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ARTICLE



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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces the notion of a “psychologically rich life”: a life characterized by complexity, in which people experience a variety of interesting things, and feel and appreciate a variety of deep emotions via firsthand experiences or vicarious experiences. A psychologically rich life can be contrasted with a boring and monotonous life, in which one feels a singular emotion or feels that their lives are defined by routines that just aren’t that interesting. Our discussion considers how it is that the psychologically rich life compares to other leading theories of the good life discussed within both philosophy and psychology, and it argues that a psychologically rich life ought to be recognized as a distinct and compelling form of the good life.

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1. Introduction

Natalya works long hours as a computer programmer. She enjoys her work but doesn’t define herself in terms of it, and she cherishes and prizes her free time. She loves reading novels on her lunch break: sometimes sad novels, sometimes novels that explore different cultures, and sometimes suspense novels. A free evening might find her watching films, and here again, she finds herself drawn to a variety of types. Sometimes she wants to feel sad, so she watches sad, often cheesy, romance films. Sometimes she just wants to experience something new, so she peruses her local calendar of events and tries something new, just because it is new. On the weekends, she and her friends often explore their city, spending the day walking miles through different neighborhoods, taking notice of the styles of their inhabitants and even the conversations they overhear while in line for coffee. She is a people-watcher: she is curious and good at noticing the quirks and details of those who pass by. Her favorite excursions are often unplanned: she’d rather follow her mood and do what sparks her interest in the moment rather than be held victim to hotel reservations. Of course, living like this comes with its downsides: to her family’s chagrin, she’s made them stay in their fair

share of seedy motels, something even Natalya herself can find to be unpleasant. But seeking pleasant experiences was never the aim. She would always choose the unexpected over the safe and secure, for what Natalya strives is to experience a range of emotions – from sadness to fear to shock and awe, and this is how she structures her free time.

There is a little bit of Natalya in most of us, and in some of us there may be a lot. We've all chosen to watch a sad film just to feel sad. We can see the allure in getting ourselves out of our comfort zone. We choose to go on rollercoasters that scare us beyond measure. We've lived vicariously through our favorite fictional characters, feeling their emotional reactions to living very different lives than ours. We seek out a wide range of different experiences, characterized only by their complexity and the wide range of emotions they generate within us. We dislike boredom and cherish the interesting. Notice, however, that Natalya's life and these tendencies, shared by many, don't fit neatly into established theories of the good life. The experiences that make up this kind of life aren't always pleasant, and, in fact, sometimes they are not pleasant at all. They aren't the kinds of experiences we enjoy only because of some preexisting desire for them: in fact, sometimes the most interesting experiences are interesting because we have not antecedently desired them. They also aren't always, or even often, meaningful, and they certainly are not always or often characterized by virtue.

There is a gap within existing conceptions of the good life. This is especially true within psychology, where discussions of the good life tend to dichotomize hedonic and eudaimonic conceptions. Philosophical discussions of the good life tend to be more inclusive of the different and more nuanced aspects of well-being, but even there, while we can find recognition of the importance of the kinds of experiences captured above, psychologically rich lives like Natalya's are largely missing from conversations about the good life. In this paper, we will describe the psychologically rich life and the ways in which this life contrasts with established conceptions of the good life put forward in psychology and philosophy. Our ambition is a modest one. We seek to outline what a psychologically rich life is like and to show that it is an important and choice-worthy life that is empirically distinct and theoretically separate from the leading theories of the good life.

Notice that our goal is not to defend the psychologically rich life as the sole, fundamental good life for all. Rather, our goal is to show that it is, simply, a good life. This doesn't mean it is the only good life, for we agree that there are other compelling forms of a good life. A happy life, full of pleasure and enjoyment, is a good life. A life characterized by meaning and virtue is also a good life. Our aim here is not to show that a psychologically rich life offers a better or preferable alternative to other conceptions of the good life; rather, we aim to open up the conceptual space by presenting a distinct form of the good life which hasn't been sufficiently recognized.

This way of approaching the idea of the good life, recognizing that a good life can contain different dimensions and vary between individuals, is common within psychology but less common within philosophy. One of our ambitions in this paper is thus to encourage approaching one's analysis of the good life from a multi-dimensional perspective. While there are important features of our natures that bind us together and make it the case that some things are good for *all* of us, we also think that it is important to recognize that individual differences impact our experiences and make it the case that some experiences are more valuable for one person than for another. Some of us might lean more toward experiences that generate pleasure and satisfy desires, some might lean more toward experiences that deliver meaning, and – as we will argue – some might lean more toward experiences that mentally engage and arouse. That we lean more strongly toward one doesn't exclude the value or importance of the others. As our discussion will show, it just means that we are more likely structure our lives according to one dimension than the others.

