



The  
British  
Psychological  
Society

Social Psychology Section

# Social Psychological Review

Volume 9 Number 1  
April 2007

ISSN: 1369-7862

# Developing conceptions of well-being: Advancing subjective, hedonic and eudaimonic theories

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*This paper reviews and challenges academic ideas of well-being. It begins by outlining the dominant approach to defining and measuring well-being, known as subjective well-being (SWB). Having examined its cognitive and affective components and corresponding measures, the paper progresses to question SWB by introducing the distinction between hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. Next, the viability and limitations of the eudaimonic paradigm are discussed, including the lack of conceptual coherence in the current definitions of eudaimonic well-being. Finally, the paper examines the potential role of qualitative research on well-being to help refine develop and refine the concept of well-being.*

What is the highest of all goals achievable by actions? ... both the general run of man and people of superior refinement say it is happiness ... but with regard to what happiness is, they differ.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, Chapter 4.

**H**APPINESS HAS BEEN A TOPIC OF interest for many centuries, from Ancient Greek philosophy, through Post-Enlightenment West-European moral philosophy (especially Utilitarianism) to Humanistic psychology and current quality-of-life and well-being research in the social, political and economic sciences (Veenhoven, 1991). Aristotle defined happiness as a supreme good, the only value in life that is 'final' and sufficient. Final in a sense that everything else is merely means to this end, sufficient in that once happiness is achieved, nothing else is needed or desired (Diener, 1993).

Currently the field of well-being is flourishing, both in terms of increasing research output, and the public and political interest in the topic. There are a number of reasons for this. Western countries have achieved a sufficient level of affluence that survival is no longer such a dominating question in many people's lives. For the comfortably off quality of life can become more important than the issues of economic prosperity. Politicians and economists are also developing an

interest in non-financial indicators of well-being and quality of life (e.g. Layard, 2005). A number of reliable measures of subjective well-being have been developed (Diener, Lucas & Oishi, 2002).

An investigation on the PsycINFO illustrates the expansion trends in the well-being research output. For example, a comparison of all research publications on well-being and depression using the basic search reveals 113,428 entries on depression between 1872 and 2006 and 22,545 on well-being for the same period. This yields a ratio of 5:1. The ratio stayed at 4.5:1 during the last 20 years, decreasing to 3.8:1 in the last 10 years and further to 3.5:1 in the last five. If we consider a more specific well-being construct, such as subjective well-being, and compare it with undoubtedly more general constructs of depression and anxiety, we can also observe decreases in the original gulf between these topics of study. Thus, an overall comparison between depression and subjective well-being yields the ratio of 72:1, decreasing to 61:1 in the last 20 years, to 51:1 in the last 10 and staying at 52:1 in the last five. This

decrease is particularly notable considering that between 1872 and 1978 the ratio was around 750:1 (Linley & Joseph, 2004). A similar picture can be observed comparing the research output on anxiety and subjective well-being with an overall ratio at 63:1, ratio in the last 20 years being 47:1, 40:1 in the last 10, and 37:1 in the last five. Recently the co-ordinated effort of the advocates of positive psychology, the movement concerned with the scientific study of flourishing in human beings, has been increasingly successful in attracting both public and corporate funding for well-being related research.

Reviews of well-being research can be found in Diener (1984), DeNeve and Cooper (1998), Diener *et al.* (1999), and Diener *et al.* (2002). These articles address the benefits, correlates and predictors of well-being, multiple theories of relations between personality and well-being, theoretical accounts of well-being and between-nation differences. However, these reviews tend to take for granted the centrality of subjective well-being as a construct, and fail to question the conceptual appropriateness of this framework. In contrast, the current paper provides an overview and critique of the existing definitions of well-being and their corresponding measurements. It enriches and extends the review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being by Ryan and Deci (2001) by not only challenging the dominant paradigm of subjective well-being, but by reviewing the latest research on and questioning the conceptual coherence of the eudaimonic well-being construct. In this process, the review also draws on the qualitative studies of well-being that contribute to the development of conceptual clarity about well-being.

### **Subjective well-being: The dominant approach to defining and measuring well-being**

Amongst the many concepts that have much in common with the term happiness are self-actualisation, contentment, adjustment, economic prosperity, welfare and well-being.

The classification of happiness and well-being developed by Veenhoven (1991) organises them according to scope of influence (individual well-being, collective well-being and mixed conceptions) and objectivity/subjectivity principles.

The notion of *subjective well-being* (SWB) is a recognised substitute in research literature to the more commonly used term happiness. SWB is considered a multi-dimensional construct, which encompasses how people evaluate their own lives in terms of both affective and cognitive components of well-being (Diener, 2000). SWB is not the only conception of well-being currently offered, but is the dominant one at present. In this paper, the notions of happiness and subjective well-being are used interchangeably.

