

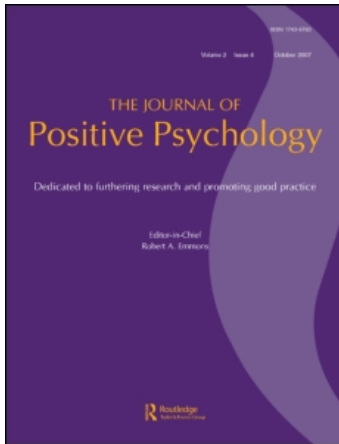
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### Reconsidering happiness: the costs of distinguishing between hedonics and eudaimonia

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## Reconsidering happiness: the costs of distinguishing between hedonics and eudaimonia

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In recent years, well-being researchers have distinguished between eudaimonic happiness (e.g., meaning and purpose; taking part in activities that allow for the actualization of one's skills, talents, and potential) and hedonic happiness (e.g., high frequencies of positive affect, low frequencies of negative affect, and evaluating life as satisfying). Unfortunately, this distinction (rooted in philosophy) does not necessarily translate well to science. Among the problems of drawing too sharp a line between 'types of happiness' is the fact that eudaimonia is not well-defined and lacks consistent measurement. Moreover, empirical evidence currently suggests that hedonic and eudaimonic well-being overlap conceptually, and may represent psychological mechanisms that operate together. In this article, we outline the problems and costs of distinguishing between two types of happiness, and provide detailed recommendations for a research program on well-being with greater scientific precision.

**Keywords:** happiness; the good life; meaning; hedonics; eudaimonia; subjective well-being; psychological well-being; personal expressiveness; self determination theory; intrinsic motivation; Aristotle

*The purpose of life is to be happy.* The Dalai Lama

*You will never be happy if you continue to search for what happiness consists of.* Albert Camus

*And they all lived happily ever after.* The Brothers Grimm

### Introduction

The place of happiness in the Good Life has been a central concern for thinkers from Aristotle to the present day. In *Nicomachean ethics*, Aristotle famously distinguished hedonism (the life occupied by the search for pleasure) and eudaimonia (happiness that arises from good works). Contemporary psychologists have drawn on this Aristotelian distinction to suggest that modern well-being research falls into two conceptual camps: hedonics, which focuses on how the person feels about his or her life, and eudaimonics, which focuses on living a life in full accord with one's potential (Ryan & Deci, 2001). In recent years, this distinction has gained widespread acceptance among researchers, providing scholars with a language for talking about well-being. Indeed, increasing numbers of studies and articles treat well-being within these categories (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000; Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002; Kopperud, & Vittersø, in press; Maltby, Day, & Barbur, 2005;

Seligman, 2002; Vittersø, 2003, 2004; Waterman, 1993, 2007; Waterman, Schwartz, & Conti, 2008). While we applaud efforts to empirically examine the concept of well-being, we also see certain dangers in treating this intriguing conceptual distinction as if it is proven fact. Foremost among these is the implicit (and sometimes explicit) argument that there is a moral hierarchy to be found in happiness, with eudaimonic happiness being viewed as more objective, comprehensive, and morally valid than hedonic well-being (e.g., Annas, 2004; Waterman, 2007). In this paper, we address the distinction between hedonic and eudaimonic happiness, briefly reviewing its roots in philosophy and use in psychology. In addition, we review the empirical evidence for a qualitative distinction between these two conceptions of happiness, and address the implications of an uncritical reliance on this distinction for our understanding of human thriving. Finally, we offer suggestions for a future program of research on well-being.

### A brief history of happiness

Although Plato, Epicurus, Marcus Aurelius, and other great thinkers all spoke or wrote on happiness and the Good Life, it was Aristotle (4th Century BCE/1986) who most thoroughly examined the topic. Aristotle distinguished between pleasure and the good life, with

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the latter being construed by modern people as Aristotle's brand of happiness. Aristotle's view of happiness, called *eudaimonia*, was that the greatest life was the one that was lived to its fullest potential or in accord with some internal virtue. Aristotle's eudaimonic happiness has been the foundation of 'objectivist' theories of happiness, because it is seen as reflecting objective social values rather than subjective psychological feelings. Objectivist views hold that there are objective values other than pleasure, such as knowledge, friendship, and ethics, which make life good for a person (Brulde, 2007). McMahon (2004) summarizes this approach to the good life by saying 'happiness itself was not a function of feeling, but a function of virtue' (p. 8). This approach may be attractive to many people because, by including virtue and effort as essential parts of happiness, the Aristotelian view neatly side-steps the moral ambiguity of hedonism. That is, happiness is here seen as earned through right action. Even so, for Aristotle, good feelings were an integral part of *eudaimonia* (which was, of course, his word for 'happiness').

There have always been dissenters from the objectivist view of happiness. A variety of well-known and influential 'subjectivists' (or 'mentalists') argued that people essentially desire pleasure and seek to avoid/minimize pain. These writers emphasize that the pleasant, affective side of happiness should not be overlooked or dismissed. Epicurus, for instance, thought that pleasure and pain were useful indicators of 'good and bad' in life (3rd Century BCE/1987). Similarly, Bentham (1789/1988) and Hobbes (1651/1987) both argued that pleasure is a powerful motivator and crucial to the pursuit of happiness. Locke (1689/1964) also described pleasure as a powerful motivator, and noted that there was pleasure to be found in the exercise of virtue. Locke's observations echo Aristotle's view that pleasant feelings and virtue are related, a point we will return to later in this article.

Comparing the objectivist and mentalist approaches in philosophy, one difference is clear: the objectivist tradition embraces skepticism of mental states, because an individual's feelings may or may not reflect true goodness. However, psychology is centrally about mental states and, although self-report has certainly been criticized, the use of self-report is essential in the study of happiness. There is no better way to gauge someone's positive experiences, life satisfaction, self-determination, and meaning in life than to directly ask about them. Compare self-report to other methodologies: other people don't have full access to a target's phenomenological information (informant reports), it is unclear which behavioral observations would exemplify the presence of well-being (temporal and contextual considerations), and neurobiological assessments and coding of facial

expressions serve as an important level of analysis that complement rather than replace self-reports.