Recognizing the importance and value of the psychologically rich life is important for the study of well-being, considered from both the psychological and philosophical perspectives. Current measures which study well-being empirically tend to focus primarily on hedonic or eudaimonic dimensions of the good life and overlook aspects which make life psychologically rich. Philosophical analyses of well-being also tend to overlook the importance of psychologically rich experiences in their effort to characterize well-being in terms of one over-arching value. In introducing the psychologically rich life as a good life, we hope to correct for this oversight and encourage thoughtful reflection on this important dimension of the good life.

2. What is the psychologically rich life?

We define a psychologically rich life as a life full of experiences which generate a state of mental engagement and arousal. For most people, such a life will be characterized by complexity, in which people experience a variety of interesting things and feel and appreciate a variety of deep emotions via firsthand experiences or vicarious experiences such as novels, films, and sports on TV. These experiences generate a state of psychological arousal insofar as they activate and engage a subject's cognitive and emotional states, and a life full of these experiences is psychologically rich. A psychologically rich life can be contrasted with a boring and monotonous life, in which one feels a singular emotion or feels that their lives are defined by routines that just aren't that interesting.

In some ways, we can understand the nature of a psychologically rich life through comparison with what makes for a good novel. The best novels tap into various emotions, taking the reader from sadness to joy and back down

again; they can make the reader feel uncomfortable in her skin, even to the extent that she may not want to keep reading yet cannot stop herself from continuing. They shock her and surprise her; they challenge her perspective and deliver the unexpected. Often, the arc of a novel goes up and down between these components, always delivering something interesting and often surprising, and rarely delivering the constant, same thing. These kinds of story arcs, the experiences that comprise them, and the emotions they deliver are all important components of a psychologically rich life.

Considering some examples of the kinds of experiences that deliver psychological richness helps to provide a greater understanding of just what this kind of life looks like.

- A 19-year old student from a wealthy suburb of Washington DC describes her experience going to a pro-wrestling event for the first time. She went with the expectation that it would have a lot of fake violence and goofy confrontations. To her surprise, she discovered that many pro-wrestlers were inspiring role models for many children; as previously unbeknownst to her, the World Wrestling Entertainment does a lot of charity work. She laughed, cheered, felt outraged, felt pain, and found herself moved by the experience. She came back home with a different perspective on professional wrestlers. Unexpectedness (e.g., WWE doing a lot of charity works), novelty (e.g., she had never gone to a pro-wresting event before), complexity (e.g., it was not just fake violence and choreographed confrontation; rather, diverse emotions were experienced), and resolution (e.g., “I see why so many kids adore WWE wrestlers”) made this experience more engaging than a typical weekend outing.
- In an article in the Atlantic (2015), psychologist Alison Gopnik describes a period of her life that is characterized by sadness and turmoil in the wake of a divorce but that nonetheless is ultimately a rich one. She writes of a moment when she found herself drawn to the pursuit of discovering a possible connection between David Hume and Buddhism, through a missionary named Ippolito Desideri, who had traveled through India, developed a knowledge of Buddhism, and then traveled to Paris. She immersed herself in the books of Desideri and Hume – what she describes as a “philosophical detective story” and found the experience to shape and change her life in important ways. As she writes, the characters in this story were “strongly driven by the simple desire to know, and the simple thirst for experience,” a drive we see shared and embraced by Gopnik. While her detective story results only in establishing that Hume could have had access to knowledge of Buddhism, in virtue of having written the *Treatise* in “one of the few places in Europe where that knowledge was available” (Gopnik, 2015), Gopnik’s thirst for experience opened her up to the variety, complexity, and novelty that is

so distinctive to the psychologically rich life. While rediscovering happiness, she emphasizes that being a happy woman was “not all I was. I’d discovered that I could love women as well as men, history as well as science, and that I could make my way through sadness and solitude, not just happiness. Like [the characters in her story], I had found my salvation in the sheer endless curiosity of the human mind – and the sheer endless variety of human experience” (Gopnik, 2015).

- The obituary of the neurologist Oliver Sacks, who passed away in 2015 at the age of 82, reveals a life similarly marked by richness but through very different means (Cowles, 2015). It describes Sacks as being driven by endless curiosity, writing on topics ranging from aging to hallucinations, ferns, phantom limbs, and swimming. Sacks once described himself as a “naturalist or explorer,” exploring “many strange, neuropsychological lands – the furthest Arctics and Tropics of neurological disorder” (as cited in Cowles, 2015). Sack’s memoir describes his adventures in California, where, while doing his residency, he embraced the culture, “befriending the poet Thom Gunn, entering weight-lifting competitions, and joining the Hell’s Angels on motorcycle trips to the Grand Canyon” (Cowles, 2015). His aunt once described him as a “rover,” having “one strange adventure after another” (Cowles, 2015).

