

The Nested Model of Well-Being: A Unified Approach

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Although well-being is a central topic in psychology in general and positive psychology in particular, it remains somewhat nebulous and more work is required to foster conceptual clarity that will in turn lead to empirical advances. The article outlines the Nested Model (NM) of well-being, which is conceptually grounded in a new unified theory of psychology (Henriques, 2011) that maps the construct into 4 related but also separable nested domains: (a) the subjective domain, which includes the first person phenomenological state of being; (b) the biological and psychological health and functioning of the individual; (c) the material and social environmental context; and (d) the values and ideology of the evaluator. By recognizing these elements and how they combine to form a holistic concept of well-being, theorists, practitioners and researchers from many different areas of inquiry will be able to coordinate their efforts with much greater effectiveness.

Keywords: well-being, positive psychology, hedonic, eudaimonic, unified theory of psychology

Well-being is perhaps the single most important concept in positive psychology, and it is also one of the most central concepts in all of professional psychology. Indeed, several authors have argued that, at its core, professional psychology is defined by the application of psychological knowledge in the service of human well-being (e.g., Henriques & Sternberg, 2004; Melchert, 2011). A glance outside the field of psychology reveals just how far and wide the concept of well-being stretches. For example, in 1946 the World Health Organization defined health in terms of “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO, 1946). More recently, the neuroscientist and secular philosopher Sam Harris (2010) argued that the well-being of conscious creatures was the ultimate moral value and that the central function of science, at its root, could ultimately be understood as empirically examining what contributed to and detracted from the well-being of such creatures.

Despite (or perhaps because of) the centrality of the concept of well-being, it remains the case that there is much ambiguity in the meaning of the term. To begin to get a sense of the potential for confusion, consider the extent to which well-being overlaps with, but is also potentially different from: happiness, quality of life, and general welfare. In addition, the following

questions capture some additional areas of complexity: Is well-being the opposite of pathology or are these two separable dimensions? How does the subjective, first-person experience of wellness (or distress) relate to functioning in the biological, psychological, and social domains? Can well-being be objectively analyzed and measured, like the amount of carbon in the atmosphere, or is well-being an inherently value-laden construct? Put differently, do we need to consider the moral dimension when considering well-being?

Jayawickreme, Forgeard, and Seligman (2012) recently attempted to tackle many of these issues, and did so by first emphasizing the need for greater theoretical and conceptual specificity regarding the construct. In their attempt to address the issues, the authors offered what they called the engine approach to well-being, which was based on earlier systems models (e.g., Cummins, 1998; Veenhoven, 2000). They posited the conceptual analysis of well-being should distinguish between inputs, processes, and outcomes. In their engine model, the input variables consisted of both exogenous (e.g., income, education) and endogenous predictors of well-being (e.g., personality traits), the process variables consisted of the internal states that influence the choices the individuals make (e.g., cognitions, feelings, motives), and finally the outcomes were characterized as the voluntary behaviors that characterize well-being (e.g., achievement, positive relationships). Jayawickreme, Forgeard, and Seligman (2012) further argued that the various approaches to well-being could be located within the engine approach, such that approaches to well-being tend to be either focused on inputs, processes, or outputs, or combinations therein. The authors explicitly stated that the engine approach was not meant as a theory of well-being, but as a prologue to an adequate conception of the construct, and they reiterated the call for more clarity about the construct, which they argued was

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vital if psychologists are to understand what well-being is, what causes it, and how it can be enhanced.

Jayawickreme, Forgeard, and Seligman (2012) have done the field a service by highlighting the need for greater theoretical and conceptual specificity and have clearly pointed out that the failure to be specific about the varied meanings of the term well-being has had problematic consequences for the field. We also appreciate their attempt to offer a broad scheme to characterize the various approaches that have been taken. In addition, the difference between inputs, processes and outcomes is a useful starting point. Ultimately, though, we believe more clarification is needed, as it was difficult to understand the way many of the concepts and theories were characterized in their model. For example, genetics were conceptualized by the authors as an “exogenous” input, and was in the same class of variables as income. Personality traits were characterized as endogenous input variables, as were one’s values. “Capabilities” were characterized as both inputs and process variables (p. 336). Motives, and cognitions about motives, were characterized as processes, but then “goal-driven functionings” were seen as outcome variables. In addition to these semantic complexities, the manner in which the various classes of well-being approaches overlapped with the input, processing, and output divisions offered by the engine conception seemed strained in several places. To provide just one of many possible examples, reinforcement theories were aligned with outcome. Yet “reinforcement,” which can be defined as the selection of behavior by consequence, is as much about input and process as it is about outcome. In short, it was difficult to see the logic of alignment provided by the authors in several places.

Ultimately, we agree with Jayawickreme, Forgeard, and Seligman (2012) that what is needed is a comprehensive perspective that maps the construct of well-being. However, we believe the engine model they provided, although useful in some ways, did not fully succeed in effectively mapping the terrain. We offer an alternative approach to mapping the construct, one that we hope is experienced as significantly more straightforward than the engine approach. Indeed, our goal is for the model of well-being to be experienced by readers as straightforward, almost commonsensical. If it seems intuitively obvious after it has been laid out, then we will have accomplished our goal. A reasonable question that follows is that if it is commonsensical or intuitively obvious, then does the model genuinely contribute to the literature? The answer is yes and the initial reason is found in the introduction above. Up to this point, the field of well-being research has been hampered by the absence of a shared and general map of the construct. The second deeper reason has to do with the fact, as we will articulate below, that the domains of well-being mapped by our model are derived from a new integrative metatheoretical perspective of psychology clearly delineates between physical, biological, psychological, and social dimensions of existence, which is something traditional bio-psycho-social models do not do (Ghaemi, 2010). Finally, at the end of this article, we will show how the inversion of the model leads to a mapping of the domains of illness, setting the stage for a clear understanding of the dialectical and dimensional relations between well-being and illness.

The model we offer is called the Nested Model (NM), which is grounded in a conceptually integrative metatheoretical view of the field (Henriques, 2011). It is important to note at the outset that, consistent with Harris (2010), well-being is conceptualized within

the NM as a deeply valued construct, and that a major human goal ought to be the enhancement of human well-being (Henriques, 2011). Furthermore, as we make clear in the passages that follow, we believe well-being should be defined as being far more than the subjective state of being happy or satisfied with one’s life. Following Kant, we define the essence of well-being as happiness with the worthiness to be happy. This conception requires a clear articulation of values and the effective functioning toward valued goal states.