The tension between the mentalist and objectivist traditions highlights one of our main points: although these two approaches to examining the good life might make sense for philosophers, they are less appropriate to psychology which, as we have said, is centrally about mental states. Not since the heyday of psychoanalysis have psychologists generally assumed that reports of mental states are somehow uniformly suspect or, as in the case of Skinnerian behaviorism, irrelevant. Indeed, the distinction between hedonic and eudaimonic well-being in psychological research does not translate well from this aspect of the mentalist vs. objectivist debate. Both hedonic and eudaimonic approaches to studying well-being typically rely on self-report measures to infer levels of happiness, and interest in *eudaimonia* has not been concerned with the notion that happiness likely represents psychological defense or denial (e.g., Shedler, Mayman, & Manis, 1993; Weinberger & Schwartz, 1990). This is not to say, of course, that concepts of philosophical interest need be off-limits to psychological inquiry but, rather, subjective interpretations are central to even the study of 'objective' happiness. This blurry conceptual line between social norms, 'objective' virtue, and subjective appraisal complicates the distinction between and scientific study of hedonic and eudaimonic happiness.

Within philosophy, the objectivist approach demonstrates a concern that hedonic happiness is often the outcome of reprehensible behavior. Annas (2004), for instance, writes 'Some people feel happy when helping old ladies across streets; others feel happy when torturing puppies' (p. 45). Thus, the objectivist tradition might be characterized as being not so much about *whether* a person is happy but *why* the person is happy, a distinction that is somewhat more in keeping with the translation of this philosophical debate to the science of psychology. Of course, as scientists we can draw on research to evaluate this expectation. We can examine the validity of the notion that feeling good about one's life is unlikely to provide a reliable assessment that one is happy for the right reasons. Instead of ascribing moral judgment in our definition of happiness, we can examine how the presence of values and goals that run counter to dominant social norms or objective standards of 'goodness' (e.g., willingness to torture people and animals) influence the experience of positive affect, feelings of belongingness, meaning in life, and other elements of the Good Life. This approach to examining content and context as moderating influences, rather than essential elements, of happiness minimizes the biases, interests, and values of any particular researcher studying these concepts.

### The current state of the dual category approach to happiness

Modern psychologists are interested in answering a variety of questions about happiness, including those concerning its definition, measurement, causes, and consequences. Research programs have been undertaken on the structure of well-being (Eid, 2008), happiness interventions (Fordyce, 1983; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005), the relation between material circumstances and happiness (Veenhoven, 1994), and the benefits of positive affect (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). It is interesting to note that early pioneers in the field of happiness never concerned themselves with a distinction between eudaimonia and hedonic well-being (e.g., Argyle, 1987; Brickman & Campbell, 1971; Campbell, Converse, & Rogers, 1976; Diener, 1984; Easterlin, 1974; Wilson, 1967). Although Kahneman and his colleagues (1999) later introduced the label 'hedonic psychology,' they did not suggest that hedonic well-being was independent of meaning, autonomy, or other eudaimonic concepts. Only recently has a line been drawn between these two historical views of happiness as they might apply to modern research paradigms (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff & Singer, 1998). It makes sense to ask: why is this distinction being made at this time? Where did it come from? Most importantly, is there evidence for two qualitatively different forms of happiness? It may be instructive to look at the extant research on both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being which informed the adoption of this distinction.

In their 2001 article, Ryan and Deci write 'Although there are many ways to evaluate the pleasure/pain continuum in human experience, most research within the new hedonic psychology has used assessment of subjective well-being (SWB)' (p. 144). SWB has three major components, including two affective (positive and negative affect) and one cognitive (life satisfaction) (Diener, 1984). SWB researchers believe that happiness is, essentially, an internal state that represents a variety of subjective evaluations about the quality of one's life, broadly defined. Much of the research in this field has been conducted on the factors that influence individual appraisals of happiness such as material wealth (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002), comparison standards (Michalos, 1985), and temperament (Lyyken & Tellegen, 1996). As Ryan and Deci point out, there are few, if any, empirical approaches to hedonic psychology that have been as widely examined and employed as SWB.

There is, by contrast, no single theory or approach that captures the essence of eudaimonic happiness.

Rather, it appears that most of those that do not rely on an explicit affective component seem to fall into the eudaimonic well-being category. These include psychological well-being (Ryff & Singer, 1998), self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), flourishing (Keyes, 2002), authentic happiness (Seligman, 2002), self-realization (Waterman, 1993), flow (Vittersø, 2003), as well as others. Eudaimonic theorists generally maintain that hedonic theories are inadequate to describe the Good Life (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Psychologists favoring the eudaimonic tradition tend to emphasize meaning and growth in their investigations of human well-being and there is a tendency to describe eudaimonic approaches as being more holistic.

It is our opinion that there is as much worth in the empirical study of the similarities and complementarity of hedonic and eudaimonic models of well-being as there is in examining differences. In fact, recent research focusing on the relation between affect and meaning, and similar comparisons, have proven this to be true. For example, McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) found that personal goals related to generativity were associated with increased life satisfaction and positive feelings. Similarly, Emmons (1986) found that those personal strivings that were related to intimacy increased SWB while those goals that were related to power lowered SWB. Further, experience sampling studies have shown that flow is more likely to occur when people are experiencing positive emotions (Csikszentmihalyi & Wong, 1991). In addition, enjoyment is often used as a definitive characteristic of intrinsically motivated behavior (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan, 1995). Altruism and helping, arguably eudaimonic in their degree of virtue, are also strongly related to the experience of positive affect (Batson & Powell, 2003). Sheldon and Niemiec (2006) found that feeling autonomy (a proxy for eudaimonia) and balance between autonomy, growth, and relatedness (another proxy) are all associated with increases in SWB (hedonic well-being). Finally, King and colleagues (2006) found that feeling positive affect predisposed individuals to reporting more meaning in life (see also Hicks & King, 2007) and made them more sensitive to meaning in situations. These studies underscore the point that there is a direct relation between positive affect (hedonics) and eudaimonic happiness. We believe that understanding how SWB and eudaimonic variables affect one another, and the psychological mechanisms that mediate this relationship, are as important as demarcating empirical differences. Further, we believe that this worthwhile program of research could be undermined by heavily emphasizing the differences between these concepts.