Veenhoven (1991) poses the question of whether happiness can be measured objectively or only subjectively. He argues that it cannot be measured objectively because no overt behaviours are linked to happiness in a reliable manner. For example, an outgoing and friendly appearance, which is frequently observed among happy people, can also be present in unhappy people. This is probably why surveys are the main method used for studying SWB/happiness. Nobel prize winner Kahneman (1999), on the other hand, expresses dissatisfaction with the concept of subjective WB, arguing for an assessment of objective happiness instead, which he suggests could be derived by averaging multiple records of life experiences over a period of time. This way, happiness assessment does not need to be tied to memory and to retrospective accounts, and flooded with memory-reliant evaluations. 'A ... task is to develop methods that minimise the biases of retrospective assessments in order to achieve a measurement of objective happiness that is at once valid and efficient' (Kahneman, 1999, p.22). It is arguable, however, whether Kahneman's proposal for measuring objective happiness is truly objective, as it still relies on people's subjective judgement.

Subjective well-being is traditionally approached in two ways. The first focuses on

*life satisfaction*, which is normally considered to represent a cognitive component of well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Life satisfaction, according to Veenhoven (1991) is '... the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of his life-as-a-whole favourably. In other words: how well he likes the life he leads' (p.10). One feels satisfied when there is little discrepancy between the present situation and what is thought to be the ideal or deserved standard. Life satisfaction appears to be a unitary dimension, underlying satisfaction with different areas of life, which seems meaningful to people as a personality construct (Lewinsohn, Renda & Seeley, 1991). Ratings of satisfaction with important domains, including self, marriage, family life, work, friends, etc., have been found to be highly inter-correlated and are sometimes combined by various researchers to represent an overall life satisfaction. A number of cognitive models have attempted to explain life satisfaction. Amongst these are comparison models that claim that people evaluate their lives on the basis of comparison between themselves and others. An elaboration of this is the 'Michigan Model', according to which satisfaction is greater when achievements are close to aspirations (Michalos, 1985). Raising aspirations can make satisfaction more difficult as achievement may fall short of desired aspirations (Schwartz, 2000).

The second approach focuses on *affect*. The notion of affect comprises both mood and emotions that are associated with the experience of momentary events (Lucas *et al.*, 1996). Positive and negative affect constitute the emotional side of happiness, whereas satisfaction represents the cognitive side (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Affect is studied experimentally, using the procedures of mood-induction, through experience-sampling methodology and via self-report scales. Early studies approached the emotional side of well-being as a balance between positive and negative affect (Bradburn, 1969). Later studies showed that positive and negative affect correlated with different predictor vari-

ables (Myers & Diener, 1996), and that they are only weakly (if at all) correlated with each other (Diener & Emmons, 1984). In fact, Diener and Emmons (1984) established that the correlation between negative and positive affect was more negative with a shorter time period. The current measures tend to view affective well-being as a combination of high positive and low negative affect, rather than the balance between these two variables. This finding of independence of positive and negative affect is significant for psychological interventions. Eliminating negative affect would not necessarily lead to an increase in positive affect, just as enhancing positive affect would not necessarily eliminate an underlying problem.

Even though common sense might imply that happiness would be greatest when individuals experience the maximum amount of intense positive affect and only infrequent negative affect, Diener, Sandvik and Pavot (1991) suggest that this is not the case. They show that while frequency of experience of positive affect is both necessary and sufficient for well-being, intense positive affect is not (although it can at times increase happiness amongst those who experience positive affect frequently). It appears that intense positive affect comes with the price, as it usually effects the evaluation of subsequent (usually less intense) positive experiences. Larsen and Diener (1987) also argue that intensity is of relatively little importance for the evaluation of positive affect because 'extremely positive affect' is reported infrequently (only on 2.6 per cent of days).

Ryff and Keyes (1995) argue, however, that the frequency of positive and negative affect tend to correlate negatively, while intensity correlations are often positive, which creates an illusion that these components are independent. This measurement error may be concealing the bipolarity of positive and negative affect. For more on bipolarity see, for example, Russell and Feldman Barrett (1999).

Although the affective and cognitive components of SWB are partly separable,

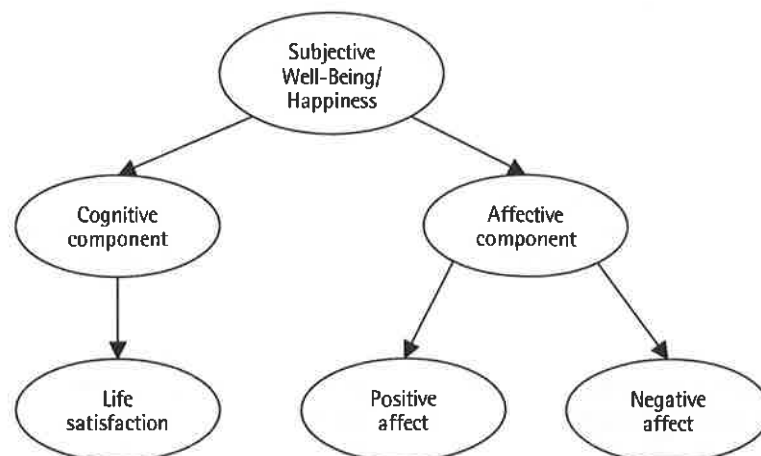
they appear to correlate at levels sufficient to say that they are part of a higher order construct of subjective well-being (Lucas *et al.*, 1996; see Figure 1 (below) for a graphical representation).