The goal of this article is to deconstruct this formulation and articulate the various domains and subdomains that go into functioning that justifies affirming emotional reactions and satisfying life evaluations. Deconstructing the various domains from the integrative metatheoretical approach delineated by Henriques (2011) yields the formulation that there are four broad domains of conceptually separable phenomena that, when taken as a whole, make up the elements that go into the construct of well-being. Current models of well-being have either focused solely on one part of the map (e.g., the subjective or environmental domains) or in the case of eudaimonic approaches to well-being, have attempted to either vaguely characterize the domain of individual functioning or the outcomes associated with the whole concept, but have failed to effectively delineate the specific domains that make up the whole. Our goal in this article is to clearly delineate the domains that go into the concept of well-being in a way that is simultaneously: (a) clear and straightforward and (b) anchored to a theoretically sophisticated formulation of the human condition.

According to the NM, the four nested domains that make up the construct of human well-being are as follows: Domain 1—the Subjective Domain, which is the first person, phenomenological, conscious experience of happiness (vs. misery) along with the self-conscious, reflected levels of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with life and its various domains; Domain 2—the Health and Functioning Domain, which can be further divided into two broad dimensions of functioning, the biological and the psychological; Domain 3—the Environmental Domain, which can also be effectively divided into two broad domains of the material and the social environment; and Domain 4—the Values and Ideology Domain, which refers to the morals, ethical perspective, and worldview of the evaluator. Figure 1 depicts these nested elements in relationship to one another. We posit that authentic well-being is achieved when there is the positive alignment of these domains. That is, an individual is high in well-being when they are happy and satisfied with their lives, are functioning well psychologically and biologically, have access to necessary and desired material resources and social connections to meet their needs (and the relative absence of damaging or dangerous stressors), and are engaging in life with a purpose and a direction that is deemed by the evaluator to be good and moral.

It is important to note that the nested relationship of the fourth domain is of a different nature than the other three. According to the model, the subjective experiences of Domain 1 reside, spatially and temporally, within the functional flow of the biological and psychological domain. Domain 2 exists, spatially and temporally, within the environmental domain. That is what we mean by “nested.” In contrast, the individual whose well-being is being considered by an external evaluator does not exist, spatially and temporally, within the worldview of the evaluator. Thus, in that sense, it is different. Nonetheless,

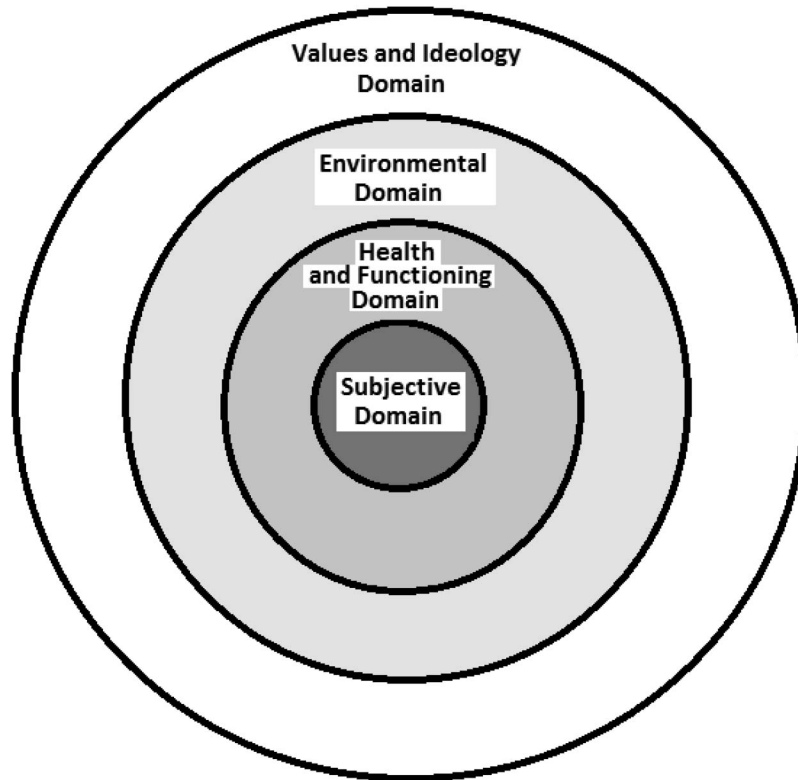


Figure 1. The Nested Model of Well-Being.

the nested concept holds when the focus is on understanding how notions of well-being are constructed. Because our contention is that well-being is inherently an evaluative construct, a full understanding of it requires inclusion of how the evaluator is viewing the other three domains. Thus, when we are considering the totality of the construct there must be a place for the evaluator's perspective.

This article reviews the major approaches to well-being and argues that the NM provides a more effective map of the construct than existing approaches. Prior to delving into the literature, it may be useful to apply this formulation to obtain a sense as to how the nested domains can be used to analyze a description of an individual's well-being. Although Harris (2010, pp. 11–12) explicitly stated that well-being “resists precise definition,” he argued that we know it when we see it and to illustrate the point, he gave two examples that represented the far ends of the well-being continuum, which he labeled the “Bad Life” and the “Good Life.” The example of the “Bad Life” was of an impoverished young widow in a war torn country who has been exposed to cruelty and violence her whole life. The day of the example is the worst day in her brutal life, a day in which she had witnessed her daughter being raped and murdered, and was then running for her life, terrified of being raped, tortured, and killed. In contrast, the good end of the life continuum was represented by a woman who was in a loving marriage, had accomplished much in her profession, was biologically healthy, and had access to all the occupational, relational, and financial resources she needed. She was recently

awarded a “billion dollar grant” to benefit children in the developing world and was being hailed by those around her as a warm and effective leader. She was doing moral work and felt fulfilled by it.

Applying the NM, one can see that the bad life in the example is characterized by the conscious experience of suffering and misery, the inability to functionally meet adaptive goals with concomitant major threats to physical integrity, which in this case was largely caused by a horrific environment that failed to meet the most basic needs for safety and belonging. The brutal acts caused the woman to inevitably live in a manner that was diametrically opposed to what she (or we) would value (i.e., wanton destruction and pain). In contrast, the woman in the good life is characterized by subjective feelings of happiness and reflected life satisfaction, effective personal and biological functioning, a resource-rich environment with few dangers, and is fulfilling her life in a way she (and we) would value.

