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## Chapter 4

### Eudaimonia

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#### Abstract

This chapter reviews the literature on eudaimonia (the pursuit, manifestation, and/or experience of virtue, personal growth, self-actualization, flourishing, excellence, and meaning) and its distinction from hedonia (the pursuit and/or experience of pleasure, enjoyment, comfort, and reduced pain). The chapter briefly outlines concepts related to eudaimonia which have appeared in philosophy, religion, and theoretical work by psychologists and psychiatrists. It provides a more detailed review of psychology research on eudaimonia. It then provides several much needed discussions: an overview of the most common themes across the many definitions of eudaimonia, organized into two subtypes – conceptions of eudaimonia as a way of behaving, and conceptions of eudaimonia as a way of feeling or a manifestation of flourishing; a discussion of why eudaimonia has been slow to receive empirical attention until recently; a synopsis of several criticisms of the eudaimonia literature; and a proposal of some important future directions.

#### Keywords

eudaimonia; eudemonia; hedonia; well-being; meaning; self-actualization; flourishing; virtue; virtue ethics; personal expressiveness

#### The Difference Between Eudaimonia and Hedonia

This chapter provides an overview of eudaimonia. The topic is often better understood in terms of what it is not, however. Eudaimonia will therefore be contrasted with hedonia, which is usually the first topic that people think of when considering well-being. Much of the chapter will focus on pulling together an understanding of the meaning of eudaimonia, since the literature is still largely at the stage of attempting to define the concept, and there is relatively little research on eudaimonia's correlates.

#### The Terms Eudaimonia and Hedonia

Roughly speaking, eudaimonia includes states and/or pursuits associated with using and developing the best in oneself, in accordance with one's true self and one's deeper principles. Hedonia includes states and/or pursuits associated with pleasure and enjoyment, and the absence of pain and discomfort<sup>1</sup>. Thus, we have the age-old distinction between virtue and pleasure.

As will be clear from the review of the literature, however, eudaimonia is a multifaceted concept, and different authors have focused on different facets. Furthermore, as discussed by Ryan, Huta, and Deci (2008), eudaimonia is sometimes conceptualized as a form of well-being, sometimes as a way of acting/thinking, and sometimes as both, which has made it difficult to

arrive at a single definition. Nevertheless, after a review of the literature, I will provide a summary of common themes that cut across the different views.

### Conceptions of Eudaimonia by Various Individuals and Schools of Thought

#### *Historical Philosophers*

The term *eudaimonia* was used in ancient Greece and popularized by Aristotle in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE in his essay called *Nicomachean Ethics* (see *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, 2001). Eudaimonia is often translated as “happiness,” and thus might be mistaken for enjoyment or pleasure; however, it is better translated as flourishing or excellence. More precisely, Aristotle defined eudaimonia as active behavior that exhibits excellence and virtue in accordance with reason and contemplation – those faculties which differentiate us from other species – and is performed for its own sake. His conception included moral virtues like justice, kindness, courage, and honesty, as well as intellectual activity and high performance at any activity, such as one’s profession.

Other ancient philosophers who advocated eudaimonia included Plato (in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE), as well as Zeno of Citium, the originator of Stoic philosophy (beginning in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE). These had a somewhat narrower conception, including only moral virtues and reason.

Around the same time, another philosopher was advocating hedonia. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, Aristippus (who was initially a pupil of Socrates but then founded the Cyrenaic school of thought) argued that pleasure is the only good and pain is the only evil, regardless of their sources, and he especially emphasized immediate physical gratification.

Various philosophers since have sided with either the hedonic or eudaimonic camp. For example, Marcus Aurelius (in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century), who is considered a Stoic philosopher, believed that happiness is achieved through noble and reasonable thought, and developed a series of aphorisms for acting in accordance with virtue and justice rather than selfishness or vain extrinsic rewards, and for making good use of one’s time. Kant (in the 18<sup>th</sup> century) advocated living in accordance with moral obligation or duty that is universally valid and that is grasped through reason, genuinely intended, and pursued as an end in itself.