These experiences and the lives they shape are different from each other; that they are complex, interesting, and tap into a range of emotions is perhaps all they share. This is the point: the psychologically rich life is an interesting life, for no other reason than that the experiences that comprise it introduce variety, depth, and interest into one’s life and therein engage and arouse the subject.

A change in perspective, in addition to the complexity and novelty of experience, also seems important to the development of richness. We have found this by reflecting on one student’s description of a novel, unexpected experience which lacked the kind of engagement that contributes to richness. This student saw a male student in the lounge in the apartment complex studying shirtless. The male student was not particularly handsome nor well-built. This made her wonder why he was studying shirtless in a public space, as it was not particularly hot in the lounge. Although this experience had novelty and some complexity (i.e., the mysteriousness of the male student’s behavior), this experience did not change her perspective in any way. Likewise, she did not experience a diverse array of emotions. The experience failed to engage her.

What unifies these experiences is the impact that they have on a subject’s mental state. Our preliminary investigations of psychological richness suggest that richness derives from a range of experiences that present variety, interestingness, depth, unexpectedness, and induce perspective-change. We suspect

that one reason why these types of experiences generate richness has to do with the states of mental arousal they stimulate: each of these different types of experiences pushes our minds out of their default state, thereby exercising and engaging our minds.¹ Returning to the above example of a student experiencing novelty and complexity upon witnessing a shirtless student but not richness, we believe that the natural explanation is that, in this instance, the novelty and complexity didn't engage her sufficiently enough to contribute richness. The experiences which contribute to a psychologically rich life arise under an umbrella of conditions (variety, depth, unexpectedness, etc.), but ultimately, they are characterized by the extent to which these conditions stimulate within the subject a state of mental engagement and arousal.

3. The psychologically rich life as a good life

What would it mean to see the psychologically rich life as, on its own, a good life? Many philosophical theories of well-being recognize the importance of the kinds of experiences that comprise a psychologically rich life, yet none present the psychologically rich life as itself a good life. Instead, they try to explain the appeal of such experiences in terms of other aspects of well-being which they take to be fundamental. We'll argue in this section that seeing the psychologically rich life as a good life involves recognizing the value of the interesting to be fundamental.

The experiences involved in the psychologically rich life are, at root, those which are interesting to the subject who experiences them.² As we've suggested, it is most often the case that those experiences involve a complexity that generates within a subject a wide range of emotions, and we would expect that a psychologically rich life, overall, is one characterized by these factors. For an experience itself to contribute to a psychologically rich life, however, it must, at a minimum, be interesting, in order to activate a subject's mind and engage her wholly.

While the notion of an interesting experience is largely absent from psychological discussions of the good life, many philosophers have noted and tried to accommodate something like it within preexisting theories of well-being. For example, consider the evolution of philosophical discussions of hedonism: while hedonism may have started as a theory whose focus is solely on pleasure, where "pleasure" refers to the distinctive quality of feeling good, nowadays, philosophers defending hedonism are more apt to develop sophisticated understandings of pleasure in recognition of the fact that "feeling good" may not be, on its own, as important as early hedonists such as Epicurus maintained.³ Thus, for example, Feldman's theory of attitudinal hedonism maintains that pleasure derives from one's attitude, from a state of being pleased, approving, or enjoying a state of affairs or particular experience (Feldman, 2002). Heathwood takes this further,

arguing for a reduction of pleasure to desire itself. On Heathwood's account, pleasure is heterogeneous in a way that the "felt quality" view can't explain. In order to make sense of the wide range of pleasures, we ought to give up the idea that what defines pleasure is any distinctive phenomenological feeling and recognize that what defines pleasure is simply that the subject desires it – she wants the experience to be happening for its own sake (Heathwood, 2007).

There is much more to be said about these views and the debates to which they have given rise. For our purposes, it suffices to highlight their efforts to accommodate a richer sense of the value of experiences – a value that doesn't seem best described in terms of "feeling good" but nonetheless derives from an agent's specific and unique experiences. The views we have been considering still want to describe this value in terms of pleasure – a move we think is a mistake – but there does seem within them a recognition of this value's importance.

