

EDWARD L. DECI and RICHARD M. RYAN

## **HEDONIA, EUDAIMONIA, AND WELL-BEING: AN INTRODUCTION**

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**ABSTRACT.** Research on well-being can be thought of as falling into two traditions. In one—the hedonistic tradition—the focus is on happiness, generally defined as the presence of positive affect and the absence of negative affect. In the other—the eudaimonic tradition—the focus is on living life in a full and deeply satisfying way. Recognizing that much recent research on well-being has been more closely aligned with the hedonistic tradition, this special issue presents discussions and research reviews from the eudaimonic tradition, making clear how the concept of eudaimonia adds an important perspective to our understanding of well-being.

**KEY WORDS:** eudaimonia, fully functioning, hedonism, subjective well-being.

1. Hedonia
2. Eudaimonia

### **HEDONIA AND SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING**

Well-being, which refers to optimal psychological experience and functioning, has been vigorously studied in psychology over the past quarter century. To a significant degree, this is due to the work of psychologists such as Diener (1984) who have focused on an exploration of subjective well-being (SWB). From that perspective, well-being is considered subjective because the idea is for people to evaluate *for themselves*, in a general way, the degree to which they experience a sense of wellness. As an operational definition, SWB is most often interpreted to mean experiencing a high level of positive affect, a low level of negative affect, and a high degree of satisfaction with one's life. To the extent that one strongly endorses these three constructs, one is said to be high in SWB. The concept of SWB, assessed in this way, has frequently been used interchangeably with "happiness." Thus, maximizing one's well-being has been viewed as maximizing one's feelings of happiness.

In research on SWB, the primary focus has been on factors that lead to SWB—including person factors, social-environmental factors, and cultural factors. Assumptions have not been made about what should yield SWB nor about universality in the conditions that are likely to make people happy. Readers of the *Journal of Happiness Studies* are well familiar with the idea of SWB, with its operational definition, and with studies about the types of factors that yield it.

Since the publication of *Well-Being: The Foundation of Hedonic Psychology* (Kahneman et al., 1999), SWB has been associated with the hedonistic approach to well-being. A more precise interpretation of hedonic well-being would, however, use just positive affect and negative affect to index happiness, because life satisfaction is not strictly a hedonic concept. Rather, it involves a cognitive evaluation of the conditions of one's life. Still, SWB has been widely associated with the idea of happiness and these two concepts have often been interpreted as being hedonic, although there may be room for greater integration of SWB into a more eudaimonic perspective.

## EUDAIMONIA AND FULL FUNCTIONING

In spite of the proliferation of SWB studies, SWB is not the only way to think about well-being. A second view considers well-being to consist of more than just happiness, suggesting that people's reports of being happy (or of being positively affective and satisfied) does not necessarily mean that they are psychologically well. This second perspective is referred to as *eudaimonia* (Waterman, 1993) and is concerned with living well or actualizing one's human potentials. This conceptualization maintains that well-being is not so much an outcome or end state as it is a process of fulfilling or realizing one's daimon or true nature—that is, of fulfilling one's virtuous potentials and living as one was inherently intended to live. As pointed out in several of the papers in this special issue, the eudaimonic view can be traced to Aristotle (translated by Irwin, 1985) and is aligned with various 20th century intellectual traditions, including humanistic psychology.

The two approaches to well-being—namely, hedonism and eudaimonism—are founded on different views of human nature. The hedonic approach uses what Tooby and Cosmides (1992) referred to as the standard social science model, which considers the human organism initially to be relatively empty and thus malleable, such that it gains its meaning in accord with social and cultural teachings. In contrast, the eudaimonic approach ascribes content to human nature and works to uncover that content and to understand the conditions that facilitate versus diminish it.

Still, there is believed to be substantial overlap between the experience of hedonia and eudaimonia, and research reviewed by Waterman, Schwartz, and Conti (this issue) and by Bauer, McAdams, and Pals (this issue) indicates a high level of statistical covariance. The position taken by Waterman and colleagues is that, if a person experiences eudaimonic living he or she will necessarily also experience hedonic enjoyment; however, not all hedonic enjoyment is derived from eudaimonic living. Still the two are highly correlated, and most researchers agree that there will be considerable overlap (e.g., Ryan and Deci, 2001). In spite of the statistical convergence between hedonia and eudaimonia, there are very important points of divergence. Because readers of the *Journal of Happiness Studies* are likely to be much less familiar with the eudaimonic approach to well-being and its research tradition, we have drawn together the work of several noted researchers who use the eudaimonic idea that well-being refers to being fully functioning.

### PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AND EUDAIMONIA

The first paper in this issue is by Ryff and Singer. The research they discuss began with Ryff's (1989) model and measure of psychological well-being, which falls within the eudaimonic tradition and was originally formulated to challenge the prevailing hedonistic view of well-being within psychology. In the current paper, Ryff and Singer review work of theorists dating back to Aristotle that informed the development of Ryff's formulation. The reader will see that it derives not only from

Aristotle's view of the highest human good involving virtue and the realization of one's potential, but also from the work of psychodynamically and humanistically oriented psychologists such as Jung (1933), Maslow (1968), Allport (1961), and Rogers (1962). Ryff's approach names six characteristics of psychological well-being—self-acceptance, personal growth, relatedness, autonomy, relationships, environmental mastery, and purpose in life. Thus, her scale of psychological well-being involves assessing these six subscales. Research by Ryff, Singer, and their colleagues has shown that higher levels of psychological well-being is associated with better neuroendocrine regulation, lower cardiovascular risk, and better immune functioning.

The second paper by Waterman, Schwartz, and Conti begins with an additional discussion of **the philosophical foundation of eudaimonia as a conception of well-being**. They then present research in which they use the Personally Expressive Activities Questionnaire (PEAQ) to assess both **eudaimonic** and hedonic **aspects of well-being, particularly as they relate to the concept of intrinsic motivation**. Participants list several activities that are personally salient to them, and then they respond to six items that are intended to assess **eudaimonia** and six that are intended to assess hedonic well-being. The items related to **eudaimonia** are labeled **Personally Expressive** and include, **"This activity gives me my strongest feeling that this is who I really am."** An example of an hedonic-enjoyment item is "This activity gives me my greatest pleasure."

#### THE CONTENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AND EUDAIMONIA?

There are interesting issues that come up in comparing the first two papers. Both assess **well-being within the Eudaimonic tradition**, yet they take very different approaches. Ryff and Singer's approach is to examine the six specific contents mentioned above that are theorized to constitute psychological well-being, using each as a subscale. In contrast, Waterman and colleagues use a single scale in which they assess the extent to which a particular activity leaves one feeling fulfilled and is

expressive of who one truly is. There are two important differences between these approaches. First, Ryff and colleagues assess psychological well-being as a global or individual difference variable, whereas Waterman and colleagues assess eudaimonia more narrowly in relation to particular activities. Second, the Ryff measure specifies **the content that represents eudaimonic living (e.g., environmental mastery, positive relations, self-acceptance, etc.),** whereas the Waterman measure leaves **the concept** content free, assessing simply whether an activity **leaves one feeling alive, fulfilled, and expressive of one's true self.** It seems important at this point for researchers to examine empirically the relations between these two operational definitions and the correlates of each.

### HAPPINESS, WELL-BEING, AND MATERIAL POSSESSIONS

There are two other points worth noting about the paper by Waterman and colleagues as it relates to the literature on well-being's two traditions. First, these authors refer to two types of happiness—hedonic and eudaimonic. In other words, whereas the concept of happiness within psychology has typically been aligned with just the hedonic view, Waterman and colleagues use the concept to encompass both views, making a clear distinction between the two kinds of happiness. This is primarily an issue of semantics, of how one chooses to use specific words, because Waterman et al. are making the general hedonic-eudaimonic distinction in much the same way that the other contributors to this special issue are doing. Nonetheless, in order to minimize confusion, it is important to keep in mind the different ways the term happiness is used by authors in this issue and elsewhere.

A second noteworthy point concerns the conceptual definition of hedonic well-being used by Waterman and colleagues. In line with the work of Kraut (1979), Waterman and colleagues define hedonic well-being as the positive feelings that accompany getting the material objects one wants or having the action opportunities one wishes. More specifically, there is an emphasis in this definition on material objects, which is related

to Aristotle's view of hedonia but is not necessarily implicit in current research on hedonia that emphasizes subjective well-being (Kahneman et al., 1999). The essence of this conceptual definition of Waterman and colleagues does not appear in their operational definition (i.e., in their measure of hedonic enjoyment), but it is an issue worth noting in terms of a broader understanding of the complex field of well-being.

### WELL-BEING THEMES IN LIFE STORIES

The paper by Bauer, McAdams, and Pals in this issue reviews work on people's narratives or life stories. Arguing that people create narratives to organize their experiences and relate to their social surrounds, the researchers have examined people's narratives and identified themes that tend to be associated with eudaimonia. They understand eudaimonia, or **the good life**, to comprise **pleasure, a sense of meaningfulness, and a rich psychosocial integration in a person's understanding of himself or herself**. The authors report, for example, that people whose narratives are rich in intrinsic goals for personal growth, meaningful relationships, and community contribution (Ryan et al., 1996) tend also to display psychological well-being as an indicator of eudaimonia. Further, they indicate that when people's narratives concern integrative growth—that is, growth involving deeper understanding and integration of new and old perspectives—the people tend to display a high level of ego-development (Loevinger, 1976) and psychological well-being, especially on the dimensions of purpose in life and personal growth.