Early instruments used for measuring well-being were based round single-item measures. Surprisingly, they possess a degree of validity (Diener, Lucas & Oishi, 2002). However, since the partial separateness of three major factors (life satisfaction, positive affect, negative affect) was confirmed (Andrews & Withey, 1976; Lucas, Diener & Suh, 1996), multiple scales are normally used to measure the construct of well-being. A widely accepted SWB measurement technique involves summing life satisfaction with positive affect, and subtracting negative affect from the total (Schmuck & Sheldon, 2001). The most commonly used measure of life satisfaction at present is the Life Satisfaction Scale by Diener *et al.* (1985). Another well-known measure of the cognitive side of SWB is the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). In the UK, the Depression-Happiness Scale (Joseph & Lewis, 1998) and the 29-item Revised Oxford Happiness Scale (Hills & Argyle, 2002) are also widely used, the latter being significantly

more detailed than many of its American counterparts. A review by Lucas, Diener and Larsen (2003) identifies 11 widely-used measures of affect, ranging from 1- to 300-item scales. The PANAS (positive and negative activation) scales are the most frequently used measures of affect at present (Watson *et al.*, 1988). However, they give a somewhat one-sided representation of positive affective experience of well-being, because of their bias towards activation and excitement. On close examination, we find the prevalence in the use of adjectives such as enthusiastic, interested, determined, excited, inspired, alert, active, strong, proud, attentive at the expense of notions such as content, calm, serene, peaceful which are associated with the states of harmony and stability.

Diener *et al.* (1999) claim that many multi-item instruments possess adequate psychometric properties, including converging with alternative measures, exhibiting good internal consistency, moderate stability and some sensitivity to changing circumstances. Schwarz and Strack (1991, 1999), on the other hand, argue that measures of well-being show low test-retest reliability, usually around 0.40 and not exceeding 0.60 when the same question is

Figure 1: Affective and cognitive components of Subjective Well-Being (SWB).



asked twice during a time-limited interview. The majority of measures appear to be sensitive to time perspective, news events, seasonal variations, interview setting and procedures (such as the succession of questions) (Schwarz *et al.*, 1988). According to the *judgement model of well-being*, if people are asked to evaluate their satisfaction with life as-a-whole, they are most likely to base their evaluation on their current affective state. Only if they discredit their current mood, will they use comparison strategies to evaluate specific life domains. When using a comparison strategy, whatever information comes to mind first and appears relevant is used as a standard of comparison. Having formed a judgement on the basis of either comparison or affective state, respondents may or may not edit it before reporting it to a researcher (Strack *et al.*, 1985, 1990). Tversky and Griffin (1991) present further evidence that judgements of well-being are very sensitive to comparison and contrast. Although a positive experience can make people happy, it can also decrease current well-being by diminishing the value of present experiences. On the other hand, remembering a negative event can make people appreciate their present and impact on their well-being judgement accordingly.

Schimmack, Diener and Oishi (2002) attempted to integrate these two polar viewpoints by agreeing that people construct their life-satisfaction judgements bottom-up from accessible and relevant sources of information. However, the sources are chronically accessible and provide relatively stable information, due to their reliance on personality traits, which is why judgements are found to be quite stable over time. It is arguable, however, whether the judgement theorists find this integrative model acceptable, due to insufficient attention paid to temporary sources of information, varying between and within participants.

These differences between on-the-spot assessment of happiness and more enduring constructs, led Diener *et al.* (2002) to argue for a distinction between momentary and

global well-being. Momentary well-being (i.e. expressed through emotions experienced in the moment) can be assessed in the field through the experience sampling method and in laboratory conditions. Global well-being (i.e. when people summarise their life as a whole, which is more akin, though not identical to life satisfaction), on the other hand, is mostly assessable via self-reports and is, therefore, open to distortions from affective and situational influences. This distinction also reflects the dual aspect of well-being, in that it can be conceived both as a state (a transitory subjective experience responsive to momentary fluctuations of events and conditions) and a trait (a relatively permanent disposition, influenced by the heritability of affect, Lykken & Tellegen, 1996).

To conclude this part, the dominant paradigm of well-being sees it in terms of cognitive and affective explanations that comprise the concept of SWB. Despite several problems, with measurement discussed above, a number of instruments to assess SWB have been developed and are widely used.

### **Critique of the traditional approaches to well-being**

The traditional approaches to well-being, encompassing life satisfaction, positive and negative affect, are subject to a number of conceptual criticisms, which maintain that focusing on life satisfaction and emotion gives a one-sided representation of well-being. Ryff (1989a), for example, believes that it is better to feel unhappy than not to have a purpose in life. Ryff and Keyes (1995) argue that well-being research has failed to deal with the question of what it actually means to be well psychologically. They point towards the lack of debate on whether the existing measurements actually capture the richness of human wellness and happiness. They attribute this failure to the fact that life satisfaction measures were originally generated as outcomes measures, and are essentially data driven, rather than having been developed out of a clear conceptual framework.