## Examining the validity of the dual category approach to happiness

### *Focusing on definitions*

To interpret existing data on the existence of two different types of well-being, it is necessary to begin with how these types are operationalized. As mentioned earlier, SWB is often operationalized by the frequency of both positive and negative affect and appraisals of whether aspects of one's life are satisfying (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Of course, this is a simplification of the literature as both the domains being assessed and time frame capture different elements of well-being and lead to slightly different conclusions (see Diener, Napa-Scollon, Oishi, Dzokoto, & Suh, 2000; Wirtz, Kruger, Scollon, & Diener, 2003). The focus of satisfaction judgments, for instance, can be at the global level, or include more specific judgments about particular life domains such as relationships, work, and play. Unfortunately, relatively few studies measure SWB across various life domains and, therefore, there is much to be learned about the correlates and consequences of particular response patterns across domains.

In terms of time frame, affect and life satisfaction can be measured at the (1) global level, broad assessments across time and context; (2) intermediate level, capturing mood and thoughts over durable time spans such as days, weeks, months, or meaningful periods (e.g., semester of college, pregnancy, fiscal year); and (3) momentary level immediate events and experiences as they naturally occur. The temporal dimension of assessment is non-arbitrary. Asking people to describe past events and create global judgments leads to biased recollections that fit with a person's life narrative but may be inconsistent with the frequency, intensity, stability, and value of moment-to-moment experiences. People's expectations of how an event is going to impact them differs from thoughts and feelings during the event itself which differs from retrospective evaluations of the event in terms of associations with various indicators of well-being (Wirtz et al., 2003). Similarly, there is evidence of only moderately positive correlations among assessments of affect and satisfaction at the global level, and among specific domains such as work and romantic relationships (Diener et al., 1999; Rain, Lane, & Steiner, 1991). Regardless of the domain or time frame under study, the facets of SWB can be assessed with impressive reliability and validity using multi-method approaches, appear to cohere, and show high levels of temporal stability but also sensitivity to intervention efforts (whether intentional or by meaningful natural life events) (Diener, Lucas, & Scollon, 2006; Eid, 2008; Pavot, 2007; Schimmack, 2008).

Though arguably more theory-driven than the SWB tradition, research on eudaimonia possesses less

clarity at the entry point of operationalization and measurement. The broad range of constructs assessed under the umbrella of eudaimonia include (1) self-determination and the satisfaction of essential human needs for autonomy, competence, and belonging (Deci & Ryan, 2000); (2) psychological well-being as defined by the dimensions of self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth (Ryff, 1989, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 2008); (3) intrinsic motivation and pursuing goals that are congruent with one's core interests and values (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008); (4) taking part in activities that make people feel alive, engaged, and fulfilled (Waterman, 1993; Waterman et al., 2008); (5) living in accord with meaning and purpose in life (McGregor & Little, 1998; Seligman, 2002); (6) being curious and open to new experiences with an orientation toward novelty, change, and personal growth (Kopperud & Vittersø, in press; Vittersø, 2003, 2004); and (7) vitality or calm, energetic feelings (Nix, Ryan, Manly, & Deci, 1999; Waterman, 1993).

The most striking aspect of these different definitions and operational terms is that none of them fully capture the philosophical roots of eudaimonia as described by Aristotle (which is cited in nearly all papers that mention the word). According to Aristotle, eudaimonia is behaving in a way that is noble and worthwhile for its own sake. By the Aristotelian definition, people develop their ultimate potential or capabilities and only then can they achieve eudaimonia by bringing this excellence and virtue to action. According to Aristotle, people love behaving virtuously because we learn through practice that it is the most valuable possible endeavor. It is valuable because when we are our ideal selves (whether intentionally or not) the lives of other people in our sphere of influence are benefited. Aristotle likely chose his words with great care and even provided a list of virtues to strive towards including courage, temperance, proper ambition, patience, truthfulness, wittiness, friendliness, modesty, and righteous indignation, among others. For Aristotle, eudaimonia was for others to consider after a person's death in 'he/she lived a "good life"' defined by continuous action.

We remain optimistic that many of these elements of eudaimonia will be studied in the future. However, we are unsure how to reconcile the various conceptualizations of eudaimonia in scientific studies with the original definition by Aristotle. We are sympathetic to our colleagues in that we believe there are several reasons for the difficulty of this endeavor. First, eudaimonia does not appear, conceptually, to be a single dimension and to treat it as such will likely lead to a loss of valuable information. Of course, research in the name of eudaimonia listed above has led to valuable advances in the understanding of well-being,

even if not actually addressing the original concept of eudaimonia. Second, eudaimonia was originally designed to be an objective term, yet is being studied as a subjective experience. How does an individual evaluate whether they achieved their potential, the best of their capabilities, or moved to become a person of virtue or excellence? The same question can be posed to observers or informants, how can they objectively evaluate these qualities in another person? This becomes even more problematic when we consider making judgments about a person's 'proper ambition,' 'modesty,' 'truthfulness,' or 'righteous indignation.' These terms are easy to use in philosophical texts but they become much more controversial when the attempt is made to apply them to understanding, studying, and improving the lives of actual people, especially in a cross-cultural context. To be clear: this is *not* a criticism of the scientific work conducted under the auspices of eudaimonia; it is a commentary on the difficulties and challenges of translating classical philosophy into meaningful scientific language and research programs (two millennia later) when the original authors had different aims. Aristotle was not concerned with operationalizing eudaimonia for the purposes of scientific inquiry. Indeed, for Aristotle, eudaimonia was an objective judgment reserved for observers of an individual after his or her death: Was that a Good Life? We are not convinced that an objective notion of happiness is possible or, more importantly, meaningful or useful.

