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## EUDAIMONISM

*Lorraine Besser-Jones*

Eudaimonism holds that the best life is the life well lived, where a life well lived makes optimal use of one's capacities. While it is safe to say that all contemporary forms of eudaimonism owe a substantial debt to Aristotle, what marks out a theory of well-being as eudaimonistic has much more to do with its structure, rather than necessarily with its historic roots. In this chapter I will isolate the structure of eudaimonism, explore the variety of ways in which contemporary theorists (both philosophers and psychologists) fill out this structure, and then consider some of the challenges eudaimonism faces.

### **The structure of eudaimonism**

The Greek word *eudaimonia* is one that notoriously resists easy interpretation. Aristotle uses *eudaimonia* to represent the highest good for human beings, something that he takes to be circumscribed to the function distinctive to human beings. For many years, *eudaimonia* was translated as "happiness." Increasingly, though, philosophers recognize that understanding *eudaimonia* in terms of happiness can be misleading. When we think of happiness, we tend to think first and foremost of positive feelings (of satisfaction, of pleasure). But focusing on these features potentially leads us to overlook the distinctive kind of well-being Aristotle sought to describe, which is something important and valuable in its own right—even independently of the positive feelings associated with it.

To avoid this kind of confusion, many philosophers no longer try to provide an English translation for the word *eudaimonia*, and *eudaimonia* is taken to represent itself a distinctive form of well-being that refers to a state of flourishing, and specifically flourishing *qua* human being. There is much more needed to unpack this concept, but understanding *eudaimonia* in terms of human flourishing gives us a helpful way of anchoring eudaimonism and also delivers some insight into how eudaimonism departs from other contemporary theories of well-being. We can helpfully distinguish eudaimonism from other theories of well-being by highlighting the following characteristics of eudaimonism: First, its effort to characterize an active state of well-being that, while experiential, requires agency and ongoing activity; and, second, its characterization of well-being as objective, dependent upon features of one's life rather than one's attitudes towards one's life. Let's consider each in turn.

Whereas other theories of well-being take well-being to be a largely passive state—something we experience—eudaimonism takes well-being to be an active process of living well, of well

functioning. To illustrate this difference in a very simple fashion, consider the contrasting experiences of the young child, learning how to read. Prior to learning how to read, the child experiences books by being read to. This, of course, is an enjoyable experience that is both valuable and meaningful for the child. It is, nonetheless, a different experience than the one the child engages in when she learns how to read for herself. Through the active process of reading, the child experiences the book in a different manner. Reading the book becomes an activity. The book is no longer delivered to her; rather she takes ownership of the experience, through the active exercise of her agency. Eudaimonism is an effort to describe the kind of well-being that arises through this kind of *active exercise of agency*.

LeBar (2013) helpfully describes this contrast as one between seeing oneself as a patient and as an agent.<sup>1</sup> According to LeBar, the patientist approach holds that “what matters is not so much what we do as what happens, and in particular happens to us”; the agentist approach, in contrast, “emphasizes that our lives go well in virtue of what we do, rather than what happens” (2013: 67, 69). A patientist approach to well-being focuses on what happens to us, while an agentist approach focuses on what we do.

This aspect of eudaimonism is also a distinctive aspect of the psychological conception of eudaimonism. Psychologists (e.g. Ryan et al. 2006) describe the contrast between agentist and patientist approaches in terms of the distinction between a process and an outcome. Eudaimonism describes well-being in terms of a specific way of living—a process of living well—rather than in terms of an outcome such as experiencing a particular mental state. This isn’t to say that the process of living well isn’t associated with positive outcomes, but the hope is that focusing on the process of living well allows us to identify a unique and distinctively human form of well-being, one that highlights our agency and one for which there can be no substitute.

Why might we think the process is itself valuable, independently of the outcome? And why might we think, as many eudaimonists do, that the process is more important than the outcome? While in reality it is difficult to separate the two, reflection on Nozick’s arguments regarding the experience machine is helpful (Nozick 1974). The experience machine promises to deliver certain experiences, such as pleasure, to an individual. We might see the experience machine as providing the outcome without the process. Individuals in the experience machine are patients, not agents. Nozick argues that if hedonistic approaches towards understanding well-being are correct, we all ought to and would in fact choose to enter the experience machine. But, of course, we don’t. Why? As Nozick writes, “we want to *do* certain things and not just have the experience of doing them” (1974: 613). The point is not limited to hedonism, but extends to any outcome-based, patientist approach to well-being. Readers sympathetic to this line of argument ought to find the eudaimonistic approach to well-being intriguing.