On the hedonic end, Hobbes’ (17<sup>th</sup> century) egoistical hedonism asserted that the good life involves maximizing personal pleasure and minimizing personal pain. And Bentham’s (19<sup>th</sup> century) utilitarianism, which was more statistically and socially defined, asserted that the greatest good was determined by the greatest frequency, intensity, and duration of pleasure and happiness for the greatest number of people, and similarly the smallest amount of pain.

The eudaimonic-hedonic distinction, therefore, has a long philosophical history.

#### *Religion*

In addition to philosophical teachings, some religions have been an equally ancient source of eudaimonic thought. Though we will not discuss religions in detail, a review of eudaimonia would be incomplete without at least a mention of these. Religions including Christianity in the West and Confucianism in the East include ethical philosophies that direct people towards some conception of what it means to be a better person. They include principles such as virtue, humaneness, and delay of gratification. Though religions are sometimes criticized as being dogmatic and prejudicial, they have also been the world’s most widespread, systematic, and enduring advocates of such eudaimonic principles.

#### *Theoretical Work by Modern Psychologists and Psychiatrists*

In modern psychology and psychiatry, the distinction between eudaimonic and hedonic views of well-being is also apparent. First, eudaimonia has played a central role in the theoretical writings of several influential authors.

Maslow (1970) believed that humans have a natural need to *self-actualize*, i.e., strive for something greater in life and be all that they can be. This tendency is at the top of his hierarchy of basic human needs, and is expected to arise once more basic biological, safety, belonging, and esteem needs are met. Maslow conducted biographical analyses of historical figures whom he considered self-actualized (e.g., Albert Einstein, William James), and described them as rising to challenges; realistic and able to differentiate between the genuine and inauthentic; focused more on means than ends; autonomous, natural, and non-conformist; accepting of self and others; guided by a strong personal ethic; and having an ongoing freshness in appreciating life's experiences. Maslow also reported that more self-actualized individuals have more peak experiences – moments of great emotion or understanding, when one feels particularly aware, alive, and connected with oneself and the surrounding world.

Various other theorists have similarly defined the good life as developing one's potential to the fullest. Jung (1933) spoke of *individuation* as the process of becoming fully oneself, autonomous, aware, and well integrated. Allport (1955) defined psychological well-being as *maturity*, which includes expressing one's true self, seeing things realistically, relating constructively to others, and having a personalized conscience. And Rogers (1961) advocated being *fully functioning*, and thus using all of one's capacities when appropriate, including joy and suffering.

By comparison, Freud's (1920) theory placed more emphasis on hedonic satisfaction. According to his *pleasure principle*, tension-reduction and pleasure are the ultimate goals of life, though this is somewhat balanced by his *reality principle*, which states that we must learn to accept pain and postpone gratification because of the exigencies of reality.

### *Empirical Work by Modern Psychologists*

In addition to theoretical authors, researchers are also debating the two views of well-being – see Ryff & Singer (1998) versus Diener, Sapyta, & Suh (1998); Kashdan, Biswas-Diener & King (2008) versus Waterman (2008) and Ryan & Huta (2009); and Kahneman (1999) versus Seligman (2002).

Let us review a number of research programs, as they have appeared in chronological order.

Beginning in the early 1970s and researched widely today, self-determination theory is related to eudaimonia in its view of *autonomy* as a central cause of well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy includes being true to oneself, having different aspects of oneself well integrated, and endorsing one's activities rather than being controlled by external or internal pressures. Autonomy can be assessed with a variety of scales, from trait-level measures (including the General Causality Orientation Scale, Deci & Ryan, 1985), to state-level measures (e.g., Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000), to domain-specific measures (e.g., learning, prosocial, healthcare, exercise, religion, and friendship domains – see <http://www.psych.rochester.edu/SDT/>). Research has shown that autonomy relates to persistence, cognitive flexibility, conceptual learning, creativity, self-actualization, vitality, and a wide-range of other well-being indices; it relates negatively to interest in extrinsic matters such as money, material possessions, image, and status. Recently, Ryan and colleagues (2008) proposed that eudaimonia includes three additional characteristics: acting with awareness; acting in line with

objectively valid and enduring psychological needs rather than momentary impulses; and pursuing goals that are ends in themselves (e.g., personal growth, community contribution) rather than means to an end (e.g., money, image, power).