We believe there is greater value in advancing the study of happiness by examining related theoretical conceptualizations. For example, self-determination theory examines the process of personal growth by discussing human being's attempt to satisfy fundamental desires to form satisfying, meaningful social relationships (belonging), feelings of competence in mastering environmental challenges (competence), and feelings that one is making choices based on personal values as opposed to controlling forces (autonomy) (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). This model has led to important discoveries about how important social figures (parents, teachers, coaches, and therapists) can create the conditions for these desires to meet or undermine them. The attempt to link this work to eudaimonia only creates a layer of complexity that obscures these and other findings.

With respect to the scientific study of eudaimonia, no mention has been made about the likely variability in outcomes depending on the types of virtues and forms of potential and excellence that are actualized in a person's life. Not all virtuous lives are likely to be equal. As eudaimonia is defined and studied, these individual differences are ignored. However, recent related research clearly shows that certain strengths and virtues are associated with greater satisfaction and success in life (e.g., Biswas-Diener, 2006;

Park & Peterson, 2006; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2006). Thus, we are concerned about studying virtue and excellence as broad terms that ignore the meaningful variability among virtues.

Upon reviewing the discrepancies between prior work on eudaimonia and the original nature of the term, other methodological issues arise. Developing measures of elements of eudaimonia, and examining their psychometric properties (e.g., structural validity, temporal stability), can be problematic as it is unclear what to use as criterion variables. Curiously, a number of researchers have attempted to provide evidence of the distinctive value of eudaimonia by examining correlations with measures of SWB (e.g., Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005; Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000) or virtually identical independent and dependent variables (e.g., Vittersø, 2004; Waterman, 1993; Waterman et al., 2008). Studying eudaimonia as the antecedent of well-being provides illusory progress in defining, measuring, and understanding the nature of well-being. Rather than demonstrating that eudaimonic pursuits are central to a *qualitatively* different kind of happiness, this work has demonstrated that variables thought to be eudaimonic lead to *quantitatively higher* levels of hedonic well-being. Again, such research shows that eudaimonic variables are potent predictors of hedonic functioning (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Sheldon, 2002). Importantly these results demonstrate that eudaimonic pursuits are associated not with a 'better' form of happiness but simply a higher level of happiness.

Of course, the problem of blurring the lines between predictors and outcomes is not unique to eudaimonia as it also plagues SWB research. For example, trait-based positive and negative affect are often measured as indicators of SWB and the personality traits of neuroticism and extraversion are often used as predictors of these SWB indicators (e.g., DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). This line of research is fraught with redundancies as traits of like valence (positive affect and extraversion; negative affect and neuroticism) are theoretically and empirically similar at affective and motivational levels of analysis and cohere together in factor analyses (e.g., Elliot & Thrash, 2002).

The lack of a unified definition of eudaimonia can prevent meaningful scientific inquiry for two important reasons. First, multiple definitions interfere with valuable inquiry into the relation between these various concepts themselves. For instance, there are several constructs described as representing eudaimonia: self-acceptance (sometimes called self-esteem), autonomy (sometimes called locus of control), vitality (sometimes called energized positive emotions), and self-concordance or personal expressiveness (sometimes called authenticity). If each of these variables inherently defines eudaimonia, along with intrinsic

motivation, meaning and purpose in life, curiosity, openness to experience, feelings of competence and belonging, and the quality of social relationships, then researchers cannot examine how these factors differentially influence well-being. For example, research suggests that the presence of significant, lasting, and supportive social relationships distinguishes people who are extremely happy from the rest of society (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Myers, 2000; Myers & Diener, 1995). If 'positive relations with others' is part of the definition of happiness (Ryff & Singer, 1998) then the study of whether and how relationships and interpersonal processes affect happiness becomes a potentially messy examination of conceptually overlapping predictor and outcome variables (Kashdan, 2004). Second, defining eudaimonia as Aristotle does conflates the phenomenological experience of happiness with the sources of that happiness. In this school of thought being virtuous, using one's strengths to the fullest capacity, feeling meaning in life, and reaching one's potential are what leads to happiness. Then again, all of these qualities are what define this supposed distinct form of happiness. How do we advance knowledge about what promotes happiness when this vast array of positive experiences, approach behaviors, and developmental processes are all packaged inside the definition of happiness itself? Defining eudaimonia this way actually interferes with scientific inquiry into the nature of well-being as it becomes increasingly difficult to disentangle antecedents, correlates, and consequences.

By contrast, consider the research examining how different internal and external sources influence a person's degree of SWB. Not surprisingly, researchers have discovered that not all sources are equal in contributing to the frequency, intensity, and durability of a person's SWB. These sources of SWB are expressed at different levels of analysis (McAdams, 1996). At Level 1 are broad personality traits which are composed of a person's general behavioral tendencies and goal orientations. When a person's personality is organized around high extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness and low neuroticism, there is an increased likelihood of elevated SWB (resilient profile; John & Srivastava, 1999). At Level 2, at an increasing level of sophistication, are goals and strivings that guide a person's decision making and deployment of cognitive resources, physical stamina, and time blocks. For example, it appears that SWB is greater when a person makes meaningful progress toward goals that are intentionally chosen; these goals are interesting and reflect a person's most highly endorsed values as opposed to those of others or of society (Sheldon, 2002). At Level 3, the most overarching level, life narratives which organize personality, strivings, and life events into a coherent framework, capturing the totality of a person. When a person possesses

a life narrative characterized by meaningful life pursuits (passions or purpose in life) and the seizing of opportunities for personal growth, these dimensions are associated with greater SWB (McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006). Other research has focused on social and cultural factors that influence the nature and strength of a person's SWB (e.g., Lucas & Dyrenforth, 2006; Tsai, 2007). As a result of having a clear definition and assessment tools that map onto this definition, researchers have found that some goals, traits, narrative dimensions, and broad social factors, but not others, are particularly potent in generating SWB. Such findings are possible because the antecedents are clearly separable from the construct of SWB, itself. We argue that the work on psychological well-being (Ryff & Singer, 1998) and self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2000) has made profound discoveries about happiness, but the attempt to create links between these concepts and eudaimonia only serves to obscure these scientific gains.

