

## ARISTOTLE'S EUDEMONIA AND ITS IMPACT ON HUMAN WELL-BEING IN MODERN PSYCHOLOGY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Received: 08 March, 2024

Revised: 13 March, 2024

Accepted: 19 March, 2024

Published: 29 March, 2024

### ABSTRACT

The pursuit of well-being goes beyond seeking pleasure and satisfaction. Aristotle's concept of "eudemonia" highlights human flourishing and the development of one's full potential. In psychology, subjective well-being has expanded to include a more holistic understanding of well-being. The Paper builds on Aristotle's ideas and modern positive psychology to define and measure eudaimonic well-being (focusing on living a meaningful life). It explores links to social factors, work-life experiences, health, and future research directions including: socio-economic inequality, the role of arts and humanities, and ethical entrepreneurship. This paper aims to closely interpret Aristotle's perspective and examine how it aligns or diverges from its use in contemporary psychology, thereby providing a clearer theoretical framework. Eudemonia is discussed as an ethical idea that represents the highest form of living, emerging naturally from human qualities. It's an active pursuit involving subjective experiences and the striving for goals that are inherently valuable for humans. While eudemonia represents a singular approach to life, it encompasses various elements like a sense of belonging, justice, and social harmony. The concept is distinct from mere pleasure-seeking (hedonic) and is about leading a complete life characterized by virtue of excellence. Aristotle viewed it as the ultimate purpose of human existence. Psychological research on eudaimonic well-being encompasses areas such as psychological well-being theory, self-determination theory, and meaning in life. Future research directions in eudaimonic well-being will also be discussed.

**Keywords:** Aristotle Eudemonia, Modern Psychology, Human Well-being, Emotional Intelligence, Self Determination Theory

### INTRODUCTION

#### Philosophy of Eudemonia

The concept of eudemonia, originating from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (4th century B.C.E./2001), is a central theme in philosophical discussions on ethics. Eudemonia is often translated as "happiness," but the contemporary interpretation used in philosophy is "flourishing." Various interpretations and commentaries on Aristotle's eudemonia have been proposed in modern philosophy (Annas, 1993; Haybron, 2008; Kraut, 1979; Norton, 1976; Tiberius, 2013). These interpretations share the idea that eudemonia reflects virtue, excellence, and the realization of one's full

potential (Huta & Waterman, 2014). Rooted in its philosophical origins, eudemonia represents an objective standard of goodness and is considered a worthwhile pursuit in life (Huta & Waterman, 2014).

#### Eudemonia in Ancient and Contemporary Perspectives

Eudemonism, a prominent philosophical perspective on "the good life," places emphasis on living a meaningful and fulfilling life. This perspective considers both subjective feelings and objective conditions that reflect physical, psychological, and social well-being. The question of how to achieve the

good life has been a topic of debate among philosophers throughout history. More recently, this debate has gained traction in psychology, with researchers such as Kashdan et al. (2008), Ryan and Huta (2009), Ryff and Singer (2008), and Waterman (2008) exploring various aspects of the good life. Well-being is a complex and multifaceted concept encompassing optimal human experience and psychological functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2001). It includes subjective feelings and objective conditions reflecting physical, psychological, and social health. Throughout history, philosophers have grappled with the question of "the good life" and how to achieve it. This debate has recently gained traction in psychology (Kashdan et al., 2008; Ryan & Huta, 2009; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Waterman, 2008). One prominent philosophical perspective on "the good life" is eudemonism, which emphasizes living a meaningful and fulfilling life. It includes subjective feelings and objective conditions reflecting physical, psychological, and social health. Throughout history, philosophers have grappled with the question of "the good life" and how to achieve it. This debate has recently gained traction in psychology (Kashdan et al., 2008; Ryan & Huta, 2009; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Waterman, 2008). One prominent philosophical perspective on "the good life" is eudemonism, which emphasizes living a meaningful and fulfilling life.

The concept of eudemonia has garnered considerable attention in psychological research, leading to various theoretical frameworks. These include the eudaimonic identity theory as proposed by Waterman, Schwartz, and Conti (2008), the psychological well-being theory by Ryff and Singer (2008), the concepts of psychological and social flourishing by Keyes, Shmotkin, and Ryff (2002), the Self-Determination Theory outlined by Ryan, Huta, and Deci (2008), and the eudaimonic theory developed by Fowers (2005, 2012) and Fowers, Mollica, & Procacci (2010). These authors have robustly advocated for eudemonia as a vital area for theoretical and empirical investigation. Eudemonia, a term borrowed from ancient Greek philosophy, is most frequently associated with Aristotle. However, modern adaptations of this concept often vary from Aristotle's original perspective. Aristotle's seminal work, "Nicomachean Ethics" (Aristotle, 1999), offers an extensive discourse on eudemonia, depicting it as the highest human good. This chapter will concentrate on Aristotle's interpretation of eudemonia, while acknowledging that other ancient