A number of theorists have expressed dissatisfaction with the current conception of well-being. McGregor and Little (1998) claim that contemporary literature on well-being largely ignores the contributions of humanistic and existential approaches to this concept, thereby sidetracking the role of meaning. Indeed, many current theories, with some notable exceptions, rarely mention the previous extensive literature on the subject of positive psychological functioning, such as Maslow's (1968) conception of self-actualisation, Roger's (1961) notion of the fully functioning person, Jung's (1933) formulation of individuation, Allport's (1961) conception of maturity, Erickson's (1959) psychosocial stage model and Jahoda's (1958) positive criteria of mental health, and many others. Vitterso (2003) points out that current conceptions of well-being generally fail to do justice to the complexity of philosophical conceptions of happiness and fail to incorporate the dimension of personal growth. Having thoroughly reviewed the existing research on theoretical conceptions of well-being, Ryan and Deci (2001) question the validity of SWB as an operational definition of well-being, as opposed to hedonism, and, as a consequence, the types of activities and goals theorised to promote well-being that have arisen in association with this conceptualisation.

In response to such criticisms, Diener, Lucas and Oishi (2002), the proponents of the 'traditional' viewpoint, maintain that their approach to well-being is so widespread and widely recognised because it is accessible. Respondents are evaluating their lives themselves; they are not assessing it on the basis of what someone else believes to constitute their happiness. Therefore, it is argued that this relatively simple approach to well-being allows people to convey to researchers what they feel makes their life good.

### **Hedonic and eudaimonic paradigms of well-being**

The criticisms raised in the last section reflect the growing division between hedonic

and eudaimonic approaches to well-being. Ryan and Deci (2001) suggest that there are actually two separate philosophies of well-being, of which one revolves around hedonism, pleasure and happiness, while the other is more concerned with the actualisation of human potential.

The Hedonic view can be traced back to Aristippus, a Greek philosopher who believed that the goal of life is to experience maximum pleasure (Ryan & Deci, 2001), and further on to DeSade, the Utilitarian philosophers and others. Defined broadly, 'Hedonic psychology ... is the study of what makes experiences and life events pleasant and unpleasant. It is concerned with feelings of pleasure and pain, of interest and boredom, of joy and sorrow, and of satisfaction and dissatisfaction' (Kahneman, Diener & Schwarz, 1999, p.ix).

Many current measures of well-being seem to reflect this conception of well-being as 'hedonism'. Although interpreted widely (not reduced to physical hedonism) well-being is defined in terms of maximisation of pleasure (or positive affect) and minimisation of pain (negative affect). Having reviewed a number of studies, Vitterso (2003) shows that the structural validation of the SWB components (satisfaction with life, positive and negative affect) confirms that all these fall under the influence of one higher-order factor called hedonism, which he describes as a tendency to evaluate oneself and one's environment in terms of goodness and badness. During the past two decades, hedonic well-being has tended to dominate as the operational definition of well-being rather than hedonism, which was employed as a major outcome variable.

Aristotle was the originator of the concept of eudaimonia, which literary means 'good spirit'. He conceived that true happiness is found by leading a virtuous life and doing what is worth doing, arguing that realising human potential is the ultimate human goal. This approach maintains that not all desires are worth pursuing, even though some of them may yield pleasure, they would

not produce wellness. This idea was further developed over the centuries by prominent thinkers, such as John Locke, who argued that happiness is pursued through prudence and the Stoics, for example, who stressed the value of self-discipline. The ideas of humanists, such as Maslow (1968) and Rogers (1961) also reflect eudaimonic ideals. A number of modern theories of well-being also come under the broad umbrella of eudaimonia. Notable amongst these are psychological well-being (Ryff & Singer, 1998); self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and various other ideas relating to wellness, including self-actualisation and vitality. These and other eudaimonic theories are considered in more detail below.

Waterman (1993) was amongst the first to introduce (or re-introduce) the notion of eudaimonia into contemporary psychological literature. He explains daimon as the potentialities of each person, the realisation of which leads to the greatest fulfilment. Efforts to live in accordance with one's daimon, and the congruence between people's life activities and their deep values, lead to the experience of eudaimonia. In a sense Waterman conceives of eudaimonia as a form of objective well-being, by referring to it as something that is worth desiring and having in life. He claims that although eudaimonia is sufficient, it is not a necessary condition for hedonic happiness.

The concept of *psychological well-being* (PWB) is widely advocated by Carol Ryff and her colleagues (e.g. Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 1998). She defines well-being as 'the striving for perfection that represents the realisation of one's true potential' (Ryff, 1995, p.100). Ryff and Keyes's (1995) conception of well-being was derived from a comprehensive analysis of various approaches to happiness in different sub-fields of psychology (including humanistic and developmental psychology). They offer six components of positive human functioning which include: *self-acceptance* (positive evaluation of oneself and one's life),

*personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, environmental mastery* (the capacity to effectively manage one's life and surrounding environment) and *autonomy*. Their studies provide empirical support for this six-factor model with the emergence of a single higher factor. A philosophical analysis by Ryff and Singer (1998) also provided some support for the above mentioned elements of well-being. Keyes, Shmotkin and Ryff (2002) hypothesised that SWB and PWB, although conceptually related, are empirically distinct conceptions of well-being. Factor analysis of the data from over 3000 respondents confirmed that SWB and PWB are two correlated but distinct factors, and that they show a different pattern of relationships to demographic and personality variables, such as education, age and the Big Five dimensions. Although many treat SWB and PWB as complimentary constructs, a number of researchers, however, are critical of Ryff's six dimensions. Vitterso (2003), for example, notes several findings suggesting that Ryff's six dimensions can be accounted for by only two factors corresponding to hedonic and eudaimonic WB. Having performed psychometric modelling on the data from a UK birth cohort sample ( $N=1179$ ), Abbott *et al.* (2006) concluded that environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life and self-acceptance can be accounted by the second-order factor, which they call motivation/self direction. They reason that the remaining three distinct factors – autonomy, positive relations and self-direction are reminiscent of Deci and Ryan's (2000) basic psychological needs (autonomy, relatedness and competence discussed below). It could be argued further that although the components of well-being derived by Ryff and Keyes (1995) are grounded in theoretical literature, they still are still relatively arbitrary and are not based on any qualitative empirical work.

The *Self-Determination Theory* (SDT), developed by Ryan and Deci postulates the existence of three inherent psychological needs – competence, autonomy and related-



ness – which when satisfied, enhance motivation and well-being and when limited, impact on well-functioning (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Ryan, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2000). A number of studies (e.g. Sheldon *et al.*'s, 2001 research on what is satisfying about satisfying events) provide support for the claim that these three needs are basic, although self-esteem is also frequently mentioned. The difference between PWB and SDT that Ryan and Deci (2001) see is that autonomy, competence and relatedness foster well-being in their model, whereas Ryff uses these concepts to define well-being.

Csikszentmihalyi's (1992) concept of *autotelic* personality is another attempt to define eudaimonic happiness. Autotelic people, in his definition, are those who often engage in activities for their own sake, and experience *flow* states frequently. Flow is an optimal state between boredom and anxiety, when a high challenge is met with an appropriately high level of skill. It is typically described as: 'Your concentration is very complete, your mind isn't wandering, you are not thinking of something else; you are totally involved in what you are doing' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, p.39). The following characteristics of flow have been identified: merging of actions and awareness; focusing of attention; forgetting the self; receiving clear feedback; distortion of time; an autotelic nature of experience. Csikszentmihalyi argues that creating opportunities for flow would lead to enhanced happiness (1999).

Seligman (2003) distinguishes between the pleasant life, good life and meaningful life in his attempt to develop a theory of *authentic happiness* accounting for both hedonic and eudaimonic aspects. The pleasant life is devoted to the pursuit of positive emotions, and can be paralleled with hedonic well-being. In the good life one would use their dominant character (or so-called signature) strengths to obtain gratifications (which are activities we like doing, akin to flow). Finally, the meaningful life is defined as using your signature character strengths in the service of something greater

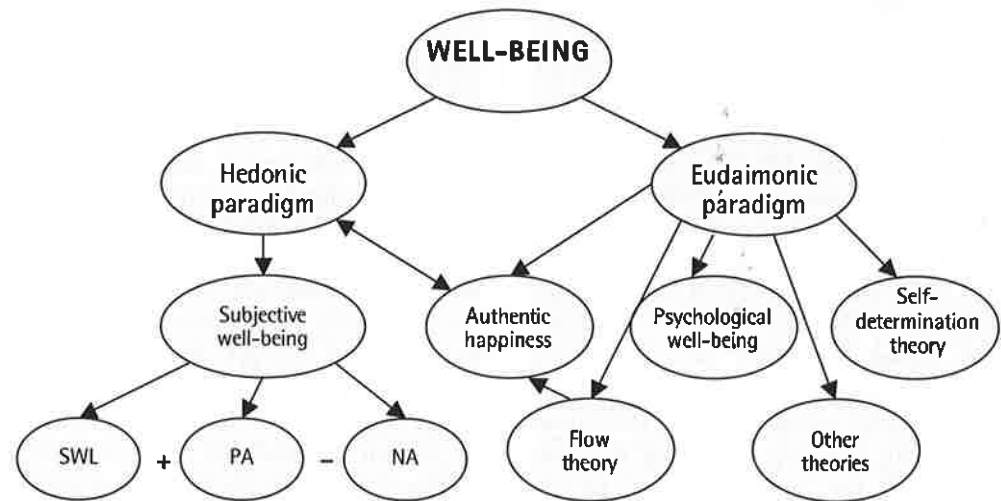
than yourself. Huta *et al.* (2003) hypothesised that both pursuits of engagement/flow and of meaning in Seligman's model can be viewed as eudaimonic. They compared these eudaimonic pursuits with pleasure/hedonic pursuits in relation to life satisfaction. It emerged that life satisfaction was positively related to eudaimonic pursuits and only weakly positively related to pleasure, whilst positive affect was more strongly related to the hedonic pursuits.

Figure 2 offers a graphic representation of the hedonic and eudaimonic paradigms.

It is possible that well-being is best conceived as a multi-dimensional construct. Compton *et al.* (1996) derived two main factors out of 18 indicators of well-being, one representing happiness/SWB, and another – personal growth. Measures of SWB related to a factor different from that of personal growth constructs which included maturity, self-actualisation, hardiness, and openness to experience. King and Napa (1998), and McGregor and Little (1998) independently found two related factors representing well-being as a whole – happiness and meaning or meaningfulness.

