *from the point of view* of (certain version of) utilitarianism, *from the point of view* of certain deontological principles, or *from the point of view* of certain version of virtue ethics. This might not be perfect, but I believe it turns out to be the most fruitful path thus far found to evaluate moral goodness. Although no simple principle is universally endorsed and although no single principle covers the whole spectrum of morality, choosing a list of the most generally and cross-culturally endorsed principles, and asking the person oneself or third-party observers to rate a certain life against those principles might produce some relatively relevant information about the moral goodness of a person.

There are things researchers can measure as regards morality. For example, we can measure people's moral orientations and the extent to which people use different foundations to make their moral judgments (Graham et al., 2009, 2013). We can also measure the strength of people's other-oriented preferences, such as their empathic concern (e.g., Batson et al., 2007, 2009) or prosocial orientation (e.g., Van Lange et al., 1997), which are often thought to lead to morally virtuous behavior (however, see Batson et al., 1995). But there is no easy solution to how to measure the moral goodness of people as such. Individuals themselves are unreliable judges as regards the moral goodness of their own actions. Furthermore, we are lacking objective standards that third-party evaluators could use in order to make this judgment. The best we can probably do is to develop a list of most generally endorsed moral principles and then to develop scales to evaluate a person's life or actions against those moral principles. However, I am not aware that such efforts would have been done, and thus from a measuring point of view this dimension of good life seems to be the most underdeveloped, and perhaps hardest to approach using quantitative assessment methods.

Measuring Meaning in Life

Having for a long time been the domain of philosophers, meaning in life has lately emerged as a vibrant research topic also within psychology (see Wong, 2012). Both philosophers (May, 2015; e.g., Wolf, 2010) and psychologists (Baumeister, 1991; e.g., Frankl, 1963; Martela & Steger, 2016) see the quest for meaning as a

fundamental part of our psychological makeup (Baumeister, 1991; Frankl, 1963; Wong, 1989). However, several observers have noted that the field is still suffering from definitional ambiguity as meaning in life seems to denote not one, but several constructs (Heintzelman & King, 2014; Leontiev, 2013). Recently, a consensus has started to emerge that meaning in life as a psychological construct seems to include three facets (Heintzelman & King, 2014; King et al., 2006; Martela & Steger, 2016): *Coherence* as a “sense of comprehensibility and one’s life making sense,” *purpose* as a “sense of core goals, aims, and direction in life,” and *significance* as a “sense of life’s inherent value and having a life worth living” (Martela & Steger, 2016, p. 531). People thus seem to seek comprehensibility, direction, and value, and meaning in life is the umbrella term used to describe all three of these strivings. What unites them is a certain need to find a bigger structure within which one’s life is sensible, directed, and valuable.

Measuring this kind of subjective meaning through self-reports should be in principle possible. Whether one’s life seems to be comprehensible, have direction, and have value are all subjective experiences, and thus something that subjects can evaluate. Usual caveats about lack of self-awareness and the possibility of self-deception apply, but there are no specific reasons to think that they would be more problematic as regards meaning in life as compared to life satisfaction or positive affect. As regards existing measures, several scales exist, but nowadays, the most commonly used is the *Meaning in Life Questionnaire Presence of Meaning Scale* (Steger et al., 2006), which asks subjects to evaluate items such as “I understand my life’s meaning” and “My life has a clear sense of purpose.” It seems to include both general items and items related to some of the three facets of meaning such as purpose. Thus, it seems to do a relatively good job in tapping into the general sense of meaning people have in their life. However, if we want to take seriously the division of meaning into coherence, purpose, and significance, we would need separate scales for each of these three facets. Luckily, first steps into measuring the various dimensions separately have just recently been taken (George & Park, 2016; Kashdan & McKnight, 2013).

As important as subjective evaluations of meaning in life are, it should be noted that not all philosophers agree with this subjective standpoint as regards meaning in life. Many argue instead that there is an objective component to meaning in life (e.g., Wolf, 2010; see also Kauppinen, 2016). According to this view, one’s subjective experience of meaning is not all that matters or not at all what matters. Instead, if one’s life fulfills certain external criteria, it is judged as meaningful, and if it falls short of these criteria, it is judged as meaningless, whether or not the subject oneself agrees with this judgment. If we take this objective path, then measuring meaning in life becomes a different matter. Instead of asking the subject, we should first settle on a consensus about what are the relevant external criteria that make life meaningful or not, and then aim to evaluate a certain life based on those external criteria.