eudaimonic theories also present significant opportunities for contemporary scholarly research. While eudemonia is sometimes rendered as 'happiness,' this translation risks conflating the concept with a fleeting affective state, a view inconsistent with Aristotle's understanding. Eudemonia instead signifies a life of complete human flourishing, characterized by self-actualization and the pursuit of excellence. Accordingly, this work primarily utilizes the term 'eudemonia,' reserving 'flourishing' as a synonym where appropriate."

The revival of virtue ethics and eudaimonic theory in the 20th century can be traced back to Anscombe (1958), leading to the development of a vibrant scholarly community. While psychologists first expressed sustained interest in virtue and eudemonia in the 1990s (e.g., Waterman, Schwartz, & Conti, 2008), their research has primarily focused on the concept of eudaimonic well-being (EWB) (e.g., Ryff & Singer, 2008). This book, therefore, centers on EWB, which has been extensively studied using self-report measures encompassing constructs such as meaning, purpose, personal growth, flow, and personal expression (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002). The term "EWB" proves valuable in maintaining a clear distinction between philosophical inquiries into a flourishing life and psychological investigations into the subjective experience of well-being. While both eudemonia and EWB will be discussed, the focus of this book will remain on the former as the more fundamental and historically significant concept.

A lively debate regarding the value of the eudemonia concept has unfolded amongst scholars (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & King, 2009; Kashdan, Biswas-Diener, & King, 2008; Keyes & Annas, 2009; Waterman, 2008). Kashdan et al. (2009) identified significant conceptual ambiguities and raised several methodological concerns. Waterman (2008) countered that psychological research on eudemonia is nascent and, therefore, susceptible to such initial challenges, which will require further investigation and refinement. Keyes and Annas (2009) emphasized the availability of numerous conceptual resources that can contribute to establishing a shared understanding.

A significant critique of the burgeoning eudemonia literature centers on the frequent appropriation of the term by psychologists with limited engagement with its philosophical roots (e.g., Nussbaum, 2001). To

refine the psychological study of eudemonia and EWB, we propose a crucial first step: a rigorous return to the ancient Greek thinkers, the concept's originators. While Aristotle occupies central stage for many contemporary scholars (e.g., Waterman, Schwartz, & Conti, 2008), the invaluable contributions of other ancient schools like the Stoics and Epicureans should not be overlooked (e.g., Hadot, 2002; Inwood, 2005). High-quality scholarship demands attentiveness to the source of our concepts. We must credit these intellectual forebears and present compelling justifications for our appropriations, rather than simply borrowing a venerated term to serve individual research agendas. While applying ancient philosophical concepts to contemporary contexts necessitates reinterpretations, we must remain mindful of the original thinker's intent (Gauthier, 1978). In the case of Aristotle and his influential notion of eudemonia, some psychologists have adopted a "humanistic gloss" that emphasizes personal self-realization, autonomous individuals, and a subjectively defined version of flourishing (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, 2008). This focus on self-actualization, autonomy, and subjective values, however, deviates significantly from Aristotle's original conception. As Tiberius (2013) aptly observes, "No one in the ancient world thought that what things are good for you could be determined by your own subjective attitudes...Subjectivism is so much the default now that we don't even see it as a view in need of any justification; it's like water to us fishes" (p. 29). Reconciling these divergent perspectives requires a nuanced approach. While acknowledging the inevitable evolution of concepts over time, we must engage critically with Aristotle's own arguments and reasoning as laid out in works like the *Nicomachean Ethics*. This critical engagement can help us identify core aspects of eudemonia that remain relevant across contexts, such as the importance of virtue, reason, and engagement with the world beyond oneself. Ultimately, bridging the gap between ancient and modern understandings of eudemonia allows us to enrich our understanding of human flourishing and its pursuit in the 21st century. While legitimate reinterpretations of Aristotle's eudemonia can be undertaken from humanistic or other perspectives, a critical concern emerges: insufficiently clarifying the extent and nature of these deviations. Such ambiguity generates conceptual confusion and interpretive difficulties within the

field (Nussbaum, 2001). Therefore, one central aim of this chapter is to offer a thorough interpretation of Aristotle's, and other ancient thinkers', views on eudemonia. This clear foundation will facilitate effective comparison and contrast between his conception and contemporary psychological accounts. While we strive to illuminate Aristotle's ideas, we encourage engagement with other sources and reinterpretations, including our own presented here. As evidenced by our liberal use of Aristotelian quotes, his work serves as a foundational touchstone for our interpretations, though we readily acknowledge this is not the definitive articulation of eudemonia. Ultimately, the path to understanding eudemonia becomes fraught when scholars claim Aristotelian roots without transparently clarifying how their views build upon or depart from his original framework.