Our contention is that the NM provides the field with the necessary conceptual map of the well-being construct and that many analyses of well-being, such as Harris' (2010) work, would have been greatly strengthened if it had been grounded on a clear, commonsensical definition. We contend that the NM also helps to integrate major approaches more effectively. Within the field of psychology, broadly speaking, there have been two dominant approaches to well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). First, there is the hedonic approach, which emphasizes the experience of happiness and sense of satisfaction with one's life. Second, there is the eudaimonic approach, which empha-

sizes both psychological functioning and a more holistic approach to well-being. A brief review of these approaches will allow us to place them in the context of the NM approach.

Happiness, Hedonic Psychology, and Subjective Well-Being

Happiness was originally a central construct in positive psychology (Seligman, 2002) and long before that it was a topic of reflection by philosophers and religious thinkers alike. The keys to happiness have been argued to be found in such things as love, wisdom, money, youth, communion with God, and the Eastern notion of nonattachment. Research psychologists began to move away from philosophizing about what ought to lead to happiness and toward empirically studying questions such as: What is happiness?, Can happiness be measured?, and What causes happiness? In their text, *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology*, Kahneman, Diener, and Schwarz (1999) define hedonic psychology as the study of “what makes experiences and life pleasant and unpleasant” (p. ix). A review of the topics reveals an emphasis on happiness as opposed to misery, the nature of emotions, moods, and reflected appraisals of satisfaction, and the measurement of pleasurable and painful states of mind. Crucial to the hedonic perspective is that there are two broad systems of affect and mood (Morris, 1999), the positive and the negative, and that these systems are ingrained in the basic design of the brain (Hoebel, Rada, Mark, & Pothos, 1999). The reason for this is generally presumed to be an evolutionary one, namely is that there are systems that foster the approach of rewards and the avoidance of punishments. This understanding is consistent with the unified approach adopted here (Henriques, 2011).

One line of research in hedonic psychology that is particularly relevant to the current discussion is Ed Diener’s work on subjective well-being. In the 1980s, Diener was interested in happiness, what made people happy, whether or not it could be measured, what were its correlates, and what it predicted (Eid & Larson, 2008). Diener came to refer to his broad notion of happiness as subjective well-being (SWB). SWB is, by definition, subjective, meaning that it is a first-person perspective and thus based on and influenced by personal experiences. In addition, SWB includes not just the absence of negative factors, but also the presence of positive factors. To specifically explicate the components of SWB, Diener, Scollon, and Lucas (2003) presented a hierarchical model that consisted of four constructs, two of which were “emotional” (i.e., levels of positive affect and negative affect) and two “cognitive” (i.e., global life satisfaction and satisfaction with specific domains like finances or occupation). The highest level is the overarching construct, subjective well-being, and the four components of well-being—positive affect, negative affect, global satisfaction, and domain satisfaction are at the second level. Each component is independent yet moderately correlated and conceptually related (i.e., general satisfaction relates to domain satisfaction, degrees of positive affect relate to degrees of negative affect). Schimmack (2008) reviewed this component structure of SWB and found general support for it in quantitative analyses.

Crucial to the current unified perspective and as will be made clearer in the discussion regarding the nature of human consciousness, is that Diener, based on his empirical and conceptual work, divided SWB into “cognitive” and “emotional” components. Spe-

cifically, the positive and negative affects refer to experienced states of consciousness, felt in the here-and-now. In contrast, the two domains of satisfaction are based on reflected self-conscious verbal evaluations that collapse elements and domains across time. These are two quite different streams of thought and modes of evaluation, as Kahneman (1999) has demonstrated conclusively. Research has demonstrated, for example, that reflected appraisals do not emerge simply as the sum total of positive or negative experiences, but instead are markedly influenced by how experience unfolds, how it begins relative to how it ends (those experiences that end more pleasantly are recalled more positively), and whether or not one reaches their goals (Kahneman, 2011).

Despite the fact that SWB is an important construct, many investigators exploring well-being believe it (or happiness) is too limited in its scope, such that it fails to take into consideration relevant variables that go into the full construct of well-being. Such critics likely would take issue with the title of the Kahneman, Diener, and Schwarz (1999) text, which seemed to equate hedonic psychology with well-being. Many argue for a more holistic approach to well-being and claim that it is much more than feeling good, but it is about living a good, productive, meaningful life. Along these lines, van Deurzen (2009) cautioned against simplistic approaches to psychotherapy that use techniques to maximize happiness without reflection nor grappling with questions of meaning, purpose, or living ethical lives. The emphasis on effective functioning, values, and meaning drives the other major line of work in well-being in psychology.

Eudaimonic Approaches, Optimal Mental Health and Psychological Well-Being

The eudaimonic approach to well-being shifts the focus from happiness or subjective feelings of satisfaction and focuses more upon meaning, optimal functioning, mental health, self-realization, and the life well-lived (Waterman, 2013). Aristotle is often credited with first recognizing the eudaimonic position, as he believed living for happiness alone was vulgar and that a hedonic view of well-being made humans “slave-like” followers of desire and pleasure (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Aristotle claimed that well-being could be found in the expression of virtue or in doing what is worth doing, and the concept of eudaimonia referred to living life to its fullest potential. Others have similarly criticized simplistic conceptions focusing on happiness for being shallow and amoral. Hofmann (1962, cited in Sykes, 2010, p. 80) put the issue as follows:

Mental health can conceivably become a common ground and basic criterion for religious, social, and cultural vitality. But first of all the concept of mental health needs resolute liberation from any identification with the egoistic mirage of unconcerned happiness, with a peace of mind that is not mindful that we are always integral parts and responsible members of our society and cultural situation. We cannot be happy or healthy if we do not gain our self-respect and the development of our personal potentials from an active participation in the society and cultural struggle to rediscover always anew the meaning and purpose of individual and corporate human existence.

Eudaimonic theories of well-being also point out that not all activities that result in feelings of happiness will lead to well-being and may not be valued at all by the individual. For example, opiates are pleasure producing chemicals that lead to feelings of happiness. But most people do not try to get high all the time. Nozick (1974)

articulated this point in a thought experiment of a pleasure machine, where people were given the imaginary option that they could hook themselves up to a machine for life and experience constant bliss. In contrast to some hedonic assumptions, very few people say they would take such a life if given the choice.