Because eudaimonism describes a process, rather than an outcome, it is often described as presenting an objective theory of well-being, which is the second structural feature of eudaimonism that I will highlight here. While the distinction between “objective” and “subjective” theories of well-being can be somewhat messy, struggling to understand it will help our understanding of the structural features of eudaimonism. Following Sumner (1996), we can take objectivism to describe a form of well-being that is neither defined by nor contingent to an agent’s attitudes about how her life is going, while we can take subjectivism to describe a form of well-being whereby these attitudes are a necessary component of well-being.<sup>2</sup> Most conceptions of well-being (objective list theories are a notable exception) take well-being to be comprised almost entirely by these subjective dimensions.<sup>3</sup> A life satisfaction view of well-being, for instance, takes well-being to consist in the having of cognitive and/or affective appraisals of the overall shape one’s life takes. But eudaimonism deems such appraisals unnecessary, choosing to focus instead on aspects of flourishing (such as the exercise of practical reason, or the exercise

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of virtue) that do not depend on one experiencing any particular attitudes regarding how one's life is going. Depending on the variety of eudaimonism, there may be other important attitudes requisite to flourishing, such as concern for others, but positive attitudes regarding how one's life is going are not necessary components.

This form of objectivism follows nicely from the eudaimonist's focus on identifying an active, process-based form of well-being rather than an outcome-based form (of which form subjectivist theories of well-being tend to be). And while outcomes are associated with *eudaimonia*—people who flourish certainly are likely to experience pleasure and life satisfaction—these subjective outcomes are not the goal. The goal is one we can understand in objective terms, by looking at how an individual lives her life, rather than how she feels about the life she lives. Because eudaimonism presents an objective form of well-being that is conceptually independent of these kinds of subjective attitudes, however, some find eudaimonism to be counter-intuitive when presented as a theory of well-being. It seems odd that one could have well-being yet not feel good about how one's life is going, a point we will return to in a discussion of some of the debates surrounding eudaimonism.

Thus far we have identified eudaimonism as describing a form of well-being that consists in the active process of living well, where living well is understood in objective terms of human flourishing. These are the structural features binding together the different versions of eudaimonism, but as these are just structural features, much more needs to be said: What does it mean to live well? What counts as human flourishing? It is in the answers to these questions that different versions of eudaimonism emerge.

### **Varieties of eudaimonism**

Any conception of eudaimonism requires an account of human flourishing, i.e., an account of what it means to live well. Aristotle famously thought that human flourishing had to be explained in terms of the *distinctive* function of human beings. He took this to consist in the “activity of the soul in accordance with reason” (Aristotle, 1962, bk. 1.6). This position—that human flourishing consists in the exercise of practical rationality—informs most contemporary philosophical conceptions of eudaimonism, such as those developed by Julia Annas (2011), Daniel Russell (2012), and Mark LeBar (2013). Annas, for instance, describes eudaimonism as involving a “structured way of thinking of your life” whereby through asking “why” you can come to see that your “actions fit into structured patterns in your life; a snapshot of what you are doing at one time turns out to reveal, when we think about these structures, what your broader aims and goals in life are” (2011: 121–122). LeBar's description of *eudaimonia* is even more explicit in its allegiance to practical rationality:

The eudaimonistic proposal is that human welfare or well-being consists in living a life of practical wisdom. That is, the nature or content of what a good life is—what such a life amounts to—cannot be specified without recourse to the exercise of practical wisdom.

*(LeBar 2013: 82)*

One nice aspect of this focus on practical rationality is its ability to highlight an individual's agency. Through exercising practical rationality, and developing practical wisdom, the individual can construct and shape her life. She can reflect on her goals and how they fit together, thereby comprising a framework for her to make decisions about which ends to pursue and which course of actions to embrace. Russell describes this as a process of “rational self-construction,” writing that,

humans are by nature active creatures who live by practical reason. Human action and practical reason are inseparable: humans do not merely *behave*, but rather they *act* because they are capable of reflecting on their impulses and feelings and can—indeed *must*—find reasons for the things they do and the ways they feel.

(Russell 2012: 72)

This aspect of human nature, Russell goes on to argue, ought to define humans' fulfillment:

to be fulfilled as that kind of creature is to be active in accordance with practical wisdom and emotional soundness, since that is how practical rationality functions in a distinctively human way . . . our status as agents with practical rationality is what defines our happiness.