Waterman (1993) found that hedonic measures were associated with drive fulfilment, being relaxed, and away from problems, and eudaimonic (or personal expressiveness) measures – with growth, development, challenges and efforts. Similarly Vitterso (2003) argues that hedonism leanings lead people to perceive their internal and external environments in stable ways, while eudaimonism motivates people to understand themselves and the universe by expanding their knowledge structures. He further finds that in challenging and unstable situations individuals high on eudaimonic well-being experience more positive affect. On the other hand, in stable and goal facilitating situations, participants with high hedonic WB show more positive affect. Vitterso attempts to combine both hedonic and eudaimonic WB into a *dynamic model of well-being* in which eudaimonia is related to striving for change, while hedonic

Figure 2: Hedonic and eudaimonic paradigms of well-being.



nism – to resistance to change. The hedonic mode is oriented towards attaining something pleasant or avoiding something unpleasant, towards stability and familiarity. Eudaimonic well-being, on the other hand relates to novelty, curiosity, interest, and to striving for something better than the present situation.

Veenhoven (2000) has attempted to combine what is understood under 'subjective' and 'objective' quality of life into a single model. The subjective dimension concerns one's own subjective feelings about their life. The objective dimension refers to whether the life can be assessed as meeting certain standards by an observer. Having articulated the various aspects of the good life, well-being, happiness, and similar terms, he ordered these concepts along two dichotomous dimensions implying four qualities of life: (1) liability of the environment (living conditions); (2) life-ability of the individual (physical and mental health, self-actualisation, art of living); (3) external utility of life (objective life results, virtue, moral perfection); and (4) inner appreciation of life (inner outcomes of life, that are often understood as subjective well-being). He argues that these qualities are inde-

pendent and cannot be meaningfully summed. Life-ability and external utility of an individual can, perhaps, be loosely equated with eudaimonic well-being, while inner appreciation of life – with hedonic.

Instruments used to measure eudaimonic well-being reflect the wide variety of definitions outlined above and include Psychological Well-Being Scales (Ryff, 1989a), The Basic Psychological Needs Scale (Deci & Ryan, 2000), Approaches to Happiness Questionnaire (Peterson, Park & Seligman, 2005), and the Openness to Experience Scale (Vitterso, 2003). Recent studies seem to employ a variety of looser or more varied definitions and corresponding measurements of eudaimonic well-being, reflecting the lack of conceptual agreement over this construct. For example, Kashdan *et al.* (2006) uses a combination of modified Rosenberg's Self Esteem Scale, two items of quantity and quality of rewarding social activity with face-validity, and two items on the self-determined pursuit of novelty and challenge to assess eudaimonic well-being, defined in their paper as positive self-regard, rewarding social activity and opportunity for personal growth.

### **Criticism of the eudaimonic approaches to well-being**

Although the eudaimonic approaches to well-being expand its definition beyond purely hedonistic conceptions, they can also be subject to criticism, the chief of which concerns the widely differing conceptions of the nature of eudaimonic well-being.

Some authors define eudaimonia as actualisation of human potential (Waterman, 1993), while others associate it with frequent experience of flow states (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Other commonly used definitions include: realising one's true nature/true self (Vitterso, 2003), personal growth (Compton *et al.*, 1996), meaning (e.g. King & Napa, 1998), and the totality of six factors comprising psychological well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Seligman (2003) defines eudaimonia as both flow and meaning. Huta *et al.* (2003, p.1) summarise eudaimonia as an 'effortful engagement in life activities, developing the best in oneself, and belonging to and serving institutions larger than oneself.'

Clearly, these definitions, although not contradictory, lack clear conceptual unity. Meaning may be found in personal growth, and it also found in interpersonal or social domains. Interestingly, Ryff (1989a) and Ryff and Keyes (1995) distinguish between meaning (purpose in life) and the personal growth dimensions of well-being. Despite their attempts to shed light onto the construct of well being, eudaimonic definitions have ended up complicating the picture further. This is reflected in the wide range of instruments used to measure eudaimonic well-being, which range from flow scales to those attempting to measure openness to experience. The difficulty of separating hedonic and eudemonic conceptions can be seen with the openness to experience dimensions, which is needed not only in order to grow but to experience pleasure, a facet of hedonic WB.

Furthermore, it is questionable whether, for example, a Need for Cognition Inventory (Vitterso, 2003) is sufficient for measuring such complex processes as development.

Popovic (2005) summarises the indicators of development as increases in: complexity and differentiation (e.g. ability to recognise the composite elements of a whole or various perspectives); organisation and integration (e.g. ability to connect various elements); flexibility; refinement (e.g. sensitivity to nuances or details); mobility and dynamics (e.g. curiosity, desire to learn); self-control (e.g. ability to delay gratification); perspective (e.g. considering long term plans or other people); productivity (utilising one's potential and energy); diversity and versatility (e.g. having a variety of interests, knowledge or skills). No one of these indicators on its own is considered to be necessary or sufficient. Generally the attempts to measure development through one indicator seem inherently flawed.