It is also worthwhile to highlight the considerable conceptual overlap between some of the defining features of eudaimonia and SWB. Some researchers posit that vitality or the calm, energetic feeling of being alive is integral to eudaimonia (Nix et al., 1999; Waterman, 1993) even as positive affect is a critical element in the definition and assessment of SWB. Vitality is well-situated in one of the four quadrants of affective space as high in positive valence and high in arousal (Barrett & Russell, 1998; also known as calm energy, Thayer, 1996). From another perspective, the cognitive component of SWB (life satisfaction) can be viewed as overlapping with the abstract meaning-imbued nature of eudaimonia. Life satisfaction is often evaluated with broad, abstract judgments, allowing for a parsimonious measurement strategy. Life satisfaction can also be decomposed, however, into cognitive assessments of particular life domains. If a researcher is interested in the satisfaction of psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000) or 'the highest of all human' goods (Ryff, 1995, p. 100), then the cognitive component can be studied at this molecular level of analysis. If researchers are examining the degree to which a person believes that needs or goods are being satisfied, by definition, they are measuring the cognitive component of SWB. Thus, the boundaries between SWB and eudaimonia are often permeable and overlapping. The degree of conceptual similarity depends on which of the various, abstract definitions of eudaimonia are being used.

#### ***Focusing on measurement models, structural models, correlates, and consequences***

Nearly all of the research suggesting that SWB and eudaimonia are independent factors stems from three



data sources: factor analytic studies, dependent correlations between narrow-band indicators of each type of well-being with a common outcome variable, and person-centered studies comparing different groups of people. We next evaluate the evidence for two distinct types of happiness from each of these sources of data. Researchers using a factor-analytic approach consistently find SWB and eudaimonia indicators to load onto separate but highly related factors. The magnitude of correlations between these factors is often quite large. Waterman (1993) found 6-item measures of SWB (hedonic enjoyment for activities) and eudaimonia (personal expressiveness during activities) to correlate at 0.86, reflecting 74% common variance. In three additional studies, correlations between nearly identical 6-item measures of SWB and eudaimonia measures ranged from 0.83 to 0.87, reflecting 69% common variance (Waterman et al., 2008). Using different constructs to assess these two types of well-being, researchers consistently find stronger evidence for 2-factor rather than 1-factor solutions (Compton, Smith, Cornish, & Qualls, 1996; Keyes, 2005; Keyes et al., 2002; McGregor & Little, 1998). The best estimate of common variance between latent factors reflecting SWB and eudaimonia (operationalized by Ryff's 6 psychological well-being dimensions of self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth) was 49% (Keyes et al., 2002). Even this substantial percentage underestimates the degree of common variance, however, because in the best fitting structural model, the self-acceptance and environmental mastery dimensions loaded on both the SWB and eudaimonia latent factors (Keyes et al., 2002).

The existence of separate factors does not provide evidence of qualitatively distinct types of well-being. In fact, the correlations between latent factors of SWB and eudaimonia are larger than correlations among the components of SWB. Life satisfaction correlates between 0.42 to 0.52 with positive affect and  $-0.30$  to  $-0.51$  with negative affect, and correlations between positive and negative affect range from 0.03 to  $-0.36$  (Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996; see Watson, 2000, for a review of similar findings across different samples, time spans, and measurement strategies). Self-report scales of personality, emotion, and self-regulation are often comprised of multiple dimensions that correlate ranging from small (Zimbardo & Boyd, 1999) to large (Snyder et al., 1991) levels (i.e., correlations among subscales of the same measure are similar in magnitude to correlations between markers of eudaimonia and SWB). In these cases, the dimensions are not defined as different types, or different conceptions of the construct of study; rather, they are viewed as important parts of a profile that possesses shared, unique, and sometimes synergistic influences with meaningful outcome variables (John & Benet-Martínez, 2000).

There are reasons to be concerned about whether the statistical techniques being used to address questions about the fundamental structure of happiness provide the information needed for adequate answers. If the question concerns how different elements of happiness relate to each other in terms of magnitude or heterogeneity, factor analytic approaches are often sufficient (given appropriate tests of discriminant validity if there is initial evidence for multiple factors). If, on the other hand, the question is whether more than one meaningful category of happiness exists then factor analytic techniques are insufficient. Separate factors with moderate to large correlations are often interpreted as components, ingredients, or dimensions of a related construct. However, attempts to distinguish types of happiness from dimensions with high levels of shared variance and small to moderate levels of unique variance are taxonomic questions that require appropriate analyses. Taxometric techniques are useful for determining whether or not a set of manifest indicators (e.g., self-report subscales, responses during a behavioral assessment task, cortical activity in a particular brain region) relate to each other in a way to suggest the presence of naturally occurring categories (Meehl, 1992, 1995). To date, these data reduction techniques have not been used to determine the structure of well-being (see Schimmack, 2008, for an exception). Researchers with precise definitions and measures of SWB and eudaimonia using large datasets can easily apply these taxometric techniques with readily available tools (Schmidt, Kotov, & Joiner, 2004).

Researchers who employ factor analysis and find support for two well-being factors often take the next appropriate step to establish construct validity by examining whether the two factors are meaningful. For example, Waterman (1993, 2007) compared personal expressiveness (a proposed proxy for eudaimonia) and hedonic enjoyment (a proposed proxy for SWB) in terms of their associations with other relevant appraisals made during activities. He found statistically significant differences in the degree to which these two factors relate to perceived opportunities to develop one's best potentials, share experiences with others, satisfy the desire for competition, and be spiritually enlightened. Specifically, personal expressiveness showed greater relations with these appraisals than hedonic enjoyment. Based on these differences, Waterman, quite understandably, heralded eudaimonia as a form of happiness that is distinct from SWB (Waterman, 2007), and his results are frequently cited as evidence of this difference (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2001). However, re-examining these results we remain unconvinced that they provide support for two qualitatively different types of well-being.

