

The Evolution of Well-Being and the Good
Part I: A Review of “In Search of Coherence: Sketching a Theory
of Sustainable Well-Being” by Timo Hämäläinen

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After giving my keynote presentation on “The Psychology of the Future” at the *World Conference of Futures Research 2015* in Turku, Finland in June, one of the conference attendees, Timo Hämäläinen, introduced himself and told me that he had recently published an extensive article on well-being that he thought I would find interesting and resonant with various themes in my talk. He told me that my writings on future consciousness were cited and discussed in his article.

Hämäläinen, a Fellow in Strategic Research for the Finnish Innovation Fund in Helsinki, Finland, sent me his article soon after I returned to the USA; indeed, I discovered that the article, “In Search of Coherence: Sketching a Theory of Sustainable Well-Being,” was a chapter in a new book that Hämäläinen had co-edited with Juliet Michaelson, titled *Well-Being and Beyond*. Not only did the article look impressive in its scholarly depth, but perusing through the table of contents of the book I noticed other provocative sounding chapters, including one by Maureen O’Hara and Andrew Lyon titled “Well-Being and Well-Becoming: Reauthorizing the Subject in Incoherent Times.” Hämäläinen was kind enough to send me a copy of this article as well. (Complete references are included at the end of this editorial.)

I told Hämäläinen that after reading his article I would give him some feedback, but as I read it dawned on me that given the great substance and depth of his publication, the article warranted an extended “book review.” Moreover, I also read O’Hara’s and Lyon’s article, which further built upon various themes pertaining to the nature and psychology of well-being. I realized that in discussing Timo’s article it made sense to bring in O’Hara and Lyon’s article as well.

Adding further to my study, I discovered in the references listed in the latter article an intriguing sounding publication titled “Happiness Donut: A Confucian Critique of Positive Psychology” by Louise Sundararajan. I was able to locate on the web the “Donut” article and read it. Since the concepts of well-being, happiness, and the good that I presented in my talk (as throughout my writings, Lombardo, 2011a) are greatly inspired by positive psychology and the work of Martin Seligman, the “Donut” article definitely perked my interest, and further enriched my thinking on the whole issue of well-being and the good. As Sundararajan questions in her article, does positive psychology (as espoused by Martin Seligman in particular) provide a viable, convincing, and globally balanced theory of psychological well-being and the good? Hence, starting from Timo’s article, I eventually read, took notes on, and thought through three new related articles on the themes of well-being and how to define and realize the good life (and the good future)-- which were the opening questions presented in my keynote talk in Finland. (See my

slide show at the Conference Website: <https://futuresconference2015.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/tom-lombardo.pdf>

Reviewing all three articles in this issue of the newsletter would produce too lengthy an editorial, hence I first review Timo's article in this September issue, and I plan to review the latter two articles in the next editorial of the newsletter.

By way of introduction, the relevance of these articles to the topics of wisdom and the future is: Well-being and the good are frequently identified as the overarching goals of wisdom; in fact, leading a life of wisdom is frequently seen as the highest expression of psychological well-being (and psychological functioning) and the good life. Hence, our most preferable or desirable future should be a life of wisdom, with wisdom providing both the substance and the means for realizing the good future. Within my review of these three articles I highlight their relevance to the themes of wisdom and the good future, as described above, and of special note, I compare the main points of these articles with my theses that wisdom is heightened future consciousness and that the good future (or the good life) is flourishing in the flow of evolution.

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Overall, Hämäläinen's article is an informative review of the numerous global efforts to articulate and measure human well-being and implement social policies to enhance it in the world; it is an excellent review of theories and the pragmatics of well-being. Additionally, the article attempts to offer a holistic and comprehensive conception of well-being that addresses all the key dimensions of human existence; the author contrasts his holistic view with various other influential views of well-being that are limited in scope. Of special note, Hämäläinen critiques dominant materialistic and economic visions of well-being, arguing instead that a diverse array of disciplinary studies needs to inform visions of human well-being. Well-being goes beyond the physical; well-being goes beyond wealth. Moreover, Hämäläinen proposes that his holistic view of well-being specifically concerns itself with contemporary industrialized human societies, in which there are emerging new issues and themes regarding how to realize well-being and the good life, both individually and collectively. Our understanding of well-being needs to reflect the unique challenges of modern times, something that many views of well-being do not do. An economic and materialistic vision of well-being is decidedly out of touch with the centrally important psycho-social challenges of contemporary times.