(Russell 2012: 72)

This style of argument is common amongst contemporary eudaimonists and very much echoes Aristotle's position as developed in his function argument. But we might wonder whether or not this emphasis on practical rationality is warranted. While Russell claims that humans "must" find reasons for their actions, as Doris (2002, 2009) argues, psychological research shows it is all too common that we don't find reasons for our actions and that we don't act, as Russell claims, as "active creatures who live by practical reason" (2012: 72). We tend to respond automatically to situational factors of which we are not even aware (Doris 2002) and we are influenced by unconscious biases in largely unpredictable ways (Bargh and Chartrand, 1999). Our behavior rarely reflects our beliefs (Fendrich 1967; Knobe and Leiter 2007), and when we do use reason in moral contexts, it tends to be post hoc, as a means of rationalizing our behavior (Haidt 2001).<sup>4</sup> This research does not eliminate the possibility of using practical reason, but it might make us question whether our capacity for engaging in practical reason is what *defines* us, such that we ought to understand human fulfillment by appeal to practical rationality.<sup>5</sup>

While admittedly eudaimonism is a view about an ideal form of human fulfillment, about the best shape a human life can take, empirical research contesting the very view of agency upon which this idealized form of human fulfillment is predicated might lead us to question this strand of eudaimonism, which has dominated contemporary philosophical discussions of eudaimonism. An alternative approach to eudaimonism, grounded within a psychological understanding of human fulfillment, moves away from this emphasis on practical reason, focusing instead on the satisfaction of needs and the exercise of one's capacities that are essential to this satisfaction.

Psychologists understand eudaimonism, what they call eudaimonic well-being, in this fashion (Ryan et al. 2006; Ryff and Singer 2008).<sup>6</sup> Eudaimonic well-being describes a state of psychological health, of ongoing proper functioning. It shares the structure of philosophical conceptions of eudaimonism, insofar as it seeks to describe the active process of living well, but fills out its account of flourishing by looking at the circumstances in which individuals tend to flourish, and those in which they tend to exhibit pathologies. Analysis of these circumstances enables researchers to posit the existence of innate psychological needs, which are drives individuals have to seek out certain kinds of experiences.<sup>7</sup> According to Deci and Ryan's influential research (2000), we have needs to experience competency over our environments and as such to engage in experiences that allow us to exercise our skills; to experience belongingness with others, to both care for others and be cared for by others; to experience autonomy through selecting and pursuing goals with which we identify. When we engage in these activities in an ongoing fashion, we experience eudaimonic well-being.

So what does eudaimonic well-being look like? Need satisfaction is associated with physical, psychological, and cognitive benefits.<sup>8</sup> It facilitates “optimal functioning of the natural propensities for growth and integration, as well as for constructive social development and personal well-being” (Ryan and Deci 2000b: 68). Ryan and Deci describe individuals experiencing eudaimonic well-being as representing the best of human potential, as “curious, vital, and self-motivated. At their best, they are agentic and inspired, striving to learn; extend themselves; master new skills; and apply their talents responsibly” (2000b: 68). They contrast this state with non-optimal functioning, wherein individuals reject growth and responsibility, and find themselves “apathetic, alienated, and irresponsible” (Ryan and Deci 2000b: 68). Thus living well, according to this form of eudaimonism, consists in continually engaging in the kinds of experiences that satisfy our needs to engage with others, to develop skills, to identify with our goals and pursuits—a way of living explored at length in Besser-Jones (2014).

The psychological conception of eudaimonism clearly de-emphasizes the role of practical reasoning, choosing to highlight needs satisfaction as the distinctive component of living well, rather than the exercise of practical reason. While this is a significant departure from the philosophical conception, it does not eliminate the role of practical reason from living well. Rather, as I argue (Besser-Jones 2014), practical reason ought to be invoked in service of selecting the goals essential to living well and in motivating us to pursue those goals. At the end of the day, we might rightly wonder whether both the philosophical and the psychological conceptions of eudaimonism differ primarily insofar as they assign practical reason a different weight, rather than a different role. As we’ve seen, the philosophical conception of eudaimonism takes the exercise of practical reason to be primary and justifies the ways of living it leads to by appeal to practical reason, whereas the psychological conception of eudaimonism takes the satisfaction of innate psychological needