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The Relevance of Aristotle's Conception of Eudaimonia for the Psychological Study of Happiness

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Aristotle (1985), in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, takes as a starting point that humans want the best possible life, and uses the term "eudaimonia" to refer to the type of life one thinks best, or most worthwhile, or most desirable (Ackrill, 1973). The usual English translation of eudaimona is as happiness, raising as a consequence the question as to how happiness as a concept is to be understood (Cooper, 1975; Kraut, 1979; Tatarkiewicz, 1976).

In contemporary usage, the term "happiness" is generally considered to refer to hedonic happiness, a subjective experience that includes "the belief that one is getting the important things one wants, as well as certain pleasant affects that normally go along with this belief" (Kraut, 1979, p. 178). The most thorough expression of ethical hedonism was advanced by Aristippus of Cyrene in the third century B.C., who held "that pleasure is the *sole* good, but also that only one's own physical, positive, momentary pleasure is a good, and is so regardless of its cause" (Tatarkiewicz, 1976, p. 317).

Aristotle clearly rejected this Cyrenaic view of happiness. "The many, the most vulgar, seemingly conceive the good and happiness as pleasure, and hence they also like the life of gratification. Here they appear completely slavish, since the life they decide on is a life of grazing animals" (Aristotle, 1985, p. 7). Against this view of hedonic happiness, Aristotle (1985) offers the proposition that eudaimonia (happiness) is "activity expressing virtue" (p. 284) where virtue may be variously considered to be the best thing, the best within us, or excellence (Ackrill, 1973; McDowell, 1980). According to Telfer (1980), eudaimonia embodies the idea, not that one is pleased with one's life, but that one has "what is *worth* desiring and worth having in life" (p. 37). This is to be taken as an objective statement as to the proper ends of each person and as such does not readily lend itself for use within a psychological framework.

Before endeavoring to render the concept of eudaimonia in a form potentially useful within psychology, it is necessary to consider what might be the proper ends of each person. According to the ethical system of eudaimonism, a philosophy that predates Aristotle, individuals have a responsibility to recognize and live in accordance with their daimon or "true self." The daimon refers to the potentialities of each person, the realization of which represents the greatest fulfillment in living of which each is capable. The daimon is an

ideal in the sense of being an excellence, a perfection toward which one strives and, hence, it can give meaning and direction to one's life. The potentialities comprising the daimon can be interpreted as including both one's aptitudes and talents and one's purposes in living. The efforts a person makes to live in accordance with the daimon, to realize those potentials, can be said to be personally expressive. (See Norton, 1976, for an extended discussion of the philosophy of eudaimonism, and Waterman, 1984, in press, for a presentation of the ways in which eudaimonistic values are embodied in a range of contemporary psychological theories.)

Eudaimonia, then, is activity in accordance with one's daimon. This is what is considered worth having in life. Since Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is concerned with the proper ends of human functioning, he rejects the view of eudaimonia as a subjective state equivalent to, or similar to, hedonic enjoyment. But if psychologists are to be able to make productive use of the Aristotle's conception of eudaimonia, it must be rendered in a form more congenial to the field. In pursuing this goal, I have found it necessary to take several significant departures from the Aristotelian perspective, while I have endeavored to remain true to Aristotle's ethical objectives. The most important of these departures is to consider eudaimonia to have a subjective component embodying the experiences that flow from efforts to live in truth to one's daimon by striving to develop one's aptitudes and talents for purposes deemed worth having in life. I have elaborated elsewhere (Waterman, in press) on this and other contrasts with Aristotle on eudaimonia.

In considering eudaimonia to have a subjective component, it seems an unremarkable observation that individuals may reflect upon, or otherwise come to experience, the view that they are developing their aptitudes and talents. Similarly, they may reflect upon, or otherwise come to experience, the view that they are desiring, and are pursuing, purposes in life that are worth having. In other words, they may assess themselves in terms of the objective standard of eudaimonia. But since this experience of eudaimonia is subjective, it must be acknowledged that a person may wrongly experience it, that is, the actions engaged in may not actually be advancing one's aptitudes and talents or one's purposes in living. It is beyond the scope of this article to consider whether, or how, such errors could be detected either by the individual or by an observer.