This recognition is not limited to philosophical discussions of hedonism; others working within different approaches to well-being often highlight the importance of these kinds of experiences, or at least aspects of the psychologically rich life. For example, Bradford's (2015) work on achievement recognizes and highlights the importance of complexity as a dimension of achievement, and Bramble emphasizes the importance of experiencing a diversity of pleasures over one's lifetime. A life spent occupied with one pleasure, Bramble argues, would not be a very good life (Bramble, 2016).

Other philosophical theories present space for the psychologically rich life by emphasizing the importance of the individual's perspective in informing their well-being. Tiberius, for example, defends a value-based life-satisfaction view that emphasizes the importance of living a life that satisfies one's subjective, attitude-dependent values (Tiberius, 2008). She argues that a theory of well-being ought to be understood as a template, filled in by the individual:

The theory of well-being tells us the rough outlines of a good life and it explains why this life is good for one person while a different life is good for someone else. But the theory does not identify a good life in detail; this is something that must be done through the practice of living by engaging in reflection, planning, gaining experience, observing the effects of these experiences and so on. The value fulfillment theory . . . plots a good trip in general, but leave the details open for negotiation. We negotiate the gap between real and ideal as we try to improve our lives or the lives of others. (Tiberius, 2015, p. 348)

This emphasis on attitude-dependent values allows for the prioritization of a psychologically rich life. Haybron's (2008) individual nature-fulfillment theory likewise opens this space. Observing the richness that embeds ordinary human life, Haybron emphasizes the importance of living in ways that express one's nature as an individual.

All of these philosophers are on to something: they recognize the appeal of experiences that cannot be reduced to simply feeling good. They recognize what makes these experiences so appealing depends partly upon the particular individual experiencing them and the robustness of her experience. They recognize that something's being interesting is a valuable aspect of these experiences. Yet, while these views may be able to accommodate these experiences or maintain that they are part of the good life, they nonetheless do not recognize the value of interesting experiences which mentally engage and arouse to be fundamental. Within these views, we see recognition of the importance and appeal of these kinds of experiences, yet hesitation to entertain the possibility that these experiences might be valuable on their own. We think this is a mistake: we think that interesting experiences are valuable independently of their connection to pleasure, achievement, the exercise of our capacities, or our values more generally.

We also think that these experiences are valuable independently of their connection to desire and, thus, that the psychologically rich life is different in an important way from a desire-fulfillment theory of well-being (e.g., Murphy, 1999). Desire-fulfillment theories understand well-being in terms of desire satisfaction. A desire-fulfillment theory might maintain that psychologically rich lives are valuable, but only because we want them. Returning to our opening example of Natalya, we might think that her life is a good one only insofar as it is the life that she wants. If it turned out that she engaged in those activities only because her partner insisted upon it, we wouldn't think her life was a good one.

It is true that part of developing a psychologically rich life is to embrace interesting experiences and, in a way, to allow oneself to be engaged and aroused through one's activities. Desiring the experience is one form this can take. Often, though, engagement and arousal derive from experiences whose effect was not anticipated, notably, when there was no antecedent desire to engage in the activity. Surprise, novelty, and a departure from one's expectations are often what generates the kind of engagement that is distinctive to experiences that contribute to a psychologically rich life. Of course, when these elements (or others) combine, it is also true that the individual *wants* those experiences or, at least, as Heathwood might say, are "into" them at the time they are occurring. Our position, however, is that the reason people come to desire, want, or otherwise are "into" interesting experiences is because such experiences have value that is independent of those desires and wants and can't be accounted for solely through an appeal to desires.

4. The psychologically rich life: a distinct form of the good life

To defend the psychologically rich life as a distinct form of the good life, we first present preliminary empirical findings suggesting that the psychologically rich

life is empirically distinct from the two forms of the good life that dominate psychological research: a “happy life” and a “life of meaning.” We then explore on a theoretical level why the psychologically rich life is so distinct.

Psychological discussions of the good life focus on two main ways of understanding the good life: as a life characterized by subjective well-being, which we take to include hedonic feelings as well as life satisfaction and will generally refer to as the “happy life”; and as a life characterized by meaning, be it meaning derived from perfectionist grounds (the fulfillment and development of one’s capacities and, particularly, the exercise of virtue), or from purpose, achievement, or, more generally, the pursuit of objective values or objectively valuable projects.

This divide can be tracked back at least as far as Ryan and Deci’s (2001) review of well-being research, which categorizes the research into two categories: (a) the hedonic approach, which focuses on pleasure and its attainment, and (b) the eudaimonic approach. According to Ryan and Deci (2001), the eudaimonic approach is focused on “meaning and self-realization,” and is defined in terms of “the degree to which a person is fully functioning” (p. 141). This approach has become a standard way of categorizing the dimensions of well-being for psychological research (e.g., Delle Fave et al., 2011; Waterman, 2007). While there has been some debate regarding whether or not the hedonic and eudaimonic approaches track dimensions of the good life or of separate good lives (Biswas-Diener et al., 2009; Henderson & Knight, 2012), recognizing these as the central two approaches to the good life is the norm.