Hämäläinen takes the "Capability Approach" (CA), which he identifies as the most comprehensive and influential contemporary theory of well-being, as his springboard for articulating his own holistic theory of well-being. The CA, associated with the writings and work of Amartya Sen (2001, 2009) and Martha Nussbaum (2003, 2011), and serving as the inspiration for the development of the *United Nations Human Development Index*, according to Hämäläinen, has many positive features to recommend itself: It is multi-dimensional (going beyond economic variables), including such factors as "food and shelter, health, physical security, knowledge, social needs,

rights and freedoms, rule of law, [and the] natural environment.” Also, the CA highlights individual active human agency and capacity, human choice, self-empowerment, and human responsibility as central factors in well-being. In essence, well-being is an individual and collective self-achievement. Even if human agency is set in the context of constraining and/or supporting environmental conditions and resources, well-being is ultimately an achievement realized by humans rather than given to them. This second point clearly aligns with my virtue theory of well-being and the good, in which self-responsibility is described as the cardinal virtue behind wisdom, happiness, and flourishing.

Hämäläinen finds the CA deficient in several important respects however: There is a lack of acknowledgement of unique contemporary challenges to well-being; there is very little analysis of how the various psychological and functional factors involved in well-being interact with each other (CA is not truly holistic); and there is minimal treatment on how environmental factors help or hinder human well-being (again, if holism implies an integrative vision of humans and their environment than CA is not sufficiently holistic). As one final major point, according to Hämäläinen, CA does not address the general issue of sustainable development for humanity as a whole, which Hämäläinen believes is a critical factor in defining collective well-being.

What Hämäläinen proposes as an advance over CA is a model of well-being and its determinants (represented by an interactive flow diagram) that includes both environmental and psychological factors, which are interactive with each other. Beginning on the left side of his diagram, a list of environmental factors, resources, and capabilities is identified as utilized by humans in various activities and roles to address and satisfy a set of identified psychological needs (Maslow’s hierarchy of needs and a sense of coherence) that if successfully addressed lead to subjective well-being. Hence, the flow is: Environment/Resources/Capabilities --> Activities and Roles --> Needs --> Well-Being. Although there is a flow of determination moving from factors on the left side to the right side of the diagram, there is also feedback effects represented in the overall diagram going in the reverse direction from right to left. Hence, activities and roles impact the environment and level of capabilities, both constructively and negatively; and both need-satisfaction and subjective well-being impact the environment and resources as well. These loops of interdependency between psychological states and activities and the environment roughly correspond to what I refer to as human-environmental reciprocities. Though one could argue as an environmental determinist that the environment sets the conditions for, if not determines, human action and states of well-being (or lack thereof), as Hämäläinen notes and I have argued as well, the environment (as the arena of resources, opportunities, and obstacles) is clearly under the influence of the choices, actions, and mental states of the individual (Lombardo, 2011). Through our actions we change the environment. (The active agency view of humans and human well-being is a key component within such a reciprocal theory of causation and well-being.)

According to Hämäläinen, subjective well-being and happiness is realized through the achievement of (or at least progress toward achieving) one’s goals. The achievement of

a goal is defined as the satisfaction of a need. He also states that well-being is feeling good and functioning well or effectively in using one's resources and capabilities, a description consistent with the first definition. Following the work of the positive psychologist, Corey Keyes (2007), Hämäläinen also identifies well-being as "flourishing."

Two points, though, to note in this model are that defining well-being as the satisfaction of needs sounds very similar to the psychological theory of human motivation in which humans are described as fundamentally motivated in their actions toward reducing their needs. A need is by definition a deficiency; hence the psychological theory of need reduction is a deficiency-based theory of motivation. But analogously, would that mean that Hämäläinen is presenting a deficiency reduction-based theory of well-being? Is well-being based upon eliminating an aversive or undesirable state (a need)? Such an interpretation of well-being consequently would not be grounded in a very positive or inspiring theory of human nature.