Also in the 1970s, Csíkszentmihályi (1990) introduced the concept of *flow*, an optimal state experienced when one skillfully engages in a challenging activity. It is the state achieved by rock climbers when they feel at one with the rock, by musicians when their playing seems to flow of its own accord, and by any of us when we are so engaged in an activity that nothing else seems to matter, we no longer see ourselves from the outside, and even time seems to stop. Csíkszentmihályi and colleagues have studied flow using *experience-sampling*, where each participant reports their momentary state at multiple time points (Csíkszentmihályi & Larson, 1987) – this provides state-level assessments of flow, which can also be aggregated into trait-level assessments. During flow, one does not view oneself as happy – to step into an evaluative mindset would be to break out of the immersion. Only afterward does one view the flow experience as wonderful. Csíkszentmihályi describes flow as *autotelic*, i.e., an end in itself rather than a means to an end. He argues that flow fosters personal evolution because the challenging activity stretches a person's abilities; he also reports findings that flow promotes positive affect, creativity, concentration, learning, meaning and purpose in life, and a sense of transcendence or connection with a greater whole.

Some years later, Ryff (1989) introduced her conception of eudaimonia. She argued that well-being is better defined by objectively realizing one's potential and flourishing in the face of life's existential challenges, than by subjectively feeling good. More specifically, Ryff proposed that eudaimonia consists of what she called *psychological well-being*: personal growth, purpose in life, autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, and self-acceptance. These characteristics are assessed at the trait level using the *Psychological Well-Being* scale (Ryff & Keyes, 1995), the most frequently employed measure of eudaimonia to date. Confirmatory factor analyses show a better fit when treating psychological well-being and hedonic well-being (indexed by positive affect, negative affect, life satisfaction, and happiness) as two factors rather than part of one factor, though the factors correlated around  $r = .80$  (Gallagher, Lopez, & Preacher, 2009; Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002). Studies have related the Psychological Well-Being scale to many variables, including lower mental illness, successful aging, physical health, and positive cardiovascular, neuroendocrine, and immune functioning (Keyes & Annas, 2009; Ryff et al., 2006). Furthermore, the scale is associated with greater left than right superior frontal brain activation, providing biological evidence for its link with well-being and goal-directed behavior (Urry et al., 2004).

In the early 1990s, Waterman proposed a description of eudaimonia that he called *personal expressiveness* (Waterman et al., 2003). It is characterized by six feelings about one's most representative activities, assessed at the trait level using the *Personally Expressive Activities Questionnaire* (Waterman, Schwartz, & Conti, 2008): that these activities make one feel alive, that they express who one really is, that one is intensely involved in them, that they are what one was meant to do, that they make one particularly complete or fulfilled, and that one has a special fit or meshing with them. Waterman contrasted personal expressiveness with a measure of hedonic enjoyment (including enjoyment, pleasure, satisfaction, feeling good, feeling a warm glow, and feeling happy). The distinction was subtle, with the scales correlating around  $r = .80$ . Nevertheless, relative to hedonic enjoyment, personal expressiveness related more to activities that allowed one to develop one's best potentials, as well activities that involved high challenge and high skill (i.e., flow activities). Further, personal expressiveness tended to be accompanied

by hedonic enjoyment, while hedonic enjoyment was not necessarily accompanied by personal expressiveness. Waterman (1981) also reviewed literature showing that a eudaimonic concern with personal excellence and development is positively (not negatively, as is sometimes believed) related to prosocial behavior.