For example, consider a crucial ingredient of eudaimonia: the extent to which an activity provides



an opportunity to move toward self-realization. Based on a meta-analysis of three studies (Waterman et al., 2008), this construct was correlated with personal expressiveness,  $r=0.52$ , and hedonic enjoyment,  $r=0.29$ . The difference between these correlations is statistically significant and a 0.52 correlation is large. Note, that both correlations are positive and significant, that is, personal expressiveness and hedonic enjoyment correlate with self-realization in a parallel fashion. Furthermore, personal expressiveness and self-realization are both considered aspects of eudaimonia, as such the fact that they are strongly correlated should not be surprising. In the end, we find a moderate sized correlation between 'pure' pleasure and feeling a sense of self-realization during an activity, on the one hand, and a large sized correlation between two variables that both appear to be part of the working definition of eudaimonia, on the other. Given the overlapping conceptual definitions of personal expressiveness and self-realization, one might argue that the smaller correlation is, perhaps, the more notable of the two, that simple enjoyment predicts feelings of self-realization in an activity. From the vantage point of trying to understand and improve people's well-being, we are unsure what is gained by comparing correlations between two indices of qualitatively different types of well-being, when one of these indices is, conceptually, part of the definition of the criterion.

Other researchers have used alternative strategies to test whether indicators of SWB and eudaimonia each provide unique explanatory power in understanding psychological, physical, and social functioning outcomes. For instance, researchers controlling for shared variance, have demonstrated the construct specificity of SWB and eudaimonia indicators (McGregor & Little, 1998; Vittersø, 2003, 2004). A second analytic strategy extends beyond 'main effect' models to examine potential synergistic relations between variables reflecting SWB and eudaimonia, respectively, on meaningful outcome variables (Heisel & Flett, 2004; Kashdan & Steger, 2007; King et al., 2006; Peterson et al., 2005). Each of these studies found evidence that SWB and eudaimonia dimensions often operate together such that high levels of both dimensions lead to the most optimal functioning. A third analytic strategy examines whether groups of people with different scores on SWB and eudaimonia dimensions can be meaningfully distinguished from one another (Keyes et al., 2002; Singer, Ryff, Carr, & Magee, 1998). As an example of this person-centered approach, Keyes et al. (2002) created four groups as a function of scoring either high or low on SWB and eudaimonia latent variables, respectively. Their results suggest that, in combination, both SWB and eudaimonia variables were useful in differentiating people's personality profile. Taken together, these studies provide evidence

for the importance of evaluating different measures of well-being in the same study and examining how they operate together.

The implicit, and sometimes explicit, assumption of two distinct types of well-being is that SWB and eudaimonia each provide information that is not provided by the other and that the benefits or outcomes of each are distinct. The data briefly reviewed above suggest a unified field of elements, components, or ingredients that can theoretically influence each other and, as a result, often modify the process and outcomes of well-being. As opposed to conceptualizing two distinct, alternative bins of variables, researchers have provided evidence for the usefulness of combining ingredients from the SWB and eudaimonia bins (e.g., Keyes et al., 2002). The results from a range of studies also suggest that hedonic and eudaimonic processes work in tandem. Under the right conditions, for example, priming positive emotions can lead to enhanced beliefs about the presence of meaning in life (King et al., 2006). Similarly, for people with a strong purpose in life, extreme negative affect is not linked with suicidal ideations (Heisel & Flett, 2004). It is worth noting that these and other scientific advances were made possible by researchers ignoring the arbitrary and unsupported demarcation between the components of SWB and eudaimonia. Instead of using hedonia and eudaimonia labels, we feel there is greater empirical support for (and scientific precision in) referring to the exact constructs being studied (e.g., activated positive emotions or work satisfaction instead of SWB and personal expressiveness or purpose in life instead of eudaimonia).

### *Caveats*

There is no question that the two-model distinction has intellectual appeal, and scholars on all sides must be credited with taking on the important question of human fulfillment using empirical methods. Self-described eudaimonia researchers have certainly embraced one of the greatest challenges possible: to come to an evidence-based psychological understanding of the Good Life. In contrast to the hedonic approach to well-being, this work has been marked by a high level of theoretical sophistication. The eudaimonic approach has been conceptually sophisticated, grappling with complex and multifaceted constructs. While acknowledging the value of these efforts, we hope to bring to light some of the problems that have come to characterize the application of Aristotle's classic approach to well-being.

It deserves mentioning that hedonic research has been more atheoretical or data-driven. In contrast to this bottom-up approach, research on the eudaimonic

aspects of well-being can be described as a top-down approach that is explicitly linked to theory. As we mentioned, however, one of the problems of this top-down approach is the absence of any unification in the definitions and theories under the umbrella of eudaimonia. This leaves consumers with the arduous task of trying to reconcile conflicting ideas and research findings to determine the existing state of knowledge; this partially explains why applied fields and the general public pay greater attention to work focusing on SWB compared with eudaimonia. These philosophical assumptions are important as they influence operational definitions, assessment techniques, research methodologies, analytic strategies, as well as decision rules concerning how the literature is reviewed, synthesized, and interpreted. The transparency of these philosophical assumptions and their inherent consequences may serve to enhance the precision of future research on well-being. Fortunately, theoretical complexity is not an insurmountable difficulty, and we eagerly anticipate future scientific advances in this area

#### Costs of a dual category approach to happiness

Eudaimonia and hedonic happiness are intriguing philosophical concepts. We are skeptical, however, that they are the most useful way to frame contemporary research in well-being. While they are entirely appropriate to the philosophical traditions in which they were produced, these concepts do not translate well to modern scientific and empirical inquiry. Currently, for example, there is no widely agreed upon operational definition or established measurement of eudaimonic well-being. This means that the findings from studies examining the relation of variables to eudaimonia and hedonics cannot be easily interpreted or compared with one another. Similarly, studies reveal that there is far more overlap between models of well-being associated with eudaimonic and hedonic well-being than there was believed to be in the original philosophical conceptualizations of these topics. While philosophers have often emphasized the differences between types of happiness, social scientists must consider the best available empirical evidence when making arguments. Until issues of definition, methodology, and relatedness (where eudaimonia and hedonic well-being are concerned) are better understood, research programs attending to differences in these types of well-being will be relatively weak and difficult to interpret meaningfully.