For many people, happiness serves as the litmus test for the good life: what else could characterize a good life, if not that it was a happy life?⁴ The “happy life” that our research invokes tracks ordinary usage of the concept and, following Haybron, it describes happiness as bearing “a purely psychological meaning, denoting some broad and typically lasting aspect of the individual’s state of mind: *being happy*” (Haybron, 2008, p. 30). Within psychology, being happy is commonly interpreted both hedonically, in terms of experiencing pleasure, and evaluatively, in terms of experiencing life satisfaction. Both of these components capture the sense that happiness is a subjective phenomenon, valuable to those who lead the happy life solely because the state of subjective well-being it invokes is itself a valuable one – the positive valence definitive of states of subjective well-being is taken to be valuable in itself.

We take the “life of meaning” to track the form of well-being the conception of which has its roots in Aristotle’s concept of eudaimonia but which has come, particularly in psychological discussions, to be understood in terms of a life dedicated to meaning and purpose (Steger et al., 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2001). While there are certainly interesting questions to explore regarding how best to construe the concept of eudaimonia,⁵ for the sake of identifying the dominant forms of well-being within philosophy and psychology, we can

treat the life of meaning as an umbrella concept that incorporates the views that experiences are valuable insofar as they generate meaning derived from virtue, purpose, achievement, or the pursuit of objective values and valuable projects.⁶

To test whether or not the psychologically rich life is empirically distinct from the happy life and the life of meaning, we developed short and long versions of the psychologically rich life scale and conducted a series of studies to test the reliability and the validity of these scales.⁷ We asked 583 college students to indicate the degree to which each of the 15 words (e.g., happy, enjoyable, comfortable, meaningful, fulfilling, purposeful, psychologically rich, interesting, uneventful) describes their lives. We then conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses, comparing the fit of the 3-factor structure (a happy life, a meaningful life, and a psychologically rich life) with the fit of the 1-factor structure (all the items loading on one factor), and the fit of the 2-factor structures (happiness- and meaning-related items loading on one factor and psychological richness-related items loading on the other factor; happiness and psychological richness-related items loading on one factor and meaning items loading on the other; meaning and psychological richness items loading on one factor, and happiness items loading on the other). The 3-factor model fits the data very well (e.g., $CFI = .961$): the fit is significantly better than with other models ($\Delta\chi^2 s > 150$, $ps < .001$). This shows that out of the people included in our sample, some people led a happy life, others led a meaningful life, and yet others led a psychologically rich life.

In addition to the self-report analysis, we tested the empirical distinctness of the psychologically rich life through three other measures. First, we asked our research assistants to read and rate all the obituaries that appeared in the New York Times in June, 2016 in terms of how happy, pleasant, interesting, dramatic, meaningful, and fulfilling the lives of the deceased were (over 100 obituaries). Perceived richness was found to be inversely correlated with perceived happiness (mean correlation is $-.255$, $p < .05$), and it was found to be moderately correlated with perceived meaningfulness (mean correlation is $.371$, $p < .01$).

Second, we conducted a 14-day daily diary study with 203 college students. These participants kept a record of how happy, meaningful, and psychologically rich they felt each day, as well as what kinds of activities they engaged in and how much free time they had each day. Using a multilevel random coefficient model, we found that participants felt more daily life satisfaction on a day with more free time, whereas they felt more psychological richness on a day with less free time. The amount of free time did not significantly predict how meaningful that day was. Furthermore, the best activity predictor of daily psychological richness was taking a short trip, whereas the best activity predictor of daily life satisfaction and meaning was partying. These

findings suggest that predictors of a psychologically rich life are different from those of life satisfaction and meaning in life.

Finally, we collected data from 97 Chinese international students in the U.S. and 169 Chinese students in China and assessed their life satisfaction, meaning in life, and psychological richness. The idea was that those living abroad must be exposed to novel environments that might result in a change in perspective. As expected, Chinese international students in the U.S. had a more psychologically rich life as well as higher life satisfaction than Chinese students in China, although they were not different in terms of meaning in life. As a follow-up study, we collected weekly data from 43 American college students who were studying abroad and compared them with 100 American college students in the same university who were staying on campus. We found that these two groups did not differ in terms of a psychologically rich life at the beginning of the semester ($t = 0.22, p = .827$), but at the end of the semester, those studying abroad reported a higher level of psychological ($t = 2.42, p = .017$). In other words, psychological richness significantly increased over the semester for students studying abroad, whereas their life satisfaction and meaning in life did not change.