To further expand upon this point, Hämäläinen lists Maslow's hierarchy of needs as one of the two main sets of human needs that humans are motivated in their actions to address. But as Maslow (1968, 1972) noted, the "higher needs" in his list, specifically self-actualization, are not the same kind of motivators as the "lower needs," such as hunger, thirst, and safety. For Maslow, it is a mistake to refer to self-actualization as a need at all; it is not a deficiency in need of elimination, but rather self-actualization is more strongly associated with growth. Self-actualization encompasses pursuit and enhancement rather than avoidance and elimination. Though this contrast can sound simply semantic, if well-being is flourishing, as I have suggested, involving growth as a key factor, and humans indeed are motivated in this positive direction, it makes sense to get away from defining well-being in terms of the elimination of deficiencies and needs--what I would take as a negative view of human motivation and human goals. Flourishing and growth is moving toward something, rather than away from something.

Another key question regarding Hämäläinen's diagram is his inclusion of a "sense of coherence" as a set of additional needs above and beyond Maslow's list of needs. It seems to me that the items listed under coherence, which include meaningfulness in life, higher purpose, flow, and both manageability and comprehensibility in life, are by and large covered under Maslow's (1968, 1972) description of self-actualizing individuals. I am not sure if anything substantive is added with his list of "Sense of Coherence" factors. But as I will explain below, coherence is a central theme in Hämäläinen's theory of well-being, and he wants to highlight it in his initial diagrammatic representation of the whole theory.

Moving forward in the article, Hämäläinen argues that material well-being became a central focus and concern in industrialized nations after World War II, but this materialistic and economic vision of the "good life" has been a central theme in the West at least as far back as the Age of Western Enlightenment and the emergence of the secular theory of progress. Heaven knows, at the very least, food, shelter, and physical possessions and instruments for survival have been seen as essential to human well-

being running back thousands of years. Moreover, Hämäläinen also states that as industrialized nations successfully addressed material concerns, other non-material factors became important in thinking about well-being. As our bellies were filled and our homes provided with innumerable gadgets and appliances, we became more concerned with personal self-development and self-worth, for example. But this interpretation again seems historically limited, in so far as the non-material dimensions (psychological, spiritual, and social) of human existence have been the concern of numerous writers and social movements since the beginnings of recorded history. Religious, spiritual, and philosophical traditions through the ages have emphasized the “higher dimensions” of human happiness and well-being--of the development of the mind and the spirit. Indeed, there were innumerable critics of the Western vision of economic and technological progress in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who highlighted the importance of psychological, ethical, and social factors that, according to critics, were being ignored by the materialistic-oriented advocates of secular progress. All told, both materialistic and psycho-spiritual visions of well-being have been around since the beginnings of recorded history, if not earlier (Lombardo, 2006).

Even if our perceptions of what constitutes the good life haven’t changed as much as Hämäläinen contends, following Hämäläinen we can agree that in the early years of the twenty-first century we live in a “changed world.” (How it’s changed is a complex question.) Of special note, Hämäläinen contends that in industrialized regions we are bombarded with an overload of information and choices; there is pervasive uncertainty regarding what is best, what is true, and where we are heading and should be heading; and in general, human reality has become increasingly complex, stressing our capacities for comprehensibility and manageability. These factors are challenging our ability to realize well-being in life, and need to be addressed by any viable theory and set of policies and practices regarding well-being in contemporary times.

What I would note regarding his list is that his major identified challenges are psychological in nature, and though we live in a material world in which economic considerations are important, the key to our present and future states of well-being is to be found within our psychological development. (This point aligns with the active agency theory of well-being, and that wisdom, a psychological character trait or virtue, is the key to well-being.) As a general point of resonance and appreciation, Hämäläinen’s efforts throughout his article to identify the new and emergent contemporary challenges to well-being and how to appropriately address them are both informative and thought provoking. I will add, though, that based upon the vision of well-being I have developed in books and articles, it seems equally, if not more important, to address the question of well-being for the future. As beings who exist in a future-oriented reality, well-being needs to be conceptualized with an eye toward the future (and not just the present) regarding both its anticipated challenges and opportunities.