Examining Empirical Debates and Research Programs Beyond theoretical debates, empirical research also reflects the rich tapestry of perspectives on eudemonia. Scholars actively engage in discussions contrasting different views of well-being, as exemplified by Ryff and Singer's (1998) focus on psychological well-being versus Diener, Sapyta, and Suh's (1998) emphasis on subjective well-being, or Kashdan et al.'s (2008) exploration of psychological flourishing alongside Waterman's (2008) and Ryan and Huta's (2009) investigations of eudemonia, and Kahneman's (1999) perspective on happiness contrasted with Seligman's (2002) work on positive psychology. To delve deeper into these diverse interpretations, let's delve into a chronological exploration of key research programs. In the early 1970s, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) emerged as a groundbreaking framework with significant relevance to eudemonia. Pioneered by Ryan and Deci (2000), SDT posits autonomy as a central driving force behind well-being and human flourishing. Self-determination theory (SDT) asserts that a comprehensive understanding of human motivation necessitates considering innate psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. In this discussion, we explore the concept of needs within SDT and its relationship with previous theories of needs. It is important to emphasize that needs outline the essential conditions for psychological growth, integrity, and well-being. This understanding of needs gives rise to hypotheses suggesting that different regulatory processes involved in pursuing goals have varying associations

with effective functioning and well-being. Additionally, different goal contents are linked to the quality of behavior and mental health, primarily due to the varying degrees of need satisfaction associated with distinct regulatory processes and goal contents. Social environments and individual differences that foster the fulfillment of these basic needs enable natural growth processes, including intrinsically motivated behavior and the integration of extrinsic motivations. Conversely, environments that impede autonomy, competence, or relatedness are linked to lower motivation, performance, and well-being. Furthermore, we discuss how psychological needs are connected to cultural values, evolutionary processes, and other contemporary theories of motivation.

### **Eudemonic Well-Being and Emotional Intelligence**

Researchers in the field of positive psychology, such as Antonovsky (1987a) and Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), recognize that optimal human functioning goes beyond the absence of risk or pathology. They have sought to identify factors contributing to the development of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Ryan and Deci, 2001; Ryff and Singer, 2008; Waterman et al., 2010). Hedonic well-being involves happiness, pleasure attainment, and pain avoidance, while eudaimonic well-being refers to fulfilling one's full potential (Ryan and Deci, 2001).

Hedonic well-being, often referred to as subjective well-being (SWB), encompasses positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA) (Kahneman et al., 1999). Life satisfaction is considered a cognitive component of SWB (Pavot and Diener, 1993; Diener et al., 1999). The inclusion of life satisfaction as a dimension of SWB, along with affective indicators, has been supported by research (Arrindell et al., 1991; Lucas et al., 1996; Keyes et al., 2002).

Eudaimonic well-being, referred to as psychological well-being (PWB) by Ryff and Singer (2008) and eudaimonic well-being (EWB) by Waterman et al. (2010), emphasizes personal growth, mastery, life purpose, and meaning. PWB goes beyond the attainment of SWB and is derived from fulfillment, meaning, and self-realization (Ryff and Singer, 2008). It is associated with physical and mental health indices (Deci and Ryan, 2000) and is relevant to prevention, health promotion, and vocational psychology.

Emotional intelligence (EI) has gained attention in research and intervention for its potential to enhance coping resources and promote well-being (Schutte et al., 2007; Martins et al., 2010; Sánchez-Álvarez et al., 2015, 2016; Fernández-Berrocal, 2016). EI is linked to positive outcomes across various domains and is associated with individual and social resources such as resilience and social support (Di Fabio and Kenny, 2012a; Di Fabio and Saklofske, 2014b; Perera and DiGiacomo, 2015). Interventions targeting EI have been found to increase well-being and have lasting effects (Di Fabio and Kenny, 2011; Nelis et al., 2009, 2011).

Conceptual models suggest that EI influences well-being by facilitating adaptive coping, developing social networks, regulating emotions, and fostering personal growth and self-actualization (Zeidner et al., 2012; Zeidner and Olnick-Shemesh, 2010; Friedman and Kern, 2014). Research supports relationships between EI and social support, coping efficiency, stress reduction, and emotional regulation (Di Fabio and Kenny, 2012a; Perera and DiGiacomo, 2015; Mikolajczak et al., 2008, 2009). Subjective well-being (SWB), also known as hedonic well-being, includes positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA), as well as cognitive components like life satisfaction. There is some debate about whether SWB should be restricted to affective indicators or include cognitive dimensions as well. However, research has shown moderate to strong relationships between positive and negative affect and life satisfaction.