In the field of psychological research, a general review of the construct of eudaimonic well-being has recently been offered (Waterman, 2013), and three systematic approaches to this conception of well-being have been prominent: (a) self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000); (b) psychological well-being (Ryff & Singer, 1998); and (c) flourishing (Seligman, 2011). Each of the three major approaches claims that there are core needs or characteristics that constitute the foundational elements of well-being, and that well-being occurs when these domains are met or reached. Self-determination theory, for example, posits three core human psychological needs in the form of relatedness, autonomy, and competency and claims that meeting these needs in accordance with one's potential results in a state of high well-being.

Carol Ryff has been one of the most active voices in the well-being literature. Early in her career she criticized the conception of "happiness" or subjective well-being as not being a sufficient construct for understanding the whole of positive functioning (Ryff, 1989). She also criticized early SWB researchers for misconstruing Aristotle as arguing for advancing happiness when in fact what he argued for was "the idea of striving toward excellence based on one's unique potential" (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Contrasting the research on SWB, she coined the term psychological well-being to refer to a more holistic approach to the concept. She identified six major domains that were frequently discussed by prominent psychological theorists and therapists as evincing optimal mental health: (a) self-acceptance, (b) positive relations with others, (c) autonomy, (d) environmental mastery, (e) purpose in life, and (f) personal growth. For Ryff (1989, p. 1072), well-being and optimal mental health involve the "processes of setting and pursuing goals, attempting to realize one's potential, experiencing deep connections to others, managing surrounding demands and opportunities, exercising self-direction, and possessing positive self-regard."

Martin Seligman (2011) outlined a framework similar to Ryff's conception of psychological well-being. He argued that there were five different elements or domains that together make up the construct of well-being, which were as follows: (a) positive emotion, (b) engagement, (c) meaning, (d) positive relationships, and (e) accomplishment, and are represented in the acronym, PERMA. For Seligman, an individual is high in well-being if they regularly experience positive relative to negative emotions, have accomplishments they are proud of, are engaged in life, believe their life was meaningful and had many positive relationships.

Referencing the hedonic and eudaimonic approaches to the NM, it is apparent that hedonic and SWB approaches correspond to the subjective domain, whereas eudaimonic approaches connect both vaguely to the health and functioning domain, but more generally to the overall outcomes of the relationships between the various domains. Our perspective is that although eudaimonic approaches attempt to take a holistic approach to well-being similar to the manner done here, they fail in regards to clarity because—as also pointed out by Jayawickreme, Forgeard, and Seligman (2012)—these approaches do not effectively divide the construct of well-being into its component parts, nor differentiate inputs, and parts and processes from outcomes.

Prior to moving on to providing more detail of the NM, it is important to note that although the hedonic and eudaimonic approaches have been quite distinct in the literature, there have been a few attempts to integrate them (e.g., Tomer, 2011). Corey Keyes has offered one pathway toward developing a more integrative view. Keyes, Shmotkin, and Ryff (2002) examined the quantitative relationships between measures of SWB and PWB and found that the two constructs were related, but also empirically distinct, and Keyes' (2007) has continued to be an advocate for combining subjective well-being with psychological well-being. He advocated for a model of "mental health" that consists of three different layers of functioning: (a) the emotional, (b) the psychological, and (c) the social, and argued that people range from languishing to flourishing in their functioning in these domains. The emotional dimension of Keyes' conception is very close to the hedonic notion of well-being, whereas the psychological level is drawn from Ryff's model, and the social domain consists of one's positive engagement with community and society at large, including elements such as belonging and seeing one's actions as being valued by the community at large. As an integrative approach, Keyes' formulation overlaps some with the unified approach adopted here. However, it does not explicitly differentiate the nature of the nested domains, which is required for fuller understanding of the construct.

The Four Domains of the Nested Model

The central claim of the NM is that human consciousness is nested within human biological and psychological functioning, and that the individual is nested within the broader ecology, which has social and material elements. Finally, we conceive well-being as being an inherently an evaluative construct, and the actions and conditions of an individual are referenced in relation to the ideology and values of the evaluator. In that sense, the individual and their environment exist in the context of the perspective of the evaluator. Below we articulate the four nested domains characterized by the unified approach, the way to differentiate them, and then the assessment of each domain and how they contribute to the overall construct.

Domain 1: The Subjective Domain

The first domain in the NM, the Subjective Domain, refers to human consciousness and the first person experience of being. We start with the claim that consciousness is central to the construct of well-being, such that the construct of well-being is meaningless unless one presupposes first that the entity being considered is (or has the potential to be) conscious (Harris, 2010). A rock or a tree—presuming both lack any inner experience—cannot be said to have well-being, at least as the term is being used here. In contrast, an animal, such as a dog, which is presumed to have an inner experience, can have either poor or elevated levels of well-being. As such, it is imperative to have at least a working conception of consciousness. This, however, has been one of the main points of confusion in the well-being literature. The unified approach provides a clear framework for understanding human consciousness (Henriques, 2011) and, as will be detailed, this conception corresponds well with the existing literature on SWB. Nevertheless, despite the centrality of subjective consciousness, it is only the first building block that makes up the overall construct of well-being.

According to the unified approach, consciousness refers to the here-and-now phenomenological experience of being (Henriques, 2011). It is the first person perspective on the world, the felt experience of being that emerges (somehow) from the integrated flow of neuronal information. Importantly, the unified approach characterizes adult human consciousness as consisting of two parallel streams of experience. The first is the sensory-perceptual-affective felt experience of being, which is a stream of consciousness that is presumably shared with many other animals. This involves the experience of seeing red, being hungry, or feeling happy. The unified approach posits that the nervous system evolved as a system of behavioral investment, which means that the functional capacity for movement, especially moving toward benefits and away from costs, is crucial to the basic neuro-computational architecture of the brain (Henriques, 2011). Experiential consciousness emerges out of the neuro-computational streams, and, accordingly, positive and negative feeling states are seen as nature's built-in signals to approach benefits and avoid costs. In short, consistent with the work in hedonic psychology, the emotional elements of SWB (i.e., the domains of positive and negative affect) are connected to the basic design of the mind-brain system, and, as such, positive and negative experiences form the first key ingredient of well-being.

Although many animals have conscious feeling states, according to the unified approach humans have a second stream of consciousness, called self-consciousness, which is a second order level of conscious reflection and is mediated by language and emerges in a sociocultural context of reason giving (Henriques, 2011). Reflective self-consciousness is characterized as a verbally mediated system of justification that interprets, narrates, and ultimately functions to legitimize one's self and actions in a social environment (Henriques, 2003). The degree of general life satisfaction or satisfaction with a specific domain is a function of the reflective capacities of the self-consciousness system. In short, these two streams of consciousness mapped by the unified approach correspond directly to the domains of "emotion" and "cognition" articulated by researchers exploring the SWB construct.

Because of its clear framing of human consciousness, the unified approach provides a way to place SWB in the psychological landscape. When it is so placed, the key difference between SWB and eudaimonic approaches emerges, which is that for investigators interested in the former, their conception of well-being stops at the level of subjective consciousness. In contrast, for those who adopt eudaimonic approaches, well-being must include consideration of the functional context in which the conscious appraisal takes place, for it is certainly possible that someone could have positive conscious appraisals but not be truly high in well-being, broadly construed. Consider, for example, that the current authors began to pilot an interview assessing individuals' well-being which involved questions such as, "How satisfied are you with your life?" and "Are you happy most of the time?" As part of the scale validation process, eight individuals who were in a long-term inpatient psychiatric facility were interviewed. Three of the eight individuals assessed ended up scoring the highest possible score on the well-being measure. Namely, they reported being as happy and satisfied with life as possible. Do these individuals have high well-being? It seems many would be hesitant to say yes. And this is because the context of their functioning must be taken into consideration, as it is part of the picture that encompasses the

meaning of the term well-being. Indeed, it is well-known that extreme levels of elevated mood can be associated with poor functioning, as in manic episodes. We must then consider the nature of the functional context, which the NM argues can be divided up into the personality functioning of the individual, the environmental context, and the values and ideology of the evaluator.

Domain 2: The Health and Functioning Domain

The second domain in the NM of well-being refers to the health and functioning within the individual. There are two broad domains of health and functioning to consider, the biological and psychological. Although these two levels are, of course, intimately intertwined, they nevertheless are conceptually separable. According to the unified approach, the biological dimension is ultimately a function of genetic information processing, whereas psychological dimension, the dimension of mental behavior (Henriques, 2004) is an emergent property of neuro-information processing. The distinction between the two is found in the common place distinction between bio-physical health and mental health. Biological functioning is obviously crucial for one's overall well-being. A tumor in the parietal lobe, the failure of the liver or kidneys to effectively remove toxins from the blood, the inability of the digestive system to extract nutrients from food all potentially result in breakdowns in psychological functioning. In addition, the failure of effective biological functioning often dramatically impacts the psychological landscape in terms of attention and the capacity to function in other areas (e.g., chronic pain can be functionally debilitating, arthritis can impede access to many activities). As such, the biological context and the functioning of the biological systems that mediate consciousness and personality are essential elements of well-being. Biological functioning can be analyzed at the various levels of genes, cells, organs, organ systems (e.g., circulatory system), and the physiological functioning of the animal as a whole. This level of analysis is the province of medicine, whose *raison d'être* is to foster the effective functioning of the biological systems or minimize the problematic consequences when those systems fail. As such, we will not delve deeply into the biological context here, but simply note where it exists on the map of human well-being we are offering.

The psychological dimension of Domain 2 can be broadly characterized as one's personality. It is not our intent here to offer a full picture of personality, but instead to point out the key domains of personality that lend themselves to functional analysis in a way that is clearly related to, but also distinct from the subjective domain. These functional elements are aspects that can be assessed from a third person perspective, by analyzing patterns of mental behavior across time. Mayer (2004) defined personality as the organized, developing, mental subsystems within the individual. He offered a map of the mental systems, including domains such as the self-system, perception and attention, reasoning and memory abilities, motivation and emotional systems and the like, that was broadly consistent with the unified approach (Mayer, 2004). A complementary conception of personality was offered by McAdams and Pals (2006), which also has much in common with the unified approach (see Henriques & Stout, 2012). Although not presented as a full theory of personality, we see three broad domains of personality functioning that appear particularly relevant for understanding well-being. They are as follows: (a) tem-

perament and traits, (b) characteristic adaptations and identity, and (c) adaptive potentials.

Temperament and traits. Personality theorists have long differentiated temperament or traits from character, and in accordance with [McAdams and Pals \(2006\)](#), it is a distinction we make here. Personality traits refer to the general dispositional tendencies that are exhibited across various situations. Although there remains some debate about the precise nature and number of traits, a general consensus emerged over decades of research on the existence of five broad trait classes: extraversion, neuroticism, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Not surprisingly, much research has consistently found a meaningful relationship between traits and measures of psychological well-being. The trait of neuroticism has demonstrated the most consistent link and high levels of neuroticism are associated with lower levels of well-being. Although research has been less consistent in regards to the other traits, they tend to be positively correlated, albeit sometimes weakly, with higher levels of psychological well-being. Indeed, given the general correlational pattern, some researchers have proposed the existence of a supraordinate personality construct called resilience, marked by low levels of neuroticism and higher levels of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness (see, e.g., [Musek, 2007](#)).

Characteristic adaptations and identity. Although the concept of traits dominated personality research for several decades, [McAdams and Pals \(2006\)](#) cogently pointed out that traits represent only a portion of personality. They argued that more attention was needed to the concept of character and argued that there were two additional “levels” of personality that could be identified: characteristic adaptations and identity. Identity refers to an individual’s beliefs about himself and the world and is largely influenced by one’s social and cultural context. Characteristic adaptations are midlevel personality units that “include motives, goals, plans, strivings, strategies, values, virtues, schemas, self-images, mental representations of significant others, developmental tasks, and many other aspects of human individuality that speak to motivational, social–cognitive, and developmental concerns” ([McAdams & Pals, 2006](#), p. 208).

Although [McAdams and Pals](#) note that at the time of their writing, there was not a systematic way to organize the systems of character adaptation, [Henriques and Stout \(2012\)](#) utilized the unified approach to delineate five conceptually distinct systems of adaptation, which are as follows: (a) the habit system, (b) the experiential system, (c) the relationship system, (d) the defensive system, and (e) the justification system. Because these systems are not as well-known as traits, they are described in more detail.