This research provides compelling reasons to view the psychologically rich life as a distinct form of the good life. Building on this preliminary case, let us now consider more deeply why the psychologically rich life is distinct from other good lives.

The first consideration involves the affective valence attached to experiences that contribute to a psychologically rich life. While the happy life is defined in terms of being a psychological state characterized on balance by positive valence, which is necessary and, in some cases, sufficient for “being happy.”⁸ No such characterization can be made with respect to the affective valence of the psychologically rich life.

The psychologically rich life neither requires nor defines itself by appeal to these positively valenced emotions. The distinctive aspect of the psychologically rich life is that it involves experiences which generate a wide range of emotions, often very intense emotions. Consider again the student’s description of her first experience of the WWE. Her expectations of the event were thwarted when she found herself surprised by the experience and by the WWE itself as an organization with considerable charitable interests and contributions. During the event itself she felt a wide range of emotions: she was laughing one moment, fearful the next, and vicariously experiencing the pain of every back flop.

Consider the emotions at stake here: enjoyment, anger, pain, and being moved. This suite of emotions not only lack an overall positive affect, there is also no common affective valence shared between them. This is a distinctive aspect of interesting experiences. They generate a wide range of emotions which often can be felt quite intensely but lack any kind of shared commonality.

Most importantly for the current discussion, the emotions invoked in these experiences are not necessarily positively valenced. Unpleasant experiences can be psychologically rich: the shock, pain, and anger felt when watching a wrestling match; the sadness felt when reading about the Holocaust; the discomfort and nervousness felt when traveling to a third world country are all part of what engage and arouse. That they have negative valences (and distinct negative valences) contributes to the engagement.⁹ The experience of the positive affective states that are necessary components of subjective well-being are not necessary to the experience of mental engagement and arousal, and this is an important difference between the psychologically rich life and the happy life.

A second consideration revolves around the kind of value invoked in interesting experiences, which, like hedonism, is an experiential value: something that depends on the qualitative feel of our experiences. This stands in sharp contrast to the host of views associated with the life of meaning and help to explain its distinctiveness from these views. Philosophical theories of this form of the good life abound, and we can differentiate between them based on what they consider to be the source of meaning and by extension the source of value. Eudaimonist views, for example, understand meaning in terms of the fulfillment of human nature through the exercise of virtue. Within the Aristotelian tradition, what makes the good life good for eudaimonist theories is the perfection of one's capacities, which is displayed through the use of reason directed toward the end of virtue.

Other views within the "life of meaning" category track different sources of meaningfulness. Bradford's account of well-being, for example, highlights achievement as the mode through which individuals engage in "the excellent exercise of the perfectionist capacities" (Bradford, 2015, p. 121). Wolf's work on meaningfulness offers a general account of the importance of recognizing the ways in which engaging in valuable activities contributes meaningfulness to our lives, partly insofar as the distinctive reasons and motives that lead us to engage in such activities are valuable forms of agency: the "reasons and motives that engage us in the activities that make our lives worth living; they give us reason to go on; they make our worlds go round. They, and the activities they engender give meaning to our lives" (Wolf, 2010, p. 2). What unites these different philosophical versions of the life of meaning is the synthesis that arises when we direct our agency toward valuable ends, giving rise to the meaning and fulfillment that shapes one's life.

The experiences that deliver meaningfulness appear to engage something with objective value. Not all of our experiences deliver meaning. In order for an experience to deliver meaningfulness, it needs to involve something with objective value. The reason why, for example, achievement delivers meaningfulness is because it engages our capacities, which are

framed in perfectionist terms as having objective value. The experiences that comprise a psychologically rich life, however, do not necessarily possess, track, or involve something with objective value.

The experiences involved in the psychologically rich life might be objectively valuable – complexity can deliver meaning – but they don't have to be: it is hard to see the objective value in a fake wrestling match, and we'd be hard pressed to find someone willing to defend it as delivering meaning to one's life. Indeed, describing these kinds of experiences in terms of meaningfulness risks mischaracterizing them; it threatens to negate the importance of the myriad of factors that make the experience complex and so interesting. As we've seen, the range of experiences that deliver psychological richness to life is broad, and many experiences, such as people-watching, sappy films, and mass-market suspense novels are not necessarily meaningful but can deliver richness. Objective value is not a necessary feature of psychological richness.