Some have argued that this external criterion should be the objective positive contribution that one’s life is able to make to the wider world (Martela, 2016b; see Singer, 2010; Smuts, 2013). In fact, I argue that as regards good life, this external

contribution that a life is able to make could be seen as one independent dimension of good life, whether we use the label “meaningfulness” or some other label to describe it. For example, Veenhoven (2000) argues that one independent quality that a life can exhibit is its external utility and that this quality is sometimes denoted as “meaning of life.” This external utility thus might be an independent dimension of good life in need of a proper label. And actually it might be the most viable way to define meaning in life as an independent dimension of good life, as some might argue that the subjective evaluations of coherence or purpose could also be seen as subdimensions of well-being rather than separate dimensions of good life. Thus, I suggest that we should seriously consider taking this objective path as regards how to define meaning in life. As regards measurement, if we would agree that meaning in life is determined by how much good one is able to produce into the world through one’s life, then this could be used as the standard against which the subject oneself, or a relevant observer, evaluates the life. However, to my knowledge such evaluations have not been done within psychological research thus far.

Thus, we could conclude by noting that if meaning is understood as a subjective experience, then it should lend itself to self-evaluation measurement (bearing in mind the usual self-evaluation caveats). However, in addition to measuring people’s general sense of meaning, it would be good to have scales that would assess the three recognized facets of subjective meaningfulness separately (coherence, purpose, significance) in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of subjective meaningfulness. This approach must also make it clear how subjective meaningfulness would be different from subjective well-being and not merely a subdimension of well-being. Accordingly, it would be good to examine more seriously the possibility that the external contribution a life is able to make should be seen as an independent dimension of a good life, and whether this dimension is actually what we should label as the meaning of a life.

Measuring Authenticity

Authenticity means that the person is aware of the real situation of one’s life (instead of being deceived) and is able to live one’s life according to one’s internal standards. It is thus about self-expression and staying true to oneself. It is a peculiar type of value and striving in that it requires a certain view of the self (Baumeister, 1987; Taylor, 1989). Historical accounts have noted that the modern idea of a self with inner depths is a relatively recent invention. In medieval times and before, a person was defined first and foremost by one’s roles and one’s explicit behavior (Baumeister, 1987; MacIntyre, 1966). It took a slow historical process for people to become aware and interested in the inner “true” and personally unique self. Without first having such an awareness of one’s unique selfhood and inner depths, it is impossible to value living in congruence with these inner depths. This historical shift in self-awareness was a prerequisite for it to become possible to start to endorse authenticity as a centrally important value in life. One could thus make a

relatively convincing case that authenticity as a dimension of good life is peculiar to the individualistic Western countries, and does not have wide appeal in other cultures that are more collectivistic and value the person's capability to fulfill their assigned roles over any individual preferences.

However, there are two kinds of evidence that speak against this conclusion of authenticity being a culture-specific value. First, research has shown that whether or not authenticity is culturally endorsed, the ability to live authentically is connected to well-being in both individualistic and collectivistic countries. For example, Chirkov et al. (2003) showed that following cultural practices for more internalized (and thus more authentic) reasons was positively connected to well-being in South Korea, Turkey, Russia, and USA. Similarly, Chen et al. (2015) showed that sense of autonomy and volition was connected to well-being in Belgium, China, USA, and Peru, and this association between autonomy and well-being was not moderated by how much the persons in question desired autonomy.

Even more interestingly, Welzel (2013) has shown that as material living conditions improve, more and more cultures are making the shift toward endorsing self-expressive and individualistic values. Using the World Values Survey (which covers 95 nations) as a database, he identified a set of questions measuring *emancipative values* by which he means autonomy, choice, equality, and voice, which thus broadly cover people's valuation of authenticity. Along his many analyses are two that are most relevant for present discussion: First, technological advancement of the society accounts for 60% of the cross-national variance in emancipative values thus showing that the material conditions of a society are a central factor explaining why certain societies endorse more strongly emancipative values. Second, young people (born after 1970) in every studied society place stronger emphasis on emancipative values than older people (born before 1950). There is thus a clear global trend toward more emancipative values that is likely due to the increased industrialization of societies around the world. It is also important to remember that before the industrial revolution authenticity and emancipative values were probably no more popular in Western countries than they were in other countries. Authenticity as a value thus seems to result from a shift in the material living conditions that took place through the industrial revolution. Thus, its alleged "Westernity" is just the result of industrial revolution taking first place in Western countries. As more and more countries are making the shift into industrialized and post-industrialized societies, authenticity and self-expression are strengthening as values across the world. Authenticity as an intrinsic value thus seems to exist as a potential in humanity, but it can really start to bloom only when material living conditions allow one to concentrate on what is inside of oneself.

How about the measurability of authenticity then? As it is about staying true to oneself and thus following one's internal standards in living, at face value it sounds like something that lends itself easily to self-evaluation. Who else could know how true I am to my innermost strivings than myself? Of course, as with other dimensions, we have to acknowledge the very real possibility that people's awareness of their own authenticity might be limited and people also could engage in self-denial refusing to acknowledge the ways in which they fail to live up to the

standard of authenticity. So any measurement of authenticity will not be perfect, but one must always take the results with a grain of salt. However, acknowledging these shortcomings, authenticity should not be any harder to measure with self-evaluation than, say, positive affect and life satisfaction.