Psychological well-being (PWB), also referred to as eudaimonic well-being (EWB), goes beyond the attainment of subjective well-being. It is derived from a sense of fulfillment, meaning, and self-realization. PWB has been associated with physical and mental health and is relevant to prevention, health promotion, and vocational psychology.

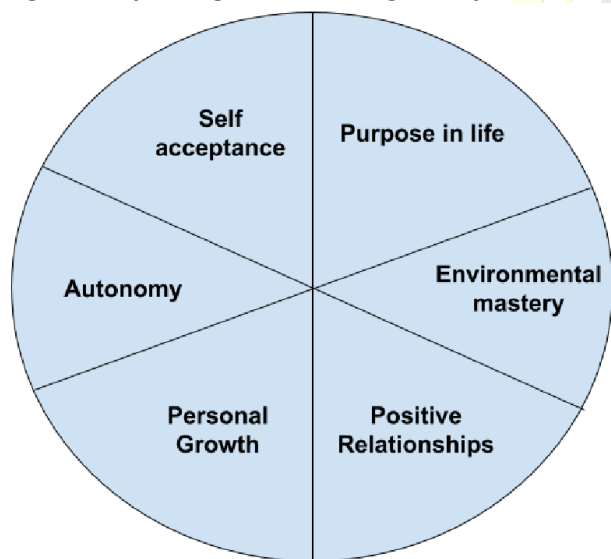
Emotional intelligence (EI) has been a focus of research and intervention for its potential to enhance coping resources and promote well-being. EI is linked to positive outcomes across various domains, including academic, social, psychological, and career domains. It is associated with individual and social resources such as resilience, positive self-evaluation, and social support.

Interventions targeting EI have shown positive effects, increasing emotional intelligence and reducing career indecision among high school students, and sustaining EI gains over a 6-month period in young adults. EI has been found to influence well-being by fostering adaptive coping, developing social networks, regulating emotions, and promoting personal growth and self-actualization.

**Psychological Well-Being Theory**

Carol Ryff (1989) recognized the dominance of subjective well-being research in the field of well-being but noted the lack of theoretical grounding and definitional precision in this area. To address this limitation, Ryff proposed an alternative model of psychological well-being that incorporates various theoretical perspectives on positive human functioning. Drawing from developmental, clinical, existential, and humanistic psychology theories (Allport, 1961; Erikson, 1959; Frankl, 1959; Jung, 1933; Maslow, 1968), Ryff's model includes six key dimensions: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth.

**Figure 1. Psychological Well-Being Theory**



- **Autonomy:** This refers to the sense of independence and self-directedness in your life.
- **Environmental mastery:** This refers to your sense of competence in managing your environment and life circumstances.

- **Personal growth:** This refers to your desire to develop your skills and talents and reach your full potential.
- **Positive relationships:** This refers to having strong and supportive relationships with other people.
- **Purpose in life:** This refers to having a sense of meaning and direction in your life.
- **Self-acceptance:** This refers to having a positive self-regard and accepting yourself for who you are.

**Aristotle's Happiness: Virtues and Golden Means**

The principle of the mean and practical wisdom contribute significantly to eudemonia by emphasizing moral virtues. Virtue, guided by accurate reasoning, strives to determine the best actions and the ultimate good. Moral virtues are seen as inclinations of different aspects of the human soul or mind, including rationality, aspiration, appetite, and rationality. These aspects consistently refer to the mean and practical reason or wisdom (phronesis). Intellectual virtue plays a crucial role in distinguishing between good and bad actions, with reasoning serving as an appropriate tool for moral judgment.

The theory of the mean provides an effective method for characterizing the state, inclination, and attitude of human actions, helping to avoid extremes of excess and defect. Thus, virtuous activity, the mean, and practical reason are interconnected in the pursuit of ultimate happiness.

There is a relationship between eudemonia and mindfulness in terms of practical reasoning and the concept of the mean. Phronesis or wisdom enables the recognition of good and bad actions, while mindfulness directs attention and concentration to the present moment. Mindfulness aids in finding the middle ground of human emotions, thoughts, and feelings, similar to the role of practical reason. Therefore, practical reason and mindfulness are relevant for achieving optimal well-being. The Aristotelian concept of eudemonia has historically played a significant role in morality, particularly in response to Plato and Thucydides' perspectives on the Peloponnesian war. Eudemonia encompasses various controversial claims related to practical wisdom, justice, virtues, rationality, and social life. It

is a concept that intersects with ethical properties such as metaphysics, philosophy of mind or soul, and epistemology.