Beginning in 1998, Vittersø has written a number of papers delineating differences between eudaimonia and hedonia (e.g., Vittersø, 1998; Vittersø, 2003; Vittersø, Oelmann, & Wang, 2009; Vittersø, Søholt, Hetland, Thoresen, & Røysamb, 2009). At the trait level, he has operationalized eudaimonia using personal growth and openness to experience, while he has operationalized hedonia as life satisfaction. At the state level, he has operationalized eudaimonia using interest, engagement, and challenge, while operationalizing hedonia as pleasure, positive affect, low negative affect, pleasantness, and easiness. Vittersø provides evidence that eudaimonia is related to but distinct from hedonia, and that trait-level eudaimonia predicts state-level eudaimonia, while trait-level hedonia predicts state-level hedonia. Furthermore, Vittersø and colleagues have proposed a model where eudaimonia signals and promotes change, growth, and accommodation, while hedonia signals and regulates stability, assimilation, and return to homeostasis. These authors also discuss possible neurological mechanisms: the dopamine systems that underlie interest and novelty-seeking may support eudaimonia, while the endogenous opioid systems that underlie pleasure and regulation of homeostatic processes may support hedonia.

In 2002, Seligman discussed eudaimonia as a *life of meaning*, i.e., a life where one considers the broader implications of one's actions and serves the greater good. He differentiated the pursuit of meaning from the pursuit of pleasure as well as the pursuit of engagement (the latter concept relates to flow, but focuses largely on the absorption component and less on personal evolution and excellence). Seligman's theory has been operationalized using the trait-level *Orientations to Happiness* scale (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005; Vella-Brodick, Park, & Peterson, 2009), where the eudaimonia items separate cleanly into their own factor and have high internal consistency, thereby supporting the distinctness and coherence of the eudaimonia concept. The eudaimonia and hedonia scales correlate around  $r = .20$ , showing a weak positive relationship. The studies showed that each pursuit related to life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect, though eudaimonia and engagement related more strongly than did pleasure. Also, a combination of these pursuits related to greater life satisfaction than any one pursuit on its own. This supported the hypothesis that the greatest well-being is found in *the full life*, which combines the different paths to well-being.

In our own work (Huta & Ryan, 2010), we have defined eudaimonia and hedonia as motives for activities, i.e., as seeking to use and develop the best in oneself, and seeking to experience pleasure and comfort. The items in our *Hedonic and Eudaimonic Motives for Activities* scale separate cleanly into eudaimonic and hedonic factors, and each subscale has high internal consistency. We have used the scale in several correlational and experience-sampling studies as well as an experimental intervention, to conduct both trait-level and state-level assessments. With this measure, eudaimonia and hedonia correlate positively at the trait level as others have found, around  $r = .40$ , indicating that people who frequently pursue eudaimonia also frequently pursue hedonia; but interestingly, they correlate negatively around  $r = -.30$  at the state level, indicating that a momentary activity tends to be eudaimonic or hedonic but not often both. We have found that eudaimonia relates more than hedonia to *elevating experience* (including awe, inspiration, and transcendence), a sense of meaning, feeling connected with oneself, and a sense of competence; hedonia relates more to positive affect and carefreeness, and to lower

negative affect; both pursuits relate similarly to vitality and life satisfaction. Paralleling the findings of Peterson et al. (2005), we found that people with both eudaimonic and hedonic pursuits scored higher on most well-being outcomes than people with only one pursuit or the other. In the intervention study, which lasted ten days, people in the hedonia condition had more well-being benefits immediately after the ten days, while people in the eudaimonia condition had more benefits three months later.

### *Factor Analytic Studies*

Taking a more statistical approach, several factor analytic studies have examined evidence for a eudaimonic-hedonic distinction. Compton, Smith, Cornish, and Qualls (1996) performed exploratory factor analysis of various measures of well-being and ways of behaving, and found a factor reflecting eudaimonic concepts (including self-actualization, maturity, and openness to experience), and a factor reflecting subjective well-being (including affect balance, life satisfaction, happiness, and self-esteem); these factors correlated  $r = .36$ . McGregor and Little (1998) factor analyzed various aspects of peoples' personal projects, and found that the degree to which these represented integrity (e.g., were congruent with one's values and identity), and the degree to which they were fun, formed separate factors. Furthermore, the fun of projects correlated with happiness, while the integrity of projects correlated with meaning.

### Common Themes in Conceptions of Eudaimonia

The conceptions of eudaimonia reviewed above differ considerably. Yet a general overview can be obtained by extracting common themes that appear in at least some of the conceptions. The themes can be organized into two groups: eudaimonia as a way of acting, and eudaimonia as a form of well-being.

Eudaimonia as a way of acting includes the following themes:

- \* *Excellence*. The concept that one is striving for something good/better or high/higher. However, whether the goodness of one's actions is to be judged subjectively or objectively and consensually is a matter of debate. At my Ph.D. thesis defense, one of my examiners asked, "Would a suicide bomber who whole-heartedly believes in the justice of their action be called eudaimonic?" The correct answer is, I believe, "Good question!" It depends on the fine print of the definition one adopts, and different authors may make different judgments here.
- \* *Authenticity/Autonomy*. Acting in line with one's true self and deep values, and striving to integrate the different aspects of oneself.
- \* *Development*. Following a purpose that promotes personal evolution and realization of one's potential.
- \* *Full Functioning*. Using the full range of what one is, as appropriate, including unpleasant emotions.
- \* *Broad Scope of Concern*. Striving to serve a greater good, whether it be the welfare of entities beyond oneself, or some long-term goal for the self or others that transcends the immediate moment.
- \* *Engagement*. Actively applying oneself, rising to the challenge, and being deeply immersed.
- \* *Autotelism*. Focusing on the quality of the means to an end, or seeing the means or process as an end in itself.
- \* *Contemplation*. Thinking about the meaning of one's actions, and being guided by abstract principles.

\* *Acceptance*. While striving for excellence, simultaneously embracing and working with reality, oneself, and others as they are.

Eudaimonia as a form of well-being includes the following themes:

- \* *Meaning*. Feeling that one's activities and experiences are meaningful and valuable.
- \* *Elevation*. A sense of being inspired, enriched, and raised to a higher or broader level of functioning.
- \* *Awe*. Feelings of awe, wonder, and being deeply moved, i.e., experiencing life's events on a deeper level.
- \* *Connection*. Feelings of connection with, awareness of, and harmony with oneself, one's activities, or a broader or longer-term context.
- \* *Aliveness*. Feeling alive and present.
- \* *Fulfillment*. Feeling fulfilled and complete, and that one does not wish anything more.
- \* *Competence*. Competence and mastery in life's important domains. While some researchers define this more as a subjective feeling (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2000), others define it more as a quality that could be judged objectively (e.g., Ryff, 1989).

#### Causes of Eudaimonia

While there has been some research on the consequences of eudaimonia, little is known about its predictors. I have thus far conducted two retrospective correlational studies on the question (Huta, in press). The first study showed that participants engaged in eudaimonic pursuits if their parents had been high on responsiveness and/or demandingness, the two dimensions that define positive parenting; hedonic pursuits did not relate to either parenting dimension. The second study showed that people engaged in eudaimonic pursuits if their parents had either verbally endorsed eudaimonia or actually role modeled it by pursuing eudaimonia themselves. However, people derived well-being from eudaimonic pursuits only if their parents had role modeled eudaimonia, not if their parents had merely verbally endorsed it.

#### Why Has Eudaimonia Been Slow to Receive Empirical Attention?

Though eudaimonia is central to the question of human well-being, researchers have been slow, even reluctant, to address it. There are a number of reasons for this (see also Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & King, 2009; Kashdan, Biswas-Diener, & King, 2008).

#### *Scope of the Concept*

First, a bewildering array of topics has fallen under the umbrella term "eudaimonia," and the topics have hailed not only from psychology but also from philosophy, ethics, and spirituality. Thus, eudaimonia is not easy to define, operationalize, or manipulate in research. Suggestions for addressing the definition of eudaimonia appear in the Future Directions section.