Although life satisfaction is generally allocated in the hedonic camp by the proponents of the eudaimonic paradigm, it is also debatable whether this needs to be the case. Life satisfaction can be conceived as an independent subjective evaluation of the current status of one's life, which can be hedonically or eudaimonically oriented. This would be consistent with the findings of some goals theorists (e.g. Oishi *et al.*, 1999), who placed the greatest emphasis on the congruence between values and subsequent goals and activities, and found that valuing and successfully carrying out hedonic pursuits may yield a similar level of life satisfaction to a corresponding eudaimonic pattern.

The preceding section argues that what is understood under eudaimonic well-being is unclear at present. Not only is there a lack of conceptual definition, there is also a lack of adequate instruments designed to measure eudaimonic well-being. In a recent empirically-based article Galati, Sotgiu and Iovino (2006) state: 'Most psychologists working on happiness have treated this conceptual category in a confusing manner' (p.61). They identify two paths towards unravelling the complexity of well-being and achieving conceptual clarity: engagement with existing knowledge and exploration of naïve know-

ledge, such as lay understandings of well-being. The current paper so far offers an example of engagement with existing knowledge, exploration of naïve knowledge generally calls for qualitative studies of the phenomenon in question and it is to this topic we now turn.

### **Qualitative studies of well-being**

Quantitative approaches to measuring well-being have been criticised since the late 1970s due to the lack of conceptual clarity as to what is meant by terms such as well-being and life satisfaction. However, most often these criticisms resulted in the refinement of measures rather than a reconsideration of approach (Thomas & Chambers, 1989). Qualitative methods can be extremely useful in mapping out a field, crystallising meanings attached to relevant constructs and formulating an overarching framework, yet this stage seems to have been missed in the development of a number of well-being measures. Although Diener himself (1993) emphasised the value of qualitative approaches to well-being in developing new measures, up to date a relatively small number of such studies appear to have been carried out. The section below reviews published literature identified through PsychInfo using the specific search terms *happiness* or *well-being* in conjunction with the terms *qualitative*, *open-ended* and *depth*. These sources were also checked for references to previous relevant publications and supplemented with other studies known to the author.

Thomas and Chambers (1989) obtained some qualitative data in an interview study of the accounts of well-being of Indian and English elderly men. The dominant themes for the English sample were fears of: incapacitation, becoming useless and dependent, and loss of significant others. The main themes from the Indian sample were importance of family, salience of religious beliefs, and satisfaction with their present life situation. Although quantitative measures yield similar results for both

samples, qualitative analysis indicated substantial difference in the actual experience of well-being.

Studying lay conceptions of well-being (Ryff, 1989b) found a commonality in the endorsement of good relationships and enjoyable activities amongst the diverse age groups among the 171 participants. However, younger adults focused more on self-knowledge, confidence and self-acceptance, while older adults – on positive coping with change. This finding, once again, places relationships into the centre point of well-being.

Sastre (1998) interviewed 490 French people, aged between 9 and 85, asking a single question: 'What does well-being mean to you?' The answers were categorised on the basis of the work of Diener and Ryff, by specifying a domain (family, friends, work, etc.) and a psychological dimension of WB (acceptance, etc.). This means that the categories were derived top down. The most frequently used categories (domains and dimensions) were family, one's physical body, relationships and acceptance.

An extensive qualitative study on happiness with adolescents was conducted by Magen (1998), attempting to answer the question what makes adolescents happy. Adolescents' responses were coded into the following categories: experiences with the self (including satisfaction, accomplishments, and actualisation), experiences with the external world (e.g. beauty, pleasure, music) and experiences with others (love, helping or transcending oneself). She also concluded that experiences of hedonic pleasure and satisfaction were mentioned far more frequently than the ones related to self-realisation and meaning in life (eudaimonic well-being), with only one third of respondents depicting the latter experiences.

Westerhof *et al.*'s (2001) qualitative study into the lay conceptions of well-being among middle aged and elderly adults identified several dimensions, not all of which are found in the literature associated with quantitative measures. Amongst these were

quality, achievement, retrospection, fulfilment, affective aspects, a hard life and a normal life, in addition to life satisfaction. Having reviewed a number of studies on lay conceptions of well-being, Westerhof *et al.* (2001) summarised the conceptions under the following categories: *global judgements of life* (life satisfaction, progress, achievements); *intrapersonal aspects* (e.g. self-esteem, self-acceptance, personality, personal development); *interpersonal aspects* (relationships, social contributions), and other *specific domains* (e.g. health and illness, career, leisure, religion).

Eigner (2001) conducted in-depth interviews with a small group of environmental activists, whose life goals she describes as global enhancement. Her qualitative analysis revealed that the well-being of participants was based on fascination with nature, joy found from being in nature, the felt effectiveness of their activities, acting in concordance with one's conscience, internal locus of control, social networks and satisfaction with their lives. The latest result is particularly interesting in that satisfaction with life for her participants was strongly linked with an engagement in a universally meaningful activity, resembling eudaimonic well-being.

Schimmack, Diener and Oishi (2002) coded their participants' life satisfaction judgements into several categories derived from the literature. Family, romantic life, relationships with friends, academic life and past events were used most often.