The term "eudemonia" itself carries multiple connotations, including happiness, contentment, delight, pleasure, and a fulfilled or worthwhile life (References 2, 3). These diverse implications contribute to the richness of the philosophical perspective surrounding eudemonia. For Aristotle, happiness wasn't a fleeting feeling or a material possession. It was eudemonia, a flourishing life lived with excellence and purpose. Imagine asking him directly about this elusive concept, and you might hear something like this:

"Some identify happiness with virtue, some with practical wisdom, others with a kind of philosophic wisdom, others with these, or one of these, accompanied by pleasure or not without pleasure; while others include also external prosperity...it is not probable that...these should be entirely mistaken, but rather that they should be right in at least some one respect or even in most respects." (Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book I, Chapter 8) While this might seem like a philosophical riddle, Aristotle clarifies his stance throughout the Nicomachean Ethics. He firmly rejects simple pleasures and superficial pursuits like power or wealth as pathways to true happiness. Instead, he champions virtue as the foundation of eudemonia.

Think of virtues as a spectrum, a golden mean between two extremes. Courage, for example, lies between recklessness and cowardice (Kings College London, 2012). It's through cultivating and practicing these virtues in our daily lives that we embark on the path to eudemonia.

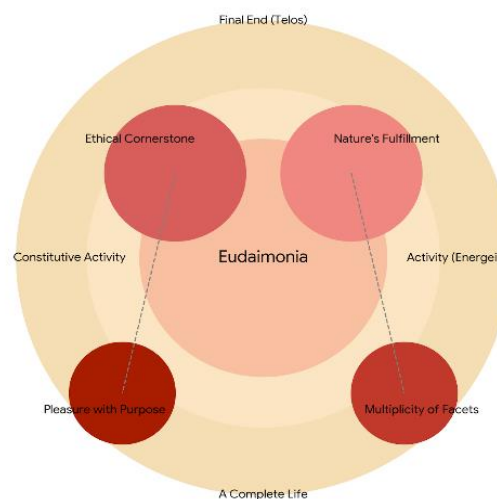
But what about those seemingly uncontrollable factors like luck or misfortune? Aristotle acknowledges that "external goods" like health and resources can play a role. However, he emphasizes that happiness lies not in the hands of fate, but in our own "individual self-realization" (Ryff & Singer, 2008, p. 17). Through cultivating virtues and acting in accordance with them, we create our own path to flourishing, regardless of external circumstances and what about the vast array of virtues? While one can specialize in particular strengths, Aristotle advises aiming for "all of the virtues" (Nothingistic.org, 2019). This holistic approach ensures that our eudemonia is not lopsided but encompasses the full spectrum of human excellence.

In essence, Aristotle offers a comprehensive blueprint for happiness, one that transcends temporary pleasures and external factors. By developing and practicing virtues, we embark on a lifelong journey of personal growth and fulfillment, a journey towards the pinnacle of human existence - eudemonia.

### Eudemonia: Nine Facets of Aristotle's Vision

To embark on this exploration of eudemonia, let us first unpack nine multifaceted characteristics that define Aristotle's complex conception (Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics). He envisioned eudemonia as the pinnacle of human existence, the most complete and desirable form of life, characterized by the following Figure:

**Figure 2. Aristotle Eudemonia framework**



**1. Ethical Cornerstone:** Eudemonia is inherently intertwined with ethics, introduced in the Nicomachean Ethics itself. Living a "good" life, in its best and most complete form, necessitates ethical considerations. References to "good," "better," and "best" in relation to life are inherently ethical evaluations.

**2. Nature's Fulfillment:** Eudemonia signifies the actualization of our full human potential, realizing our nature as unique beings within the natural world. This perspective bridges the gap between science and

ethics, suggesting fertile ground for their mutual enrichment.

**3. Activity:** Eudemonia is not a passive state; it is an active process, a way of living. It transcends fleeting emotions or experiences and embodies a sustained pattern of action and engagement.

**4. Constitutive Activity:** Certain crucial human goods, including friendship and justice, are integral to eudemonia. The very actions that comprise these goods (e.g., engaging in just actions, cultivating true friendship) are intrinsically valuable, not mere means to an end.

**5. Multiplicity of Facets:** Humans, as social and rational creatures, flourish through a diverse range of activities, not just through singular pursuits. Eudemonia encompasses the enactment of friendship, justice, noble political participation, and numerous other choice worthy aspects of being human.