#### *Abstractness, Subtlety, and Subjectivity*

Eudaimonia is also abstract and subtle. In my view, eudaimonic pursuits arise from a dialogue between seeking one's true self and striving towards ideals (in the language of 19<sup>th</sup> century romantic poets, the ideals of truth, beauty, sacredness, or love). Such guiding forces are less pre-wired than hedonia – they need to first be identified and developed, and then must be kept in mind to some degree if they are to be pursued. This makes eudaimonia easily overlooked, somewhat difficult to achieve, and easily disrupted (Vitterso, Oelmann, & Wang, 2009). It is

more elusive than hedonia for all of us, researchers included. Furthermore, the profession of psychology has deep roots in behaviorism, and thus finds it difficult to encompass such a subjectively experienced phenomenon. Despite its subtlety, eudaimonia is no less real. And while biological, cognitive, and behavioral analyses of eudaimonia are certainly informative, eudaimonia is most directly understood at the phenomenological level of analysis (Ryan & Deci, 2006).

### *The Centrality of Values*

Moreover, eudaimonia is inextricably tied to values. Eudaimonic pursuits are guided by beliefs of what it means to do something right or authentically. Eudaimonia has been called a *higher pleasure* (Seligman, 2002). And some authors have delineated specific positive characteristics of a eudaimonic person, such as mastery of life's tasks, positive relations with others, self-acceptance, and autonomy (Maslow, 1970; Ryff, 1989). This has led some researchers to criticize the eudaimonic literature as elitist and as falling outside the confines of a proper science of psychology (Kashdan et al., 2008). Yet a growing number of psychologists are becoming comfortable with terms like *virtue* and *character*, and interest in eudaimonia research has increased considerably in recent years. This is largely thanks to the work and ceaseless efforts of Martin Seligman, Christopher Peterson, and their colleagues. There is increasing recognition that values are an integral part of human experience, and that they guide (and sometimes misguide) much of what we do. Furthermore, *higher pleasures* do not mean *better pleasures* – a higher pleasure is one that employs and stimulates capacities that differentiate us from other animals, including the ability to be guided by values and vision.

### Future Directions

Research on eudaimonia is in its infancy. The definition of eudaimonia remains diffuse, and many empirical questions have yet to be tested. Below are some key future directions.

### *Defining Eudaimonia*

The challenge of defining eudaimonia actually needs to be addressed in two ways: by reaching a better consensus on the definition, but also by broadening the comfort zone of researchers.

In moving toward a consensual definition, we need to address one basic question before we even begin discussing the characteristics that should be included: Is eudaimonia a way of behaving, a form of well-being, or both? I personally see it (and hedonia) as one's way of behaving (which includes one's way of thinking), which can be assessed at either the trait level or the state level.

Clearly defining eudaimonia as a way of behaving addresses several key criticisms of the related literature (Biswas-Diener et al, 2009; Kashdan et al., 2008; Ryan et al., 2008), and would go a long way toward resolving the debates that have bogged this area down: 1) the blurring, in some cases, of the boundary between pursuits and outcomes – defining eudaimonia as a way of behaving clearly differentiates it from feelings of well-being, and thus it can be studied as a predictor, while various forms of well-being can be studied as its outcomes; 2) the asymmetrical treatment of eudaimonia and hedonia in other cases, such that eudaimonia is discussed as a way of behaving, while hedonia is discussed in terms of well-being – defining both eudaimonia and hedonia as ways of behaving makes it possible to compare them in equal terms; and 3) the *a priori* assumption that certain forms of well-being, such as vitality and feelings of meaning,



should be labeled as “eudaimonic well-being,” while other forms of well-being including life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect should be called “hedonic well-being,” before much empirical support is accumulated for these two groupings – defining eudaimonia and hedonia as pursuits makes it possible to study both of them as predictors of the same well-being outcomes, including those originally labeled as “eudaimonic” and “hedonic,” and permits an empirical test of whether certain outcomes relate more to eudaimonia or hedonia.