As noted above, coherence is a central theme in Hämäläinen’s theory of well-being. He anchors his exposition on coherence to Aaron Antonovsky’s (1987) theory of health and well-being. For Antonovsky, health results from comprehensibility of life, manageability of life, and meaningfulness in life, which are the three essential features of what

Antonovsky means by coherence. All three of these criteria are psychological, and can be seen as accomplishments or achievements of the individual (or the group).

But as a more general meaning for the term, coherence can denote integration, wholeness, and balance and harmony of parts, and Hämäläinen uses this basic meaning for the concept in his exposition as well. According to him, one can have coherence or lack of coherence within the activities, dispositions, and ideas of an individual human mind (Is the mind harmonious and unified?); between the mental states and actions of an individual and the environment (Is the individual in resonance with their environment?); and between the individual and society (Is the individual in resonance with society?). On all counts, mental, ecological, and social, does the system in question integrate and harmonize, or is it fragmented or conflicting? Along similar lines, Hämäläinen uses the term coherence to mean adjustment and a matching together; incoherence means maladjustment or mismatch. Inspired by Antonovsky, Hämäläinen contends that when coherence goes down, well-being and mental health go down, and consequently, as a feedback effect, productivity diminishes as well.

Having introduced the essentials of Antonovsky's theory, Hämäläinen presents the core theses within his theory of well-being. According to Hämäläinen, we should be aspiring toward "sustainability of well-being" (or "sustainable well-being"). In essence, true well-being is sustainable well-being. (Hence, well-being for Hämäläinen does have a future-orientation.) Furthermore, for Hämäläinen, coherence is the key to sustainable well being, since coherence supports stability and hence sustainability, which is good, whereas the lack of coherence is associated with chaos and instability, and hence lack of sustainability, which is not good.

Bringing the writings of Erwin Laszlo (2008) into the picture, Hämäläinen argues that coherence is critical to the evolutionary process. For Laszlo, evolution creates coherence (harmonious integration), and the lack of coherence between a life form and its environment is maladjustment, threatening the continued existence of the life form. Indeed, Laszlo contends that it is a fundamental moral maxim to support coherence within oneself (internal coherence) and in one's relationship with the environment (external coherence). Hämäläinen appears to support Laszlo's views, thus evolution creates coherence which maintains sustainability which equates to the moral good. Lack of coherence then is at the core of the immoral.

Hämäläinen presents a two-by-two matrix of fundamental types of coherence/incoherence: Internal/immaterial (the psychological), internal/physical (the physiological), external/immaterial (the social), and external/physical (the environmental). In each of the four types, there can be either coherence or incoherence; in the former cases we have health, vitality, and the good; in the latter cases we have illness, psychological and social problems, and immorality.

Within this general theoretical context, Hämäläinen restates and further develops his thesis that uncertainty, complexity, overload of variety and options, and interdependence of diverse variables in life, are key challenges to well-being in our contemporary world.

He further proposes that short-term thinking, selfishness, and habitual behaviors, as prevalent modes of coping within such a challenging modern reality, significantly diminish overall well-being. According to him, such modes of coping generate increasing incoherence and are not sustainable. In essence, a lack of extended temporal consciousness, lopsided ego-centricity, and a deficiency in creativity and the capacity to change significantly contribute to a loss of well-being. It is noteworthy that the converse of these three deficiencies (expanded temporal consciousness, cosmic consciousness, and creativity and the adventuresome spirit) align with three of the character virtues of heightened future consciousness and wisdom that I have proposed in my writings (See for example, Lombardo “A Virtue Theory of Wisdom,” 2013) .

After pointing out where we go wrong, Hämäläinen introduces a set of important capabilities that support coherence and sustainable well-being, including “reflexivity, foresight and systemic intelligence, willpower, self-regulation and emotion control, and intra- and interpersonal attunement, as well as compassion and empathy.” Such capacities will facilitate comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness in life, all qualities of coherence within Hämäläinen’s model (inspired by Antonovsky).