### AUTONOMY AND EUDAIMONIA

A concept that seems to be closely related to eudaimonia is *autonomy*. As defined by Ryan and Deci (2000), autonomy refers to volition, to having the experience of choice, to endorsing one's actions at the highest level of reflection. Ryan and Deci proposed that autonomy is one of the three fundamental and universal psychological needs that are central to self-determination theory (SDT), the other two being

relatedness and competence. In discussions of eudaimonia in this special issue, the concept of autonomy comes up in several ways and appears in each article. It begins with Aristotle's emphasizing choice and suggesting that virtue, which is central to eudaimonia, involves making the right *choices*. In other words, it results from choosing to act virtuously—that is, being volitionally virtuous—rather than being drawn into excesses such as accumulating material possessions.

Ryff and colleagues have used the concept of autonomy as one of the six aspects of psychological wellness, defining autonomy as self-determination, independence, and the regulation of behavior from within. Although the term “autonomy” as defined in self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000) involves self-determination and self-regulation, assuming those terms are interpreted as meaning a sense of volitional and consent, autonomy is quite different from the concept of independence. Independence means not relying on others, whereas autonomy as used in self-determination theory means acting with the experience of choice. Thus, it is quite possible to be autonomous (volitional) while relying on others rather than acting independently of them. Accordingly, there is only a partial intersection of the ideas of autonomy expressed in the articles by Ryff and Singer and by Ryan, Huta, and Deci.

Waterman, Schwartz, and Conti do not use the term autonomy, but they do talk repeatedly about self-determination, which they define as freely choosing, thus using a concept that is closely related to autonomy as defined by Ryan, Huta, and Deci.

Although Bauer, McAdams, and Pals did not address the concept of autonomy or self-determination directly, their work drew links between eudaimonia and intrinsic aspirations. The latter concept, which comes from self-determination theory (SDT), is both conceptually and empirically related to the concept of autonomy or autonomous regulation. Furthermore, Bauer and colleagues reviewed research on narrative themes that relate to high levels of ego-development, which has also been shown to relate to greater autonomy (Avery and Ryan, 1988).

### AUTONOMY AS THE BASIC NEED

The article by Devine, Camfield, and Gough has the concept of autonomy at its core, suggesting that autonomy is *the* basic human need. They then argue that although it is often said to be a western, individualistic concept, its importance is readily observable in Bangladesh, an eastern collectivist society. In the work of this group, autonomy is considered a very broad concept. Whereas SDT specifies three basic needs—autonomy, relatedness, and competence—Devine and colleagues essentially incorporate relatedness and competence within autonomy. For example, they suggest that autonomy can only be developed through interdependent relationships, that autonomy entails wanting to participate in a social life, and that when people's social activities are blocked autonomy will be impaired. They further portray autonomy in a way that encompasses competence, suggesting for example that a lack of sufficient understanding of one's culture will interfere with acting autonomously within it.

This view of autonomy is focused more at a sociological-economic level, whereas the SDT conception of autonomy is focused at the psychological level, thus accounting in part for the broader view of the concept in the work of Devine and colleagues. Still, the article by Devine and colleagues concludes that autonomy is indeed a universal psychological need, although its expression can vary greatly as a function of the context within which it is being expressed.

Their cross-cultural perspective, which highlighted the need for autonomy in Bangladesh, also makes the point that people in that culture often feel constrained from expressing the need for autonomy because it is not culturally endorsed as a value. This, of course, is important because it means that understanding the deep level of people's universal psychological needs requires being very careful in assessing them, for people in cultures that do not value particular needs may not endorse those needs on a questionnaire even though the needs are essential for their own well-being.

### SDT AND EUDAIMONIA

In the final article in this special issue, Ryan and colleagues use self-determination theory as the basis for presenting a model of eudaimonia. These authors, like others in this special issue, emphasize that eudaimonia concerns how one lives one's life rather than the well-being outcome, *per se*. Of course, living well is expected to yield both the feelings of happiness and pleasure and a sense of meaning and fulfillment. But the emphasis in the Ryan et al. paper is on the processes that represent eudaimonic living and that yield well-being.

From this perspective, living well involves those motives, goals, and behaviors that are satisfying of the basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. To examine this further, the article considers the pursuit and attainment of intrinsic (relative to extrinsic) life goals or aspirations, the autonomous (relative to controlled) regulation of behavior, and awareness or mindfulness as they relate to basic need satisfaction and eudaimonia. As well, the article addresses the conditions that promote intrinsic goal pursuits, autonomous regulation, and mindful engagement—in short, the conditions that promote eudaimonia.

### CONCLUSION

Together, the set of papers contained within this special issue makes a compelling case that the concept of eudaimonia is an important one for understanding well-being and human flourishing. Well-being conceptualized in terms of eudaimonia has considerable overlap with subjective well-being as viewed from a hedonic perspective, but there are very important differences as is made clear by the interesting articles of this special issue.

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Address for correspondence:

EDWARD L. DECI

*University of Rochester*

*Rochester, NY 14627*

*USA*

*E-mail: [deci@psych.rochester.edu](mailto:deci@psych.rochester.edu)*