

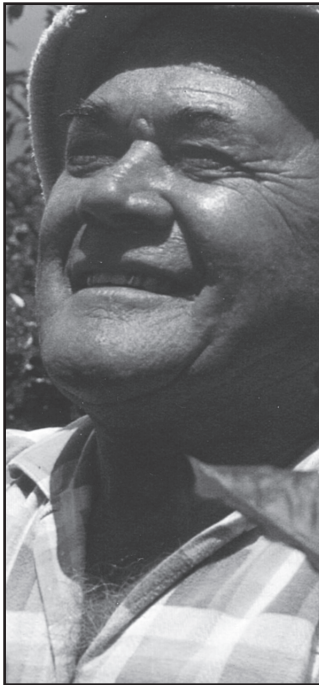
The Good Life

Yi-Fu Tuan, humanistic geographer, published a book in 1986 with the title, *The Good Life*. To speak of the good life is to speak of well-being. Tuan set out in his book to understand the nature of the good life in modern society. According to Tuan, the good life includes elements of the *physical setting* in which we find ourselves, the *activities* in which we participate, our *philosophical understandings* of human nature and its virtues, and the *social harmony* we hope to bring about as we seek to realize Utopia. To Tuan, “The good life haunts us. Everything we do is directed, consciously or subconsciously, toward attaining it” (p. 6).

In Tuan (1986), then, we have a view of the good life or well-being that expands beyond Wood’s occupational conceptualization. To be sure, Tuan named *activity* as one of four key elements of the good life, but he also specifically named our physical environments, our philosophical musings, and the social relationships we strive to perfect. Although we might incorporate some of Tuan’s added dimensions into our concept of occupation (e.g., social interactions can be included as a form of occupation), I think we must recognize that his inclusion of the sort of cosmic dimensions of life—philosophical understandings and social harmony—expands our thinking of well-being beyond the realm of occupation per se.

Positive Human Health

Ryff and Singer (1996, 1998) also spoke of the good life but from a psychological perspective. In their work published in 1996, Ryff and Singer described six key dimensions of well-being, based on a meta-analysis of theoretical literature on positive psychological functioning, lifespan development, and positive criteria for mental health. The six dimensions are self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. They stated that there are “notable parallels between the formulations of wellness emerging from the literature and philosophical perspectives on the meaning of ‘the good life’” (p. 16).



Ryff and Singer further developed their thesis in the work published in 1998 in which they offered a treatise on “positive human health.” Determined to move beyond the medical model of health as the elimination of disease (“beyond repair shops,” p. 1), Ryff and Singer defined well-being by two core features: (a) leading a life of purpose, and (b) quality connections to others. They summarized by saying, “positive health is ultimately about engagement in living” (p. 10). Thus, in the realm of psychological research on well-being, similar to Tuan’s (1986) conceptualization of the good life, we again find purpose, engagement, and harmony in relations with others present as key dimensions.