One way that the eudaimonia/hedonism distinction has influenced researchers is in imposing a presumptive conceptual framework, in which eudaimonic variables cause hedonic well-being. Eudaimonic researchers acknowledge that positive affect may be a byproduct

of eudaimonic pursuits and experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2001). As reviewed above, research has generally sought to demonstrate that eudaimonic variables relate to hedonic well-being. These ideas appear to be in keeping with the notion that eudaimonia directly influences hedonic variables. Yet, the causal direction of this relationship is often simply assumed. Given that the vast majority of research on these topics has been correlational, it is possible that hedonic well-being moves people to act in virtuous ways. Indeed, a meta-analysis by Lyubomirsky, King, and Diener (2005) demonstrated the case for the potential role of positive feelings in securing important life outcomes such as career success or satisfying marriages. Future research might move away from these assumptions toward a consideration of the potential causal role of hedonic well-being in eudaimonic endeavors or the reciprocal relations of these aspects of happiness.

Perhaps the greatest problem with an uncritical acceptance of the eudaimonia-hedonics distinction is that it fails to capture the Good Life as it is lived everyday by everyday people. Perhaps because of its inclusion of mood as a definitive feature, SWB might be viewed as a rather mundane aspect of the Good Life. Yet, by tracking positive and negative appraisals of daily life, SWB researchers are able to tap people's fulfillment, dedication to worthwhile goals, and other aspects of human psychology that have traditionally been associated with eudaimonia. Feeling good is a concomitant of many of our very best moments, including those that are directly associated with virtue and meaning. The search for something 'better' than SWB or a better form of happiness connotes a potential elitism, that the Good Life is an experience reserved for individuals who have attained some transcendence from everyday life. In fact, Aristotle is explicit about eudaimonia being an objective state that might arise only after achieving one's best potential and then acting on it. We don't agree with the particular idea of objective happiness and are confident that many other individuals interested in understanding, studying, and creating happiness are equally critical. To the extent that SWB tracks (so-called) eudaimonic variables in daily living, it provides a means to capture the everyday experience of good lives. At the very least, we suggest that taking emotion and cognitive satisfaction judgments into consideration is fundamental to any holistic examination of well-being and the good life.

Although we understand the anxiety related to the moral ambiguity surrounding hedonic well-being, we have little reason to believe this issue is anything other than an unjustified suspicion. We have not seen the legions of people who are made truly happy through anti-social or morally reprehensible behavior, and the research on happiness has not supported this idea. The absence of happiness would appear to be more

problematic than its pervasiveness. If anything, the extant research on happiness suggests that people experience positive feelings when they are acting pro-socially (Snyder & Lopez, 2007) or when their goals are self-concordant (Sheldon & Elliot, 1998). Drawing a sharp line between eudaimonic and hedonic well-being creates an artificial moral hierarchy that has the potential to hamper serious scientific inquiry on well-being.

The question of what is it that makes a life a good one is a central concern for humanity. Varied answers to this question are provided by philosophy, religion, political and cultural belief systems, and, of course, the science of psychology. Psychologists synthesize ideas from these other disciplines, and vice versa. However, psychology provides a unique approach to issues about the nature of happiness in the good life. The virtues of our scientific method and empirical attention to mental states add a new perspective on the historical dialogue on happiness. Ideas are clarified, questioned, tested, interpreted, replicated, refined, and revised in an incremental process toward understanding the nature of happiness. Even Aristotle's ideas require testing and modern revisions, as culture, methodology, and analytic tools evolve. It is the very link between eudaimonia and hedonics that justifies the psychologists' place at the table in the discussion of the Good Life.

### **Recommendations for future research on the psychology of the Good Life**

The primary impetus for the distinction between hedonics and eudaimonia in modern psychology was to devote resources to the study of previously ignored and marginalized elements of the Good Life (paralleling the launch and rationale for 'positive psychology'). In turn, great strides have been made in the accumulation of theory and research on elements such as self-determination and purpose in life which far too often are considered outside the provenance of scientific inquiry. The aim of the present paper is to critically evaluate the validity and potential costs of conceptualizing two distinct types of well-being. We conclude that the existing evidence favors quantitative distinctions among a matrix of well-being dimensions as opposed to two qualitatively different kinds of well-being. Based on our review of the literature, we offer several recommendations to advance the empirical study of well-being.

#### **1. The study of well-being may be hampered by abstract language**

One clear implication of the preceding discussion is the crucial importance of very specific treatment of the

variables being considered in any study of happiness and the Good Life. Although the labels of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being have proven to be attractive to scholars, the use of these broad terms inevitably leads to categorical thinking about constructs that are artificially separated from one another. Our reading of the research literature suggests that there is good evidence that eudaimonic and hedonic aspects of well-being can operate in tandem. We recommend that researchers take pains to maintain precise terminology when labeling constructs. For all of their intuitive appeal, overly abstract terms (happiness, flourishing, thriving, eudaimonia) that lack precise operational definitions are potentially misleading and confusing.