**6. Pleasure with Purpose:** Eudemonia is intrinsically pleasurable, but this pleasure arises from noble pursuits like learning and intellectual engagement. It stands in stark contrast to fleeting hedonistic pleasures that do not differentiate between worthy and unworthy activities.

**7. Virtue's Embrace:** Excellence in action, or virtue, constitutes eudemonia. Only through acting with moral and intellectual excellence can one achieve true flourishing.

**8. A Complete Life:** Eudemonia is not a patchwork of fleeting experiences; it is the integrated entirety of a well-lived life. It encompasses the trajectory and totality of one's existence, not just isolated moments.

**9. Final End:** Eudemonia is, for Aristotle, the ultimate end, the self-sufficient and desirable culmination of the best human life. It stands as the pinnacle towards which all our ethical and practical endeavors ultimately strive.

### Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory is another theoretical framework that embraces a eudaimonic perspective on well-being. According to Ryan and Deci (2001), self-determination theory considers self-realization, or eudemonia, as the core aspect of well-being and focuses on understanding the processes that lead to self-actualization. The theory identifies three basic psychological needs—autonomy, relatedness, and competence—as essential for optimal growth, integration, and positive social development (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The satisfaction of these needs is

believed to foster eudaimonic well-being. Intrinsic motivation, which aligns closely with eudaimonic conceptualizations of well-being, is also central to self-determination theory and represents the inherent tendency to pursue novelty, challenge, learning, development, and growth (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Research within the self-determination theory framework has found that the pursuit of intrinsic goals and values, as opposed to extrinsic ones, directly satisfies the basic psychological needs and enhances eudaimonic well-being (Ryan et al., 1996). Focusing on intrinsic aspirations is positively related to indicators of eudaimonic well-being, such as self-actualization, while focusing on extrinsic aspirations has a negative relationship (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996; Ryan et al., 1999). The self-determination theory model of eudaimonia incorporates intrinsic goal pursuit, autonomous behavior, mindfulness, and need satisfaction as central motivational concepts (Ryan et al., 2008).

While self-determination theory research has explored the relationship between goals, needs, and various conceptualizations of well-being, including hedonic well-being, scholars maintain a distinction between hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Although some conditions may foster hedonic well-being without promoting eudaimonic well-being (Nix et al., 1999), the satisfaction of psychological needs is relevant to both eudaimonic and hedonic aspects of well-being (Sheldon & Kasser, 1998; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Reis et al., 2000; Sheldon et al., 1996).

### Comparing eudaimonic and hedonic well-being

Eudemonia is often defined without including an affective or hedonic component, in contrast to hedonic well-being (Disabato et al., 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, 1993). Philosophers like Aristippus, Bentham, and Mill focused on pleasure as the highest good, differing from the concept of eudaimonia (Tatarkiewicz, 1976). Early psychological research did not initially distinguish between hedonia and eudaimonia (Brickman & Campbell, 1971; Easterlin, 1974; Wilson, 1967), but recent studies have explored and contrasted these two conceptualizations of happiness.

When comparing eudaimonic and hedonic well-being, subjective well-being is frequently used to represent the hedonic aspect. Subjective well-being encompasses positive affect, negative affect, and cognitive appraisal of life satisfaction (Diener, 1984). However, eudaimonia scholars often refer to subjective well-being as the hedonic side of well-being, acknowledging that it includes a broader range of experiences beyond simple hedonic pleasure, such as values, goals, and need fulfillment (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Subjective well-being research has gained prominence in recent decades (Diener et al., 2017; Diener et al., 1999). Recognizing the dominance of subjective well-being research, Ryff (1989) argued for a more inclusive conceptualization of well-being that captures a broader range of aspects. These two lines of well-being research are now frequently compared and contrasted (Disabato et al., 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, 1993; Tatarkiewicz, 1976; Brickman & Campbell, 1971; Easterlin, 1974; Wilson, 1967; Diener, 1984; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Diener et al., 2017; Diener et al., 1999; Ryff, 1989).

### **A critical evaluation of Aristotelian concept of happiness and its conative role in human existence**

This article critically examines Aristotle's concept of happiness (eudemonia) and highlights several inherent issues and criticisms. One key concern is the multiplicity of notions related to the pursuit of happiness and the question of whether individuals without good moral character lack an inner drive to persist in life. Additionally, Aristotle's emphasis on reason overlooks the nature of man and raises questions about the fate of those with cognitive impairments or temporary lack of mental capacity.