The habit system. The habit system corresponds to the most basic levels of mental processes and consists of sensory and motor patterns and reflexes, fixed action patterns, and are stored in procedural memories that can be elicited without any conscious awareness. Habitual responses are automatically initiated upon the presence of specific environmental cues and are shaped based on associations and consequences. In relation to well-being, the concept of habits corresponds patterns of daily activities, broadly relates to overall lifestyles (see, e.g., [Walsh, 2011](#)) and also connects directly in that there are clearly some habits that are more conducive to adaptive functioning (e.g., exercise) than others (e.g., smoking).

The experiential system. The experiential system refers to the nonverbal emotions and feelings, images, sensory aspects of mental life, and is stored in long-term memory in the form of episodic memories. There are three broad domains in the experiential system, which include perception, motives (i.e., drives and urges), and emotions, and examples of experiential phenomena include seeing red, being hungry, and feeling angry. Positive and negative emotions serve as guides that indicate stimuli and situations to approach and avoid.

In relationship to the NM of well-being, the experiential system connects to both Domains 1 and 2. As described previously, the here-and-now, first person, in-the-moment experiencing of positive and negative feeling states corresponds to the experiential elements of Domain 1. However, experiential consciousness emerges out of a bed of perceptual, motivational and emotional psychological systems ([Henriques, 2011](#)), some of which are conscious and some of which are not and thus would be in Domain 2. To see the distinction more clearly, consider that emotion-focused therapies attend to the manner in which the experiential system functions (e.g., [Greenberg, 2002](#)), and maladaptive emotions are either underregulated and overexpressed or overregulated and underexpressed. It is highly possible that individuals who attempt to overregulate or underexpress certain negative emotions might superficially appear happy, but it is apparent on more detailed analysis that their experiential system is not functioning well and that much experience is avoided or denied (see the following description of the defensive system).

The relational system. The relational system is an extension of the experiential system and refers specifically to the social motivations and feelings states, along with internal working models and self-other schema that guide people in their social exchanges and relationships ([Henriques & Stout, 2012](#)). Attachment related therapies and relationally oriented psychodynamic theorists tend to pay particular attention to the functioning of the relationship system ([Wachtel, 2011](#)). Regarding well-being, the unified approach posits that humans have a fundamental need for relational value, which is the experience of being valued by important others and having acceptable levels of social influence ([Henriques, 2011](#)). This need begins at birth, where the nature of the infant’s attachment to caregivers lays the foundation for the development of internal working models of self and other, as well as a foundational sense of security or insecurity. The relationship system refers to the intrapsychic structures within the individual that guide them in their relationships, although obviously there is a close and immediate relationship between how this system is operating and the actual interpersonal field in which the individual is immersed (which, in the NM is in Domain 3, a key part of the social environment). In regards to outcomes relevant to well-being, the key relational need is the experience of being known and valued by important others.

The defensive system. The defensive system refers to the ways in which individuals manage their actions, feelings, and thoughts, and shift the focus of conscious attention to maintain a state of psychic equilibrium. In more everyday terms, the defensive system can be thought of in terms of how people cope with distressing thoughts and experiences. The defensive system is the most diffuse of the five characteristic adaptational systems, as it refers as much to the interrelationships between the domains and the strategies utilized to maintain mental harmony and coherence.

This is not to say that the defensive system cannot be identified or studied. Psychodynamically oriented clinicians and theorists have long documented mechanisms of defensive process, and have delineated ways in which defenses can work adaptively or maladaptively. In relation to well-being, maladaptive defenses tend to result in individuals failing to get their needs met in the long term, which then relates to suffering and poorer well-being. Individuals with maladaptive defensive styles would be predicted to be less resilient in the context of stress and demonstrate more problematic outcomes associated with the other domains.

The justification system. The justification system refers to the language-based beliefs and values that allow humans to narrate events, make reflective evaluations, analyze the logic of concepts, and develop a meaningful worldview. The justification system can be viewed in terms of the immediate interpretations that people make and the kind of self-talk they engage in to make sense out of their surroundings. Like the experiential system, the justification system corresponds to both a system of adaptation in Domain 2 and relates directly to self-consciousness described in Domain 1 of the NM. The in-the-moment, self-conscious reflective evaluations that are made refer to Domain 1, whereas the functional context out of which self-consciousness emerges refers to Domain 2. Indeed, the functioning of the justification system would connect to concepts in the literature such as verbal intelligence, ego functioning, and self-concept. It would also house the “identity,” which is conceptualized by *McAdams and Pals (2006)* to be a separate level of the personality. In relationship to well-being, high levels of self-esteem, self-acceptance, and self-compassion, in addition to high levels of life domain satisfaction and a strong sense of meaning would be outcomes indicative of well-being.

Adaptive potentials. In addition to the traditional personality domains of character and temperament, adaptive potentials are also important to understanding well-being as conceived of here. Adaptive potential refers to the skills and abilities an individual has to function effectively in the environment. Intelligence is probably the best and most studied adaptive potential and recent developments in Catell-Horn-Carroll theory of intelligence provide a useful map of this complicated construct. Howard Gardner made a useful contribution to the concept of adaptive potential with his notion of multiple intelligences. His model suggests that individuals have different potentials to function effectively in the following eight areas: (a) logical-mathematical, (b) verbal/linguistic, (c) spatial reasoning, (d) bodily kinesthetic, (e) musical, (f) interpersonal, (g) intrapersonal, and (h) naturalistic (*Gardner, 1999*). We recognize Gardner’s theory has generated significant criticism and we agree with the critics that Gardner’s “multiple intelligences” are actually a misnomer and that the domains are more appropriately labeled ability sets some of which are helpfully considered intellectual abilities (e.g., logic-mathematical abilities) and some of which are not (e.g., bodily/kinesthetic abilities). These criticisms notwithstanding, his work on differing domains of ability serves as a potentially useful framework to point out that different individuals bring different skill sets or adaptive potentials to different circumstances. One’s adaptive potential is an important variable in considering how an individual is functioning. If, for example, an individual is struggling to graduate from high school, the meaning of that in regards to functioning and well-being is different if an individual has a measured IQ of 75 as opposed to 130.

One element we very much agree with in *Jayawickreme, Forgeard, and Seligman’s (2012)* critique of the current state of well-being research was that there has been confusion among theorists between inputs, processes, and outcomes. In the discussion above, we have attempted to be clear that there are systemic structures that vary in the manner in which they function, and that these concepts must correspond to, but also be conceptually separable from, indicators of well-being outcomes. The two areas of consciousness (experiential and self-reflective) and the three areas of personality (temperament, characteristic adaptations and identity, and adaptive potentials) are conceptual entities that are related to, but also quite different from, well-being.