Vitterso *et al.*'s (2003) study of teleworkers working from home allocated quality of life indicators into three categories based on Renwick and Brown's (1996) conceptual framework of well-being. (1) *Being* encompasses the most basic aspects of who people are as individuals. (2) *Belonging* is concerned with the fit between individuals and their various environments. (3) *Becoming* focuses on the purposeful activities in which individuals engage as they attempt to realise their goals, aspirations and hopes.

A large-scale qualitative study into meanings of happiness analysed the data obtained

from 1001 participants, representative of the UK adults in telephone owing households (Boniwell, 2006). Responses to the question 'Please, tell me in your own words what is happiness for you?' were allocated into six super-ordinate themes: relating, contentment, security and money, health, transcendence and self-realisation.

From the above-mentioned studies, well-being arises as a multidimensional construct, with several facets that do not feature prominently in the mainstream literature. Although it may be possible to reduce these findings to four or five distinct categories, it is worth considering some of the themes arising from qualitative research in the light of the existing definitions of well-being.

For example, a sense of belonging and social aspects repeatedly emerge from the vast majority of studies on well-being, including Boniwell (2006), Vitterso *et al.* (2003), Westerhof *et al.* (2001), Sastre (1998), Magen (1998), Thomas and Chambers (1989). Positive relations with others also form an integral part of psychological well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 1998) and relatedness is one of the three psychological needs in the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Some similar themes are found in qualitative and quantitative studies of well-being. References to the two frequently mentioned components of the eudaimonic well-being construct, personal growth and meaning, can be found in several qualitative studies. For example, Vitterso *et al.* (2003) speaks of becoming, Magen (1998) of actualisation and Boniwell (2006) of self-realisation. Constructs similar to that of meaning and purpose in life (King & Napa, 1998; Seligman, 2002; Ryff & Keyes, 1995) can be paralleled with findings of Magen (1998), who speaks of transcending oneself, social contributions highlighted by Westerhof *et al.* (2001), Eigner's (2001) acting in accordance with one's conscience, etc.

Of more interest however, are the prominent qualitative themes that do not appear to form a part of any existing definition of

well-being. One such example is the theme of contentment (or peace of mind) brought up by over 50 per cent of participants in Boniwell's (2006) study. This type of well-being seems neglected or underplayed in many American approaches to well-being including work on flow (e.g. Csikszentmihalyi, 1975, 1999) and happiness (e.g. Seligman, 2003). Other different aspects of experience with the self, identified by Ryff (1989b), Westerhof *et al.* (2001), Eigner (2001) and Vitterso *et al.* (2003) can at best only be paralleled with the PWB component of self-acceptance (e.g. Ryff & Keyes, 1995) and do not generally seem to appear in any other models.

One of the major drawbacks of several qualitative studies cited lies in the employment of a top-down, rather than a more open-ended emergent approach to data analysis, which is not conducive to the identification of gaps in existing conceptual frameworks. A further problem remains in the near impossibility of separating correlational and causal findings from the potential defining features of well-being. A final difficulty concerns the interchangeable treatment of the notions such as happiness and well-being, which may or may not reflect their lay use. Nevertheless, a thorough consideration of the elements identified by examining naïve beliefs about and experience of well-being offer one route towards developing a greater conceptual clarity of this construct.

### **Conclusions and further directions**

Despite the seeming confidence of well-being scholars, it appears that a consensus about the definition of well-being is far from having been reached. The hedonic paradigm can be charged with ignoring the roles of personal growth and meaning, while the eudaimonic one – with a lack of shared understanding of what well-being entails. Given how frequently subjective well-being measures are used as outcome variables in modern psychology, it seems advisable that more effort is invested into finding a

common non-reductionist definition of the complex construct of well-being and to develop adequate instruments which assess well-being in its complexity.

The authors believe it would be fruitful to give attention to qualitative investigations, which offer the necessary depth for examining well-being in its complexity and a means of taking account of lay understandings of the term. Theoretical models of well-being that take account of a variety of lay understandings are likely to use language in a way that is closer to the meanings lay people assign to happiness and well-being. This may help enhance measurement validity. However, as Campbell points out: 'Qualitative common sense knowing is not replaced by quantitative knowing. Rather, quantitative knowing has to trust and build upon the qualitative' (1979, p.66). Even though qualitative research may inform the development of a more appropriate conceptual framework and corresponding well-being measures, this would of course need to be supplemented with longitudinal and experimentally based studies, and psychometric modelling. For example, if well-being is construed as a multidimensional construct it may be possible that different factors are more or less salient at different life stages, which is best established through longitudinal rather than cross-sectional research. Even though experimental studies are unlikely to advance our understanding of the more global aspects of well-being, they are useful for studying momentary affective well-being, including its low activation components, such as contentment. Finally, advanced psychometric modelling (e.g. Abbott *et al.*, 2006) can be used to investigate the factorial validity of the conceptual frameworks proposed.

Even though the field of well-being may appear well researched and mapped out at the first sight, a little dig under the surface reveals layers of further possibilities. Challenging and expanding traditional approaches to well-being also carries with it renewed questions about correlations and

predictor variables and invites further theoretical accounts of the interplay between contributing factors. Despite the many scientific advances in the field, the words of Aristotle used to open this paper appear to remain true 24 centuries later.

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