There is also a practical benefit to treating eudaimonia and hedonia as ways of behaving. As reviewed earlier, the studies which treated them as ways of behaving showed only weak to moderate correlations between them, and thus good distinctness, while studies which treated them as forms of well-being or mixtures of pursuits and well-being showed very high correlations.

As for core features of eudaimonia, I see striving for excellence and authenticity as the primary features. I suspect, however, that as much debate remains about this point as about whether eudaimonia is a pursuit or a type of well-being.

At the same time as we aim to better define eudaimonia, we also need to stretch our comfort zone. At this early stage in developing the research, the rich diversity of perspectives is beneficial. If we rush into a foreclosed identity for eudaimonia, we may end up with an incomplete or biased definition. Eventually, however, eudaimonic researchers will need to reach a better consensus, or at least organize the different perspectives and understand how they relate to each other.

In addition, we need not be apologetic about the fact that eudaimonia is a broad concept. It is certainly one of the broader concepts in psychology, but if we consider for example the incredible scope of descriptors that Costa and McCrae (1992) represented with each Big Five personality label, eudaimonia is in good company.

We also need to be a little more experience-driven and a little less logistics-driven – just because a broad concept is difficult (but not impossible) to operationalize does not make it invalid. The long history of the topic, the growing interest in the topic, and the accumulating research evidence, all indicate that the eudaimonic concept corresponds to a true phenomenon in human experience.

### *Outcomes of Eudaimonia*

If we (tentatively) treat eudaimonia as a way of behaving, there are many important outcomes that we have yet to study. These include forms of psychological well-being (e.g., serenity has received little attention), other psychological benefits (e.g., insight, maturity, stages of moral development, creativity, sustained attention, increased skill, progress toward goals, healthy behaviors), and mental illness. Physical outcomes, such as those already studied in relation to Ryff’s eudaimonia scale, could be studied in relation to other eudaimonia conceptions as well. And it would be valuable to investigate whether eudaimonia is especially beneficial under certain circumstances. For example, eudaimonic individuals may find greater fulfillment in working than do hedonic individuals. Eudaimonia may also help people to cope with trauma, and buffer them against despair, because of its link with meaning and purpose.

In addition to promoting personal benefits, eudaimonia is likely to foster the well-being of one’s surrounding world. The broad scope of concern of a eudaimonic individual is likely to benefit close others, the broader social community, and even the environment.

For all of these outcomes, it will be important to show that the benefits of eudaimonia somehow differ from those of hedonia – otherwise we may be reinventing the wheel.

*Predictors of Eudaimonia*

If eudaimonia plays a role in well-being, then it is essential that we determine what leads people to be eudaimonic in the first place. Potential distal and ongoing predictors include cultural background, religious background, the values and guidance provided by one's parents and role models, life experiences such as fulfillment of psychological needs and past challenges, and opportunities permitted by life circumstances such as basic security and daily responsibilities; personality and genetics may also play a role. Potential proximal predictors include a person's recent physical well-being – one may be motivated to invest in eudaimonia if one feels rested and well; and recent psychological well-being – Fredrickson's (2001) broaden and build theory suggests that positive emotions in general should foster eudaimonia, because they broaden awareness and promote novel behavior and development, and Haidt's (2000) work suggests that elevating experience should be a particularly strong motivator of virtuous behavior.

**Concluding Remarks**

The concept of eudaimonia is based on a fundamental human question: What choices can a person make to increase their fulfillment in life? Research in this area has much potential to help people lead more fulfilling, inspiring, and meaningful lives. As we move forward in developing this literature, let us treat the topic with the respect it is due. It is important that we continually be open to learning from our findings and observations, and growing in our understanding – that is, let us be eudaimonic in our own approach to the subject.

Footnote 1: I avoid the terms “hedonism” and “hedonistic,” and instead use “hedonia” and “hedonic.” The former terms have accumulated too many negative connotations, and I do not view hedonia as maladaptive (unless taken to extremes).

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