The teleological nature of happiness presents another challenge, as it suggests that happiness may be unattainable as it transcends the physical world. The strictness of Aristotle's perspective and the constant discipline required for pursuing an elusive goal raise concerns about the sustainability of the innate drive. The reliance on virtuous acts as a means to attain happiness also faces controversies due to the lack of universal standards and the existence of moral relativism.

Furthermore, the presentation of virtue as the golden mean creates difficulties in identifying the extremes,

and Aristotle's belief that virtues are acquired through constant effort contradicts the notion that the inclination towards happiness is natural to man. The contradiction between the natural inclination to persist and the requirement for moral goodness through constant exercise is also problematic. Aristotle's understanding of entelechy as the end of the developmental process and its potential conflict with natural forces opposed to existence raises further questions.

Moreover, the heavy emphasis on virtues and intellectual contemplation as the path to happiness contradicts the tripartite dimensions of man's vegetative, sensitive, and rational soul. The role of emotions and their complex functions in relation to the inner drive to persist remains unclear. Lastly, the question arises regarding how individuals can know the right things to desire and the right actions to perform when virtuous acts lack universal guiding principles.

Aristotle's concept of eudemonia has its merits, this article highlights various theoretical and practical challenges and criticisms. Further analysis and exploration are necessary to address these issues and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of happiness.

### **The Critique of De Anima**

The manifestation of "De Anima" highlights the psychological aspects and theoretical background of human nature through the lens of eudemonia (Hughes, p.35) [3]. The term "De Anima" is derived from Latin and refers to Aristotle's treatise "On the Soul," where the inseparability of the human physical body and psychic soul is emphasized (Hughes, p.35) [3]. Eudemonia, according to this perspective, reflects the essence of human life through virtue and mental well-being (Hughes, p.35) [3] [9].

However, some researchers argue that eudemonia, from a psychological standpoint influenced by self-determination theory, is not solely a subjective or hedonistic state of happiness (Hughes, p.35) [3] [10]. They suggest that eudemonia encompasses a broader understanding that integrates psychology and biology, referencing the theory of mind/soul (Hughes, p.35) [3].



Aristotelian views on eudemonia are seen as demonstrating a dualistic organism that distinguishes between animate and inanimate components of living things (Hughes, p.35) [3]. The notion of function (ergon) is central to understanding human organisms, as it plays a vital role in various constitutive activities (Hughes, p.36) [3]. The concept of ergon refers to how something is supposed to work and is connected to the functioning of the human soul (Hughes, p.36) [3]. The excellence of function (arête) is associated with human goods and the activity of the soul, contributing to human goals (telos) (Hughes, p.37) [3].

Korsgaard suggests that the function argument of the human soul can potentially encompass metaphysical and psychological dispositions towards holistic happiness in life (Korsgaard, [11]). Therefore, the function argument of the human soul is considered a significant claim for a fulfilled human life (Hughes, p.37) [3].

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this article aimed to assess the credibility of the Aristotelian concept of eudemonia. Through a range of supporting arguments, including human life goals and happiness, intellectual significance, voluntary actions, internal and external goods, capacities and cognitive functions, practical reason, mindfulness, and the doctrine of the mean, the thesis has been defended. Overall, Aristotle's eudemonic perspective appears to be both possible and consistent in theoretical and pragmatic terms. However, there are still theoretical implications that require further scientific analysis to address their vagueness and lack of clarity. Further research is needed to delve into the concept of eudemonia from a scientific standpoint. In this paper, I've juxtaposed Aristotle's perspective on eudemonia with contemporary views on Emotional Well-Being (EWB), while striving to faithfully interpret Aristotle's thoughts as presented in the Nicomachean Ethics (NE). Our interpretation may be influenced by our own views, but we have endeavored to remain true to Aristotle's original ideas. Additionally, we have offered some unconventional critiques of EWB theory and research. This conversation illuminates various aspects of eudemonia and presents significant challenges for those studying eudemonia and EWB. Aristotle describes eudemonia as an

ethically grounded concept of a fulfilled life, encompassing multiple elements and inherently pleasurable. It's ethical in nature as it involves activities that reflect the finest and most complete expression of human nature, achieving self-sufficiency. The concept includes multiple elements, acknowledging the complexity and varied worthwhile goals of human beings. Furthermore, it is considered pleasurable since the fulfillment of our nature is inherently satisfying.