Indeed, as one of the strongest features of his article, Hämäläinen reviews a variety of psychological capacities supporting psychological well-being (which he equates with sustainable behaviors and modes of internal and external coherence). He discusses meta-cognitive and synthesizing mental abilities; he compares the strengths and weaknesses of unconscious versus conscious thought processes; he highlights the importance of flow activities and honest self-appraisal; and he includes a brief discussion of my views on wisdom and heightened future consciousness.

Complementing his psychological review, Hämäläinen next addresses various approaches to making the environment more coherent, comprehensive, manageable, and meaningful for humans. Can we reduce complexity and uncertainty in the world? What can we do to design more human-centric technologies? What are the pros and cons regarding modern media in supporting well being? How can we reorganize communities, households, families, and even the general economy to better support human well-being? How might we redesign the layout of our workspaces and our organizational cultures to better serve human well-being?

This section, combined with the previous section which focused on internal (psychological) variables, provides an ecological and holistic approach to health and well-being, attempting to pull together the mental, environmental, social, and technological.

It is within such a holistic context that Hämäläinen next discusses social exclusion and the NEET problem (“not in employment, education, or training”), which clearly illustrates how psychological problems and deficiencies (for example in life management skills) interact with poor environmental conditions, whereby each negative pole generates (or stimulates) increasing problems within the other negative pole. Problematic minds intensify problematic environments which further worsen the capacities of problematic

minds. And both factors have negative effects upon physiological health, which in turn can feed back on the psychological and environmental. Hence, problems in social functioning snowball within such interactive loops. The gist of this review by Hämäläinen comes down to “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Educating individuals early on in life regarding life management skills, for example, is a more effective and future-oriented approach than trying to fix escalating problems later on in life.

In his conclusion, Hämäläinen argues that modern society needs to focus on sustainable development and overall human well-being. All of society’s activities and goals need to be subordinated to sustainability and well-being. Moreover, society needs a new theory of well-being (which is what Hämäläinen has offered), since the present approach to well-being is not sustainable. (The present approach he is referring to is basically the economic-materialistic approach that stresses us out, depletes our environmental resources, and ignores the psychological-social dimensions of well-being.) He appears to wish to highlight in this regard that our present vision of well-being is not sufficiently holistic--that it is mechanistic, envisioning humans as “homo economicus.” In essence, we need a new cultural paradigm.

Having summarized Hämäläinen’s central theory of well-being, I will now offer a critical analysis of his theory, highlighting the key concepts of “coherence” and “sustainability.” In essence, I propose that although coherence and sustainability capture key features of well-being, and cannot be ignored, the very opposite qualities of incoherence and transformation need to also be included in a comprehensive theory of well-being. Although Hämäläinen at times uses the word “flourish” as synonymous with well-being (as he defines it), I would suggest that the concept of flourish both transcends the notions of coherence and sustainability and more accurately captures the essence of well-being.

First consider the concept of coherence, which in essence means integration. Throughout human history, the qualities of unity, order, harmony, and balance have been frequently identified as both the good as well as the core feature of mental, physical, and social health. Illustrative of this philosophical position are such notions as: Mental harmony and balance is essential to mental health; homeostatic balance is the key to biological health; a peaceful and ordered society is the ideal society; nature is a harmonious ecological balance of diverse living forms; “the harmony of the spheres” captures the cosmic essence of things; and God, as the creator and ruler of the universe, is a unified, ordered, and harmonious reality (Lombardo, 2006). It seems to me that Hämäläinen falls within this mindset of thinking.

Yet, though integration (whether it is biological, psychological, social, or ecological) is a clear dimension of reality, its converse, chaos (a disconnection, if not conflict of parts), is equally significant and essential in the operations of nature, evolution, and human existence (psychological or social). Though from the point of view of the coherence model, the qualities of fragmentation, chaos, conflict, and disequilibrium are seen as lying at the core of evil, ill health, and all human problems, these qualities all come into play within the growth and evolution of individual minds, human societies, and nature as

a whole. Such qualities, moreover, appear to serve a constructive and positive function. Such qualities seem necessary for individual freedom, creativity in both humans and nature, natural selection, and fundamental evolutionary jumps (or “Gestalt switches”) in mind and the cosmos (Lombardo, 2011b). Though such qualities within an individual consciousness or collective social reality may be experienced as unpleasant, painful, disconcerting, threatening, or confusing, and even lead to death and extinction, they often instigate progress and higher levels of wisdom, happiness, and evolution.

Moreover, bringing in Antonovsky’s three essential features of coherence, one could argue that a certain level of incomprehensibility, uncertainty, overload, loss of manageability or control, confusing complexity, and lack of clear meaningfulness are desirable qualities to maintain in life. Carried to an excess, the desire to work toward the elimination of such qualities represents a rigid, simplistic, defensive, and immature mind. One of the key features of wisdom appears to be the capacity to live with uncertainty; another key feature is flexibility and openness regarding the need to control and manage everything (one needs to be able to comfortably at times go with the flow). Engaging in true adventure requires relinquishing (to some degree at least) such needs of coherence. Indeed, within our complex, pluralistic, transforming, ambiguous, and uncertain contemporary reality, we could argue that it is psychologically adaptable to embrace a certain level of “incoherence” in life and philosophical attitude (Best and Kellner, 1997).

What I particularly wish to highlight is that the quality of flourishing (and the experience of authentic happiness that comes with it) cannot be realized without these presumably “negative” features in human life. Flourish, above all else, means to grow, and there is at best only incremental growth if we adhere to a life of coherence. Transformational growth requires chaos, fragmentation, and conflict, and a capacity to face, if not revel in, a certain amount of uncertainty. Indeed, I would also include creativity as a key element of flourishing, and again, from the above considerations, this quality can’t be realized without the “chaotic cluster” (Lombardo, 2011b). I have defined creativity as “a balanced synthesis of complementary qualities, involving the making of order out of chaos, which often involves as a prelude the making of chaos out of order.”

Some will argue that to appreciate what is good and what is pleasurable, one needs to experience what is evil and painful. This is the contrast or oppositional theory of morality and psychological states. As an illustrative and relevant case in point, individuals identified by others as being wise appear to have suffered multiple traumas, frustrations, and painful experiences in life. Also, persons of high discipline and sustained purpose appear to have developed such capacities in the context of repeated failures and frustrating, unrewarding life experiences (Seligman, 2011). At a religious and philosophical level, our greatest expressions of spirituality, morality, and enlightenment seem to have all been provoked and given articulate form by what we could describe as “negative” experiences and events in life.

In this regard, it seems to me that a Yin-Yang vision of reality and the nature of the good (Lombardo, 2006) is on target, in which both the qualities of coherence and incoherence

have respective roles to play in the good life. It seems to me that this vision is indeed more holistic and comprehensive. Order and chaos, unity and diversity, harmony and discord, sense and obscurity, and equilibrium and disequilibrium, all have a role to play in existence and evolution, and all need to be taken into account in articulating the nature of the good and human well-being. It definitely seems to me that a pure coherence model petrifies and constrains reality, society, nature, and the human mind.

The other key concept I want to critically examine is “sustainability.” This concept, over the last few decades, has become exceedingly influential, presumably identifying a fundamental feature within any theory of a desirable or preferable future. The concept is used as an anchor for critiquing our present modern world and way of life, which is presumably unsustainable.

It seems to me that the concept of sustainability brings with it a connotation, if not denotation, of stasis. Even the expression “sustainable development” implies a constancy regarding the nature and process of development, however conceived. Sustainable development is incremental development, with growth moving along a stable line and/or involving a stable base.

Indeed, “sustainability” and “coherence” (as described above) seem to fit together, since both concepts assume a sense of unity within reality; in the latter, the unity pertains to how the parts fit together into a whole; in the former, it is a unity across time, where there is constancy and continuance of the same thing. Within this mindset, one could argue that unless we are able to sustain ourselves, we cannot grow or improve, for being (or the continuance of being) is a necessary condition for becoming. You cannot grow if you disintegrate or disappear.