Domain 3: The Environmental Domain

As was captured by Kurt Lewin’s famous equation, $B = f(P, E)$, psychological behavior is always ultimately a function of the person and the environment. Because outcomes indicative of well-being emerge as patterns of psychological behavior over time, the environmental context is crucial to understanding well-being outcomes. *Recall Harris’ (2010)* description of the “bad life” referenced earlier, and consider the dominance of the environment in determining the outcomes. Indeed, the war-torn land was such that the personal characteristics and adaptive potential of the individual were almost completely muted by the sheer brutality of the environment. Clearly, macrolevel events can occur in the environment, such as war or other disasters, which result in poor well-being regardless of the personality or adaptive functioning of the individual. Along those lines, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs provides a good initial starting point for thinking about the environment. Clearly, individual well-being is dependent on meeting one’s physiological needs for air, food, and water, and for physical safety. In addition, the social environment is obviously crucial for needs for belongingness and a sense of relational value and developing a functional identity.

For our purposes here, it is useful to divide the environment into two broad areas: the material and the social, each of which has component parts. The material environment can be effectively divided into the biophysical ecology, the available technology, and one’s financial resources. The biophysical ecology element corresponds to the natural habitat in which the individual lives. This is relevant to well-being in that it includes the basic material resources that are required for health and functioning (e.g., the presence of adequate quantities of air, water, and food), as well as the basic stability and habitability of the environment, which would include elements such as air quality, noise levels, pathogens, and so forth. It is also worth noting that recent research has suggested that connection with a natural environment has a positive impact on well-being (e.g., *Cervinka, Röderer, & Hefler, 2012*). The technological environment refers to the presence of manufactured goods and resources available. The presence of certain kinds of technologies allow for much greater freedom of choice and for opportunity to control the environment for desired outcomes. At the same time, technology can give rise to many daily hassles or stressors (traffic, noise pollution) that potentially can be frustrating or alienating and lead to negative impact on well-being. Indeed, the nature of the impact of our radically changing technology on our collective well-being is a central question that requires much thoughtful attention.

The financial or economic environment refers to access to money and the basic state of the economy. Money is conceptualized here as a human symbol of potential energy that can be exchanged for work and other resources. As such, money can be thought of as a mechanism for access to power and resource control. Generally, more money is associated with greater degrees of freedom and capacity to control, and thus would be associated with greater well-being. However, the relationship is complicated by many factors, not the least of which is the concept of comparison, whereby an individual's sense of monetary satisfaction will be determined in large part by how much money they have access to relative to others they are close to and how much money they have had in the past. In addition, the financial and economic environment relates directly to issues such as employment, which is, of course, a major life domain for most adults.

The social environment refers to the network of relationships and social institutions with which an individual is imbedded. Following Bronfenbrenner (1979), it is useful to conceive of the social environment as a series of nested levels. The microsocial environment refers to the immediate relational environment and the quality and intimacy of connections with other individuals. This domain relates closely to the relationship system discussed in Domain 2, although it refers directly to the actual interpersonal environment and the amount of connection and social capital an individual has. The key domains of the microsocial environment would include relations with family, friends, peers, and romantic partners. The middle or meso-level social environment refers to the community and social class of the individual. It relates to the general socioeconomic status of the individual (i.e., lower, middle, upper), and thus is closely connected to the economic and financial domain. It also refers to the nature and quality of the social living arrangements (i.e., urban vs. rural). The macrosocial level refers to the larger cultural context. Specifically, this would include the individual's national, political, and religious identifications, as well as the larger values, ideologies, and the like.

Thus far we have identified the three major classes or domains of ingredients that constitute the well-being of an individual, namely the experience of happiness and reflective satisfaction, the health and functioning of the individual at the biological and psychological levels, and the environmental context, referring to the extent to which material and social resources are available to meet resource needs, avoid damage and foster adaptive functioning. Each of these elements has been the focus of attention in the broad literature on well-being. The last domain, values and ideology, has received significantly less attention, but according to the current model, it plays an essential role that is built into the very nature of the construct.

Domain 4: The Values and Ideology Domain

Imagine the following individual, Mr. X. When asked about his life, he reports that he is happy and satisfied. He believes in the work that he is doing and holds a high rank in his occupational organization. He reports good relationships with his peers, family, and wife. He has significantly more resources than others, the economy is booming, and he believes strongly in the current cultural Zeitgeist of his time. On the surface, this description corresponds well to Harris' (2010) description of the "good life," and by the variables we have considered so far, he would appear

to have high levels of well-being. And, yet, now imagine that the individual is a Nazi SS guard in 1940, and is working on convincing others that the "Jewish problem" requires a "final solution." Do these factors influence one's assessment of this individual's "well-being?"

We argue that it must. Well-being is an evaluative construct. The central value of the WHO is the promotion of well-being. Similarly, the ethical code of psychologists requires psychologists to make value judgments about broad aspects of an individual's functioning (i.e., we evaluate individuals who show antisocial or pedophilic tendencies as having psychopathology). As such, it is our contention that the very concept of well-being overlaps at least in some ways with living an ethical life. This value-based element plays a role in the assessment of well-being above and beyond the mere description of the other domains in the model. We thus argue that the values and ideology of the evaluator are thus a separate, fourth domain that must be included in the conception of the concept. As one who upholds Nazism, Mr. X would undoubtedly assess his own well-being to be high. We, however, would not agree. Coming from a modern psychological perspective, informed by the values of psychology as articulated in the APA Ethics Code, and working from the position that well-being is a broad construct that involves ethical living, we would evaluate Mr. X as living far from a virtuous life (Fowers, 2005).