This discussion brings to the forefront a critical issue concerning the quality of eudemonia research within the field of psychology. High-quality scholarship is characterized by a deep respect for evidence and the integrity of the work of other scholars. It's crucial to resist the urge to selectively extract phrases from another scholar's work without considering their overall conceptual framework. When it comes to using Aristotle's terminology, it's imperative to thoroughly understand his intended meanings. If one chooses not to align with Aristotle's perspective, there are two viable options. The first is to employ different terminology. The second is to redefine Aristotle's terms through well-reasoned arguments, ensuring clarity in what is being adopted and how it is being reinterpreted. Merely taking a term and assigning it a subjective, convenient, or anachronistic meaning is inadequate. Respect is a fundamental scholarly virtue, crucial for the advancement of knowledge, which in itself is a vital component of eudemonia. On the other hand, the continued use of idiosyncratic and poorly justified definitions of eudemonia hinders our potential for progress in this field.

The second major challenge facing scholars of eudemonia and Emotional Well-Being (EWB) is acknowledging the inherently ethical nature of eudemonia, a concept that many psychologists have yet to fully embrace. It's crucial to recognize that terms like "virtue," "good," and "best" are fundamentally ethical and using them without addressing the associated moral implications is akin to speaking ambiguously. Traditionally, the field of psychology has sidestepped defining what constitutes a good life by attributing it to personal preference, seemingly absolving psychologists from making objective claims about the nature of a good life. However, as I've argued, relegating values to the subjective sphere is a central aspect of the ideology of individualism, which prioritizes the individual and their desires and goals above all else. While

individualism is recognized as an ethical viewpoint, its pervasive influence within psychology is often overlooked. The study of eudemonia presents an opportunity to move beyond this individualistic ideology by seriously engaging with the social and ethical dimensions at the heart of this concept.

The debate surrounding eudemonia and ethics is a specific example of a broader, ongoing discussion about the inherent ethical commitments within psychological science. Many psychologists are uneasy with the idea that their field might be entangled with ethical issues, yet this topic has been repeatedly brought up throughout the history of psychology (as noted by Cushman in 1995, Danziger in 1990, and Richardson et al. in 1999). There lacks a convincing argument for how psychology can function without being influenced by values, despite claims to the contrary. This complex issue cannot be fully resolved in a single chapter or solely among eudemonia researchers. However, it is a central concern in the study of eudemonia and needs to be confronted head-on, rather than avoided. Scholars have the option to take different stances and justify them in the academic arena, or they can choose to overlook the issue, relying on traditional and popular views within the field. However, ignoring this question does not eliminate its relevance or importance.

The third challenge in understanding eudemonia involves moving beyond the contemporary split between subjectivity and objectivity. The common practice of categorizing all aspects of well-being as subjective is an inadequate approach that fails to acknowledge the moral responsibilities inherent in our discipline. This approach is notably at odds with Aristotle's concept of eudemonia. In our opinion, this method is flawed for two main reasons. Firstly, while well-being certainly has a subjective component, it also extends beyond mere subjectivity, encompassing elements like physical health, purposeful activity, and observable joy. Although we can distinguish between subjective and extra subjective aspects of well-being, they are not entirely separable. Aristotle emphasized that eudemonia is fundamentally about activity, which he did not view as merely a subjective state or a purely objective event. Instead, he saw activity as a combination of intentions and observable actions, forming an indivisible whole. Philosophers continue to debate whether living well should be understood in subjective or objective terms. However, trying to

confine eudemonia to either side of this modern dichotomy is anachronistic and tends to obscure more than it clarifies.

Another argument against confining eudemonia to just the subjective realm is the emerging and promising field of eudemonia research in relation to human evolution, as explored by scholars like Arnhart (1998), Fowers (2015), and Okrent (2007). Aristotle's function argument implies that living well involves aligning with our evolved nature, providing a basis to identify essential elements of our nature crucial for a good life. This idea is undoubtedly contentious, but there are recognized aspects of human nature that seem vital for living well. A prime example is our inherent social nature; our well-being is significantly influenced by the quality of our social relationships (as noted by Fowers, 2015). Our evolutionary history as social beings means we not only need and enjoy social connections but also often find them a critical source of meaning. Thus, the rigid separation of subjective and objective aspects is both problematic and potentially hinders academic advancement.

Psychological science has expanded the study of well-being by incorporating eudemonia, which goes beyond seeking pleasure and includes virtuous and meaningful aspects of life. However, there are still critiques and a need for conceptual clarity in this relatively new area of research. Further studies are required to understand the relationship between hedonic and eudemonia and their impact on overall well-being. Researchers should take a balanced approach to simultaneously explore both perspectives.

The critical examination of Aristotle's concept of happiness reveals inherent issues and criticisms. These include the multiplicity of notions related to happiness, neglect of non-rational aspects of human nature, challenges in attaining happiness, lack of universal standards for virtuous acts, and contradictions within Aristotle's theory. Further exploration is needed to refine our understanding of happiness by considering alternative perspectives and addressing these concerns.

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