Distinguishing Eudaimonia from Hedonic Enjoyment

As a subjective psychological condition, eudaimonia can be considered related to, perhaps synonymous with, a number of cognitive-affective concepts that have been used to refer to optimal psychological functioning, including the feelings accompanying intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985), flow experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975), peak experiences (Maslow, 1968), and feelings of personal expressiveness (Waterman, in press). Each of these cognitive-affective conditions can be theoretically differentiated from hedonic enjoyment in a variety of ways. (a) Whereas hedonic enjoyment may arise from a wide range of activities, eudaimonia is experienced only on connection with activities that advance one's highest potentialities, either in terms

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of aptitudes and talents and/or purposes in living. (b) Whereas hedonic enjoyment may arise from activities either actively or passively performed, eudaimonia is experienced only from one's active strivings for excellence. (c) Whereas hedonic enjoyment may arise from acvitities without regard to the quality of performance attained, eudaimonia is experienced only when one recognizes that one is making progress in the development or advancement of personally significant potentialities. (d) Whereas repeatedly engaging in activities yielding hedonic enjoyment results in satiation, opportunities for the repeated experience of eudaimonia will be continually sought. (e) Whereas most people experience hedonic enjoyment from the same broad categories of activities, the activities giving rise to eudaimonia tend to be idiosyncratic, more readily lending themselves to differentiating among individuals than to finding commonalities. (f) Whereas within any category of activities, hedonic enjoyment may arise from any of a range of possibilities considered as relatively interchangeable, eudaimonia is more likely experienced only with respect to some relatively specific actions.

A list of differences between eudaimonia and hedonic enjoyment should not be considered exhaustive. There is a long tradition within both philosophy and psychology involving efforts top distinguish higher from lower pleasures that can be brought to bear on this matter. The work of Fromm (1947) and Maslow (1968) may be particularly useful in this regard.

The Interrelationship of Eudaimonia and Hedonic Enjoyment

On philosophical grounds it has been claimed that eudaimonia is a sufficient, but not a necessary condition for hedonic happiness (Telfer, 1980). That is, a person who is regularly engaging in activities giving rise to eudaimonia will almost certainly believe that he or she is getting what is wanted from life and will experience the pleasant affects accompanying this belief. There are, however, plausibly many other routes to hedonic happiness besides engaging in eudaimonic activities. Logically, then, there are four possible categories of activities structured in terms of the presence or absence of the subjective conditions of eudaimonia and hedonic enjoyment, though one of these may be a null category: (a) activities giving rise to both eudaimonia and hedonic enjoyment, (b) activities giving rise to hedonic enjoyment, but not eudaimonia, (c) activities giving rise to eudaimonia, but not hedonic enjoyment (theoretically a null category), and (d) activities giving rise to neither eudaimonia nor hedonic enjoyment. In the distinctions among activities in these categories lies the potential to distinguish empirically between the two subjective experiences of happiness.

Research on Eudaimonia and Hedonic Enjoyment

I have been embarked upon a program of research designed to assess empirical differences between eudaimonia and hedonic enjoyment. The research instrument I developed for this purpose is the Personally Expressive Activities Questionnaire (PEAQ) (Waterman, 1989). Respondents are asked to list five activities important in their lives that they would use in describing themselves to another person. For each activity listed, they then are asked a series of

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questions pertaining to their feelings during the activity, the types of opportunities afforded by the activity, the frequency of the activity, the levels of skills and challenges involved in the activity, and the importance of the activity in their lives.

The level of hedonic enjoyment associated with an activity is assessed by two questions focusing of the experiences of enjoyment and pleasure associated with it. The level of personal expressiveness of eudaimonia associated with an activity is assessed by two questions pertaining to the extent to which the activity is associated with feelings of "really being alive" and "this is who I really am." Since respondents taking the PEAQ rate five activities, hypotheses regarding hedonic happiness and eudaimonia can each be tested in five replications within each sample. Separate analyses can be conducted for the activities in each sequential position of the respondents' lists.