But in a similar fashion to my critique of coherence, I would propose that those opposite qualities relative to sustainability have a critical value, and an accurate and complete reading of reality would indicate that sustainability (in an absolute sense) is unrealistic. The opposite of to sustain is to end and/or to be replaced. Yet if a system (or way of life) is sustained, without ending, there can be no true or deep transformation. Both growth, and more broadly the evolutionary process, at times involve collapse (with a certain degree of chaos and destruction thrown in) and reconfiguration. Things are not sustained. Indeed, realistically speaking, does anything in nature indefinitely sustain itself? And if we wish to flourish and grow, do we not at times have to abandon our present system of life (or mindset) and embrace something new? Creativity, a fundamental feature of both the physical and psycho-social realms of existence, frequently involves destruction as a prelude to the emergence of some new reality. Indeed, turning the tables on the being-becoming relationship, it may be just as true to say that the only way to continue (or persist)--to be--is to transform (passing away and becoming).

It seems to me that any viable theory of well-being needs to be grounded in reality, and reality is dynamic and evolutionary--human existence being a paradigm case of this

dynamism. And flourishing, as a dynamic and at times transformative and free-for-all state, better captures the nature of reality than sustainability does.

Psychologically, humans need both stability and security, and change and adventure. We find it psychologically aversive on either extreme of the spectrum. Just as with the contrast of coherence and chaos, a Yin-Yang model of stability and transformation better captures our psychological reality and better captures the nature of well-being.

It is better to flourish than to sustain.

It is an interesting feature of sustainability theorists that they advocate for a fundamental transformation in human existence. They explicitly do not want the present state of affairs to sustain itself. (They do, of course, argue that the present system won't sustain itself--as a prediction on the future--but at a deeper level, below the reality of future things, they do not like our present world, finding ethical faults in it, and they hope that it will end.) Hence, they wish to replace our present society with something different, which they argue will be more sustainable. But this is an ontological mistake, since whatever system replaces the present one won't be ultimately sustainable either. Reality transforms. Moreover, why would we want it to be indefinitely sustainable? It makes more sense to pursue a future embracing anticipated further transformations, and abandon the rhetoric of pursuing sustainability. We want a future society that flourishes, which involves openness to deep transformations, and not a society that sustains. In essence, sustainability theorists are utopian perfectionists, believing in and aspiring toward some kind of ideal and stable state.

As one final point, using Maslow's list of human needs as a springboard, note that the "lower needs" are described as deficiency motivated, whereas the higher needs are described as growth motivated. The lower needs revolve around maintaining stability, whereas the higher needs revolve around transformation. Indeed, the lower needs could be described as defensively or avoidance motivated; the higher needs as offensive or approach oriented. Is the state of mind apprehensive or enthusiastic?

When I listen to sustainability theorists I detect a sense of defensiveness, constraint, and protectiveness. I do not feel or hear a sense of adventure and positivity toward the future. Of course, one shouldn't be foolish or greedy, but humans need a sense of adventure and moving forward. We need to feel that we are approaching a positive future, and not just that we are defending against a negative one. This is psychological and social well-being. And wisdom is the capacity to see this fundamental fact of human existence and figure out, as best as possible, how to realize it.

In conclusion, wisdom is the overall capacity to realize well-being and the good life, which I describe as flourishing, and though wisdom clearly aspires toward and achieves levels of comprehensibility, manageability, meaningfulness, and overall coherence in life and to degrees builds upon itself, showing sustained determination and direction, wisdom also understands and embraces as key elements of the good life, the opposite qualities of uncertainty, mystery, pluralism, chaos, adventure, and deep transformation.

These latter qualities are key features of the evolutionary process and our future in which we are to flourish.

In the next editorial, continuing my review, I plan to talk on “well-becoming,” more on the Yin-Yang, with Confucius brought into the picture, global visions of well-being, and why psychology cannot avoid the ethical or normative dimension of life. Also, I may throw in a little H.G. Wells, as the icing on the cake.

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Capability Approach to Well-Being: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capability_approach

Human Development Index: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Development_Index

World Conference of Futures Research: <https://futuresconference2015.wordpress.com/>

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