5. Living the psychologically rich life

We have argued that the psychologically rich life is distinct from widely recognized forms of the good life. While some may be tempted to argue that the psychologically rich life is just another version of the happy life, that is, that psychologically rich experiences are one source of happiness, or that the psychologically rich life is only important if there is some sense of meaning derived from it, we resist this move. It is important to recognize the psychologically rich life as valuable and choice-worthy on its own, independently of its connection to these other good lives. As we have seen, despite the possible overlaps between the psychologically rich life and the others, the psychologically rich life is both conceptually and empirically distinct from the happy life and the life of meaning. Focusing only on the points of overlap and insisting that the psychologically rich life can only be important insofar as it is correlated with other good lives threatens to erase or negate the distinctive features of the psychologically rich life, features which make it choice-worthy. Our research shows that people choose and value this kind of life. While this fact may hold limited weight for some, when it comes to analyses of the good life, that people choose this life and even prefer it over other forms of the good life is important evidence that it is indeed a good life. Given its distinctness from other forms of the good life, a life structured with psychological richness in mind is bound to look different than one structured with the aim of being happy, or the aim of meaningfulness.

Psychological research on the happy life shows it to be highly correlated with stability, comfort, and security.¹⁰ Research on the life of meaning shows it to be correlated with routines and facilitated by moral principles, relationships, religiosity, and consistency (King et al., 2016). In contrast to

both, we speculate that the psychologically rich life involves experiences that are mentally stimulating and perhaps involve challenges and adventures that are often unplanned.

The following table highlights the experiences associated with each of these three forms of the good life, and we can see how the pursuit of one of these lives likely limits and potentially stands in conflict with the pursuit of the others (Table 1).

An individual pursuing the happy life actively seeks out experiences that bring her pleasure or satisfy her desires. Because security and comfort are facilitators of positive affect, much of her life will revolve around pursuing these components, such as securing a job that provides a stable income and enough money to pursue her desires. She will learn from past experiences what makes her happy and will be able to seek out those kinds of experiences, which should deliver positive affect with some reliability.¹¹ She will reflect on her desires and explore those paths that will best satisfy her desires.

An individual pursuing the life of meaning will likewise spend time reflecting on how experiences will fit into her aims. Specifically, this individual will think about which aims are worthwhile and/or make the best use of her capacities, and she will structure her life accordingly. She will build routines that support her aims, and she will likely choose a career path that delivers meaning and purpose to her life.

An individual pursuing the psychologically rich life, however, follows her curiosity without concern for stability, comfort, or purpose. She purposefully places herself (in real life or vicariously) in novel situations that test her. She tries to get out of her element and seeks out the company of those who challenge her. She craves mental stimulation and the variety of emotions that it generates. If she is lucky, she may pursue a career with built-in adventure or one that allows flexibility, but if not, she'll seek out engagement and arousal in her daily life, much as Natalya from our opening example does.

Pursuit of each of these good lives tracks a very different kind of life. Given the conceptual and empirical distinctness of the psychologically rich life, it is no surprise that those who structure their lives around it will prioritize different kinds of experiences than those who structure their lives around the happy life or a life of meaning. Moving to incorporate the

Table 1.

The Happy Life	The Life of Meaning	The Psychologically Rich Life
Experiences that are:	Experiences that:	Experiences that are:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pleasant ● Secure ● Comfortable ● Safe ● Satisfy one's desires 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Contribute ● Are purpose-driven and so structured ● Invoke virtue ● Exercise one's capacities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Unplanned ● Challenging and involve struggle ● Out of one's element ● Mentally stimulating ● Adventurous

psychologically rich life into these other good lives would entail giving up the distinctive components of the psychologically rich life.

6. Conclusion

The psychologically rich life is one full of experiences that mentally engage and arouse us. Sometimes these experiences are pleasant, sometimes they are meaningful, and sometimes they are neither pleasant nor meaningful. What defines them and unifies them as psychologically rich is neither their positive affective valence, nor their connection to objective values. It is, rather, the state of engagement and arousal they stimulate in the subject. This state arises from a wide range of circumstances, but ultimately, it depends on how the subject engages in and reacts to her activities, that is, it depends on the synthesis that arises between that specific individual and her experience.

One nice aspect of the psychologically rich life is that it is an accessible one, one which we can pursue in a number of different degrees. Many people structure their lives around psychologically rich experiences. Natalya, from our opening example, structures her life like this. Her career may not be best defined as psychologically rich, but her life is interesting, insofar as she pursues interesting experiences wherever she can. Others build their lives more centrally around the psychologically rich life: Andy is a wildlife photographer and videographer, whose chosen profession leads him all over the world, from one engaging experience to the next. Yet, it is also true that interesting experiences are available even when one finds themselves stuck in an otherwise boring life. Even the small things can engage and arouse.