In fact, a few validated scales of authenticity exist. Most notable is perhaps the scale by Wood et al. (2008), who divide the construct of authenticity into three dimensions: (1) Self-alienation: how consciously aware the person is about one's actual emotions and deep-level values; (2) authentic living: behaving and expressing emotions that are congruent with one's beliefs, emotions, and values; and (3) accepting external influences: The extent to which one is willing to conform to the expectations of others. Each of these three dimensions is measured with four items, and Wood et al. (2008) have shown that the dimensions are connected to various aspects of well-being such as positive and negative affect, stress, anxiety, life satisfaction, and self-esteem. A few other scales of authenticity exist, but they have poorer psychometric properties (Goldman and Kernis, 2002), or measure authenticity within certain roles (Sheldon et al., 1997). Thus, Wood et al.'s scale seems to be the best available scale at the moment, and it has been subsequently used in various research studies (e.g., Gino et al., 2010; Kifer et al., 2013). A peer-rated version of the scale has also been constructed (Susing et al., 2011). Thus, it can be concluded that authenticity is a dimension of good life that could be argued to be universal and that could in principle be measured (keeping in mind the usual shortcomings of self-evaluations), and a validated scale for its measurement exists. Thus, one could argue that authenticity should be—and can be—included in future empirical studies of good life.

Conclusion

Since the start of the positive psychology movement in 1999 (see Seligman, 1999), we have seen an increased emphasis on human well-being and happiness as a research topic, as a policy target, and as a life goal for individuals. Research has generated increasingly sophisticated knowledge about the nature of human well-being and how to increase it. Thus, the modern individual wanting to be happy, or the modern society wanting to make its citizens happy, can rely on much more reliable resources in their striving than what were available just a few decades ago. Although many open questions and various competing political interests remain, there has probably never been a time in history that would have been so supportive of human happiness than what we are experiencing today, especially in post-industrialized societies.

This is all good. Well-being and happiness are truly important, and it is a healthy development that modern societies have liberated people to pursue their own happiness instead of forcing them into predetermined roles. However, this pursuit of happiness becomes unhealthy when it overrides all the other dimensions of good life. Many observers have criticized what they see as a modern overemphasis on

happiness, aiming to show how behind this allegedly neutral pursuit for happiness are powerful political and commercial interests who use it to advance their own ends (e.g., Cederström & Spicer, 2015; Davies, 2015; Nussbaum, 2008). When life is reduced to mere “mood management” (King, 2001, p. 53), many important dimensions are left out. Furthermore, empirical research has shown that people obsessed with improving their happiness actually have less well-being than those who put less emphasis on this pursuit (Gruber et al., 2011; Mauss et al., 2011), partly because this strive to optimize happiness can make people unable to be satisfied with anything. So overemphasizing happiness might not be a good strategy from both a societal and a personal perspective.

However, I don’t believe that the most effective way to oppose the alleged overemphasis on happiness is to just criticize it. As essentially active beings, humans need something to strive toward in life (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Frankl, 1963). Thus, what is needed is more emphasis given to other inherent values in life beyond personal happiness. In other words, we need a more balanced account of the good life that acknowledges happiness and self-expression as invaluable, but equally acknowledges morality and meaningfulness as central dimensions of a good life. In making this more balanced view of good life a reality, psychology as a science can play its own part. In particular, psychology could do two things: First, start a serious discussion about the various dimensions of a good life; second, start to measure and gather empirical data around all recognized dimensions of a good life. This essay has been my humble attempt to start such a conversation. The four dimensions offered, and the discussions around how to measure each of them, should thus be seen as first attempt to map out the territory around good life. Much more research—both theoretical and empirical—is needed around these topics to really make this empirical science of good life possible.

Also, while aiming to make empirical science about various dimensions of good life possible, we have to recognize that there are always going to be aspects of good life that do not easily lend themselves to measurement, but which nevertheless should receive their due weight in individual and societal decision-making. Measurement should not make us blind to dimensions that are not measurable. Unfortunately, this blindness is often the case in political and other societal decision-making, and thus efforts to make certain dimensions of good life more measurable are also efforts to make them more respected and to give them more weight in actual decision-making.

Camus (1955, p. 94) has powerfully argued that “judging whether life is or is not worth living” is the “fundamental question in philosophy.” In making such a judgment, we take into account all types of different factors that can make us have different types of pro-attitudes toward a certain life and thus evaluate it as more or less worthy. This evaluation is thus not only about happiness or the economic maximization of personal benefits. This evaluation is also about—at least—the moral goodness, meaningfulness, and authenticity present in a life. Expanding Camus’ insight I see that this question of what makes life good and worth living is

not only the fundamental question in philosophy, but should be the fundamental question also in all sciences dealing with humans, including behavioral sciences such as psychology. It is about time that psychologists step up to the noble task of building theories of what makes life worth living.

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