Closely connected to the concept of values is the evaluator's basic conception of the nature of the universe, which we refer to here as one's ideology. It is useful to note here that religion and spirituality were not explicitly referenced above. There were, of course, place holders for where one might place them in the scheme. For example, an individual's justification system is the psychological subsystem that holds semantically represented beliefs and values. And the cultural zeitgeist refers to the beliefs and values of the larger culture. We could posit from the model that an individual who has spiritual beliefs that are shared by the culture and there are opportunities for expressing those beliefs in a manner that brings the experience of affirmation and validation and social connection that such processes would be associated with high levels of well-being. And, indeed, religious beliefs have repeatedly been found to be related to well-being. Our contention here is that the ideology and worldview of the evaluator will play a major role in how that relationship is explained. If, for example, one ascribes to a Christian version of reality, then the idea of accepting Christ as one's savior is associated with well-being because it brings the individual closer to the spiritual trilogy of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. In addition, a secular individual would be seen from a traditional Christian perspective as inevitably lacking in a crucial domain of existence. In contrast, a nontheistic, secular position inevitably characterizes the religious activities in a different manner and thus having a different relationship to well-being. For example, the explanation here might be that the religious beliefs serve as a comfort, create a strong social network, and prevent nihilistic attitudes from developing, but these explanations are radically different than the ontological position that one has higher well-being because one is closer to the Holy Spirit. In short, evaluations of well-being are ineluctably tied to an individual's worldview and fundamental values. What this means is that individuals who are working on holistic approaches to well-being and making claims about who has authentic well-being must articulate

their values and ideology which is being used as a reference point for assessing the individual functioning and the social context.

Mapping the Illness Domains With the Nested Model

In this final section, we attempt to take the NM one step farther by applying it to illness and using it to elucidate the complicated relationship between illness and pathology on the one hand and well-being on the other. As mentioned in the opening of this article, for much the existence of clinical psychology, the primary focus was on psychopathology; to the extent it was considered, well-being was generally conceptualized as the absence of distressing symptoms or significant functional impairment. However, with the humanistic movement in psychology and the more recent rise of positive psychology, attention has now been focused on delineating what constitutes well-being and related constructs in many areas. Yet, the well-being and positive psychology literature remains largely separate from the illness and pathology literature. A reasonable question that can be raised in considering these two literatures is what is the relationship between well-being and illness pathology?

We contend that a broad model of well-being, such as we offer with the NM, should be able to offer insights into this question, and we believe the NM succeeds in doing this. Consider, for example, that if we were to “invert” the focus of the NM, an outline of the key domains of illness and pathology emerges. From an “inverted” perspective, Domain 1 would correspond to subjective feelings of distress or perceived harm, Domain 2 would involve maladaptive or dysfunctional psychological and biological processes, Domain 3 would involve material and social contextual factors that threaten to disrupt functional processes (e.g., toxins or emotional abuse) and result in distress. When looked at this way (also consider the earlier example of Harris’ and description of “the Bad Life”), the NM provides a way of thinking about well-being and illness-pathology on a continuum that consists of the evaluation of harm or happiness on the one hand and levels of functional capacity on the other.

A simple continuum that ranges from illness-pathology to well-being on the high end does not do justice to the complexities. To see this clearly, consider that the systems that describe and classify pathology, such as the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual or International Classification of Diseases*, are very different in focus and content that the concepts reviewed above regarding hedonic, eudaimonic, or integrative approaches to well-being. Why is this so? The short answer is that the ways in which systems can malfunction is quite different than the ways in which systems can achieve optimal functioning (Domains 2 and 3). Moreover, the perceived harm or benefit of both ailments and capacities differ depending on the experience of the individual (Domain 1) or the evaluator’s values and ideology. And thus, it certainly makes sense that there are differences in focus and concepts when one is examining the illness-pathology end of the spectrum as opposed to the well-being end. The key point here is that the utility of the map offered by the NM is additionally seen when it is inverted and applied to the illness-pathology side of the wellness continuum.

Conclusion

As Jayawickreme, Forgeard, and Seligman (2012) note, well-being has traditionally been a somewhat convoluted construct that has meant many different things to many different traditions in both research and theory. The NM is offered to bring conceptual clarity to the construct, which in turn it is hoped will lead to advances in the field. The NM makes the claim that there are four conceptually separable domains that have traditionally been fused or at least not clearly separated and that has resulted in the nebulous nature of the concept. There is the subjective domain, including the first person conscious experience, there is the health and functioning of the individual (i.e., biology and personality), and there is the context in which the individual lives (both social and material) and, finally, there is the values and ideology of the evaluator. We believe that much benefit can come to the field if this map was applied broadly in the various domains of research on well-being.

Although not presented as a complete model of well-being and all its facets, the NM does offer a broad way to conceptualize authentic well-being. Following Kant, the NM conceptualizes well-being as happiness with the worthiness to be happy. Happiness in this context is synonymous with subjective well-being and refers to the preponderance of positive relative to negative emotional states and the reflected sense of life domain satisfaction. But what justifies happiness as worthy or authentic? We believe the answers are to be found in three additional classes of variables that surround and contextualize the experience of happiness. First, the psychological and biological health and functioning of the individual is crucial to consider. Focusing on the psychological, we delineated three domains of personality (traits, characteristic adaptations and identity, and adaptive potentials) crucial to assess to determining one’s potential capacity and current functioning. The other context is the environment, which provides (or not) the social and material resources to meet crucial psychological needs and foster adaptive functioning. Finally, well-being is an evaluative construct and the notion the evaluator has regarding the nature of the universe and the definition of the good life provide the epistemological context for which an evaluation of an individual’s well-being is made.

The NM has significant implications for future research on well-being. First, we strongly discourage any researchers from equating the holistic construct of well-being with subjective, conscious evaluations of happiness. At the same time, we support the continued delineation of the focus on conscious appraisal defined as subjective well-being, which is an important variable to research. Second, for researchers attempting to work out a more holistic notion of the concept, the NM encourages researchers and theorists to offer specifics regarding the health and functioning of the individual, the nature of the environmental context and their values and ideology. To us, this is what a comprehensive assessment of well-being entails. Finally, we believe that the map allows researchers to place the wide variety of various perspectives on well-being into an overarching framework that will reduce confusion and cross-talk. Within the field of psychology, the model brings clarity to the often confusing debate between hedonic and eudaimonic approaches. In addition, the model provides a way for disci-

plines such as economics and environmental science, sociology, ethics, and medicine, which all discuss the concepts of human well-being, to be clear on how they might relate to one another. For example, ethical philosophy relates directly to the issues of values, economics, and environmental approaches explore the material side of the environmental context whereas sociology emphasizes the macrolevel social context, and traditional medicine concerns itself predominantly with the bio-physical dimension of human functioning. In sum, the NM that stems from the unified approach offers the opportunity for clarity within the field of psychology and between other disciplines such that the concept of well-being may be much more effectively conceptualized and researched in future generations.

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