We believe there is value in approaching the psychology of happiness, or the Good Life more generally, as a matrix or profile of various dimensions or ingredients. Researchers can differentiate, for instance, between specific constructs such as meaning in life and life satisfaction judgments, but this is very different from discussing two types or conceptualizations of happiness. If a person is measuring flow or personal expressiveness or self-esteem as markers of eudaimonia, it is preferable to describe the exact indicators being used rather than using these measures as proxies of broader, more abstract notions of happiness or eudaimonia. Similarly, if a person is measuring positive or negative affect as markers of SWB, it is preferable to avoid using the broad and narrow terms interchangeably. Our concern is that researchers are examining the broad construct of 'happiness,' but this work is often divorced from large bodies of existing research on flow, self-esteem, affect, and other important topics (much of which existed prior to the formulation of 'positive psychology'). Precise terminology will lead to more efficient scientific resource allocation and advances (e.g., less redundant studies, fewer misinterpretations). Focusing research attention on specific dimensions of well-being allows for greater clarity in communication, facilitates comparison and bridges across studies, and promotes flexibility in the mixture of well-being variables used in research.

#### **2. We encourage skepticism of philosophical assumptions and attention to biases**

A careful analysis of the literature on well-being shows that, over time, there has been extensive 'bracket-creep' in defining and measuring happiness, particularly in the case of eudaimonia. For example, flow has been described as a state characterized by intense engagement, enjoyment, and full immersion as a result of being required to fully utilize one's skills and abilities to meet highly challenging situational demands (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Dozens of studies have



examined the role of flow states on well-being but recently flow has been absorbed into the definition of eudaimonia (Kopperud & Vittersø, in press; Vittersø, 2003; Waterman, 1993, 2007). Emotion and motivational theorists describe flow as an extreme variant of the positive affective state of interest (e.g., Fredrickson, 1998). Similar issues arise with absorption of vitality, intrinsic motivation, self-esteem, and feelings of competence, belonging, and autonomy into the definition of eudaimonia. It is important to evaluate prior work for the exact definitions being used, content of assessment devices, and nature of results (e.g., statistical significance versus magnitude of effects, potential overlap between predictor and outcome variables). It is important to evaluate exactly what questions are being asked in a particular study and whether the tests being used are appropriate for answering them. To this end, research consumers are cautioned to refer to source material.

### **3. More research is needed on well-being as a dynamic process**

Dimensions of well-being can be better distinguished by dynamic processes than by simple patterns of correlations with other variables. For example, at the level of positive experiences, the benefits of growth-oriented events endure longer, spilling over from one day into the next, compared with hedonistic events. At the level of traits, people who are higher in trait curiosity show greater reactivity to growth-oriented events whereas people who are lower in trait curiosity show greater reactivity to hedonistic events (Kashdan & Steger, 2007). By removing the arbitrary focus on well-being categories, it is easy to envision future researchers examining how psychological well-being, self-determination theory, and positive and negative affect operate together to influence hedonic adaptation, morbidity, mortality, and other variables of interest. There is already evidence that the best psychological outcomes can arise from the synergy of high positive affect, engagement, and meaning in life (Keyes et al., 2002; Peterson et al., 2005).

Researchers might take up the challenge to consider aspects of the good life that are unrelated to good feelings (King & Hicks, 2007; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Sometimes living the life of virtue would seem to pose hedonic risks. 'Doing the right thing' presumably involves sacrificing feeling good in the service of other values. In addition to parsing the global construct of happiness, researchers interested in the Good Life might consider an even broader approach to this construct, to include variables that are, themselves, often outside the province of well-being research such as regret, boredom, failure, trauma, and existential dread. It might well be that eudaimonic pursuits

sometime relate to negative feelings. Examining important outcomes that are themselves theoretically and empirically unrelated to pleasant affect might be necessary in order to support the contention of eudaimonic scholars that happiness really isn't everything. Interestingly, philosopher Elizabeth Telfer (1980) suggested that eudaimonia is always accompanied by pleasure. Devising research strategies to examine this claim is certainly a goal for future research.

### **4. Distinctions between levels of variables in any framework of well-being ought to be maintained**

Blurring the lines between predictors of well-being and well-being itself runs the risk of further confusion. Much is lost by defining happiness with elements that are peripheral to the construct. For example, in Ryff's expansive model, positive social relationships are part of the definition of well-being. As such, positive social relationships cannot be studied as an antecedent or outcome of well-being. Although Ryff's model is notable for embracing a multifaceted approach to well-being, it appears to flatten what might better be considered a hierarchy of elements that contribute in various ways to the Good Life. As such, researchers using this model and relevant measures might wish to maintain the separation of scales as a means of delineating between the psychological experience of individual well-being and potential contributors to that experience.

### **5. There is room for an important dialogue on the balance of research driven by theory and research driven by data**

Although data driven research has advantages in mapping new empirical frontiers, there is also utility in using theory to guide research questions, methodology, and the construction of assessments. Rather than allowing different research approaches to divide the field of well-being, we believe there is opportunity for important dialogue on how data and theory driven research paradigms might serve as an adjunct to one another. Unfortunately, psychologists are as susceptible as anyone else to the influences of intellectual factionalism and professional pressures to publish research can exacerbate this condition. Here we are reminded of and echo Kahneman's (2003) praise of collaboration, and encourage increased cooperation between different 'intellectual camps.'

When Aristotle proposed the distinction between eudaimonia and hedonism, he rejected the pursuit of pleasure, per se, suggesting that human beings ought to listen to a higher calling of a life of virtue. Yet, Aristotle also noted that eudaimonia was the most



pleasant of human experiences. Years of research on the psychology of well-being have demonstrated that often human beings are happiest when they are engaged in meaningful pursuits and virtuous activities. As objectivist philosophers and eudaimonic scholars argued, the source of happiness may well be important. To date, no evidence suggests that the why of happiness leads to a qualitatively different form of well-being. Rather, the Good Life as it has been studied in psychology, would appear to be not simply a happy life, but a happier life. In the larger debate about the importance of happiness to the Good Life, scholars often refer to Robert Nozick's (1974) classic thought experiment, the experience machine. Would anyone want to be hooked up to a machine that would allow the person to experience the illusion of perpetual joy? The answer, of course, is no, and this experiment is often used to demonstrate that authentic experience trumps happiness. Hedonic experience is embedded in daily life and real experience. Perhaps we thought experimenters cannot escape the notion that, although we might be happy in the machine, we would be happier engaged in real life.

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