Since eudaimonia has been claimed to be a sufficient, but not a necessary condition for hedonic happiness (Telfer, 1980), it would be expected that there would be a significant positive association between the two subjective experiences of happiness. With samples of both college students and adults (Waterman, 1989), for every replication, scores for eudaimonia were positively correlated with scores on hedonic enjoyment, with a range of .63 ($p < .001$) to .83 ($p < .001$).

Both eudaimonia and hedonic happiness have been found to be significantly correlated with a variety of cognitive-affective qualities associated with a positive emotional tone, with significant differences in the strength of the associations found for several of the qualities. Consistent with the distinctions drawn between the two subjective conditions, eudaimonia was found to be significantly more strongly correlated with having clear goals, feeling assertive, and investing a great deal of effort in an activity, while feeling happy, feeling relaxed, and forgetting one's personal problems were more strongly associated with hedonic enjoyment.

In view of the conceptual distinctions between eudaimonia and hedonic happiness, it was expected that activities giving rise to these conditions in different proportions would be seen as affording different types of opportunities for the satisfaction of goals. Specifically, if eudaimonia arises from activities in which an individual is advancing his or her talents and/or purposes in living, then the activities experienced as most personally expressive should be viewed as affording opportunities to develop one's potentials to a greater degree than would activities experienced as hedonically enjoyed, but not necessarily personally expressive. For the college sample, eudaimonia was significantly correlated with ratings of the opportunities to develop one's best potentials for each of the five replications, and in each instance the correlations for eudaimonia were significantly stronger than were the correlations with hedonic enjoyment. Fore the sample of adults, eudaimonia was again significantly correlated with ratings of the opportunities to develop one's best potentials, with significantly stronger correlations for eudaimonia than hedonic enjoyment being found in two of the replications, and a nonsignificant trend in a third. Less consistent differences between eudaimonia and

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hedonic enjoyment were found in the same direction for ratings of the opportunities afforded by an activity to share experiences with others and to have spiritual experiences. No systematic differences were found between eudaimonia and hedonic enjoyment with respect to ratings of the opportunities afforded by an activity to satisfy one's drives, to have aesthetic experiences, or to satisfy one's desires for competition.

With respect to the importance of an activity and scores on personal expressiveness and hedonic enjoyment, for both the college and adult samples, significant positive correlations were found for all five replications for both subjective experiences. Significantly stronger correlations with eudaimonia than with hedonic enjoyment were found in one replication for each sample. Combining both samples, an analysis of the direction of the strength of correlations indicated stronger correlations with eudaimonia for nine replications and a tie for the remaining replication. A sign test indicated that this difference is statistically significant ($z = 2.67, p < .01$). No systematic patterns of findings were observed regarding the relationship between frequency of an activity and either eudaimonia or hedonic enjoyment.

In another study with college students (Waterman, unpublished data), relationships between flow experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975) and the experiences of eudaimonia and hedonic enjoyment arising from activities were investigated. Flow is said to occur when an individual's skills for an activity are high and the activity affords a high level of challenge. A significant positive association between eudaimonia and flow was obtained, but no relationship between hedonic enjoyment and flow was observed.

In sum, while the experiences of eudaimonia and hedonic enjoyment are moderately to strongly associated with each other, there were, nevertheless, differences in the nature of the associations found for the two subjective conditions in a pattern consistent with theoretical expectations drawn from an Aristotelian perspective. The empirical demonstration of distinctions between eudaimonia and hedonic happiness has important implications for research on psychological well-being (Diener, 1984, Emmons, 1986, Ryff, 1989). As Ryff (1989) has observed, research on psychological well-being might well have taken very different directions had the early researchers construed the construct of happiness in terms of the realization of one's potentials rather than as a hedonic ratio of pleasant to unpleasant affects. In addition to some recent studies on psychological well-being, the recent increase in theoretical and research interest in various aspects of optimal psychological functioning (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi, 1988; Larson, 1990; Privette, 1983) appears more compatible with an Aristotelian understanding of eudaimonia than with a hedonic interpretation of happiness.

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Footnote

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