Consider the character Renee from Muriel Barbery's novel *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*. Renee is a concierge in a Paris apartment. Although she finds purpose in her job, enjoys helping others, and does so skillfully, she devotes her remaining time to reading great novels and poetry. She cannot afford to travel and attend cultural events, but she has rich inner experiences vicariously through great novels (e.g., *Anna Karenina*) and poetry, routinely experiencing a full range of emotions from sadness to envy to jealousy to joy to contentment. Renee illustrates nicely the pursuit of interest in mundane everyday life.

As such, a psychologically rich life could be achieved without much money or resources, though some seek a psychologically rich life firsthand, which requires time and material resources. It may be the case that currently, the psychologically rich life is one that is more cherished and pursued by those with privilege.¹² It doesn't have to be that way, however. There is nothing in the concept of richness that requires resources. Hesse's character Goldmund, for example, has no money but leads a psychologically rich life by choice. One of our hopes is that highlighting and introducing the

psychologically rich life into contemporary discussions of the good life may help to open the possibility of the good life to those who find themselves, like Renee, stuck in mundanity, or, more generally, to those with limited resources and opportunities. Another illustrative example comes from the Japanese: working in rice patties, they created songs and other rituals to break up the mundanity of their work. This tendency, we expect, can be found throughout cultures, and it is representative both of the importance of mental engagement and arousal, as well as the ease in which we can find it in life. The good life, perhaps, can be had by opening up one's mind, looking for the complexity in life, embracing one's range of emotions, and finding and cherishing the interesting.

In this paper, we have introduced the notion of a psychologically rich life and defended it as a distinct form of the good life. We hope that putting psychological richness on the table as a good life prompts both philosophers and psychologists to broaden their research and explore further the implications of recognizing the psychologically rich life as a good life.

Notes

1. This aspect of richness parallels flow experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Flow experiences are recognized to be a distinct form of mental engagement derived from exercising skill in the face of challenges.
2. It thus respects what is often called the "experience requirement," which maintains that in order for something to count as good for someone, she must experience it (Griffin, 1986).
3. Compare to Smuts (2011), who maintains that pleasure is simply that which "feels good."
4. See, for example, Diener (1984) and Diener et al. (1998).
5. See Besser (2016a, 2016b) for analysis.
6. This shares the spirit of Hurka's analysis of perfectionism into narrow perfectionism, focused on the development of human nature, and broad perfectionism, focused on the obtainment of objective goods (Hurka, 1993).
7. We discuss the empirical research outlined here in more detail in (Oishi et al., 2019).
8. This is made explicit in defenses of hedonism, which hold that the happy life consists in a life full of pleasure, but it is also an important part of life satisfaction accounts, such as Sumner's theory of authentic happiness, one of the first philosophical defenses of the life satisfaction account (Sumner, 1996). Even according to this sophisticated theory, which introduces authenticity of experiences and values as an important factor in evaluations, positive affect in the form of satisfaction is a necessary condition. The claim is more complicated for some versions of attitudinal hedonism, but if we take it to be, at minimum, a claim about positive valence, then it seems that any form of hedonism must embrace this. Consider Feldman's attitudinal hedonism, which focuses on enjoyment and the attitudes associated with it, rather than on hedonic pleasure itself. From a psychological perspective, I think it is clear that attitudinal pleasure – which he defines as the pleasure someone takes in a state of affairs when "he enjoys it, is pleased about it, is glad it is happening, is delighted by it"

(Feldman, 2004, p. 56) – carries the kind of positive valence that is at stake in the current discussion.

9. There is, of course, a point at which an experience might become so painful that its negative valence prevents one from being able to experience its richness. Consider, for example, the difference between reading about the Holocaust and experiencing the Holocaust firsthand within a concentration camp.
10. For instance, individuals who score high in self-reported happiness and life satisfaction tend to have a secure job, a stable romantic relationship, and a sufficient amount of money (Diener et al., 1999; Kahneman & Deaton, 2010). In contrast, longitudinal studies show that people who lost their job, became a widow or widower, or were divorced became far less satisfied with their lives than before (Lucas, 2007). Furthermore, these people did not get back to the baseline (e.g., pre-widowhood) for a long time. Another line of research demonstrates that people who stayed in one place while growing up tend to be more satisfied with their lives than those who moved around, even after controlling for various demographic variables (this effect is particularly strong for introverts) (Oishi & Schimmack, 2010).
11. This kind of pursuit is, however, more difficult than it might first seem. See Besser-Jones (2013) for discussion.
12. Preliminary data shows some correlation between valuing a psychologically rich life and having high socio-economic status; however, life satisfaction was even more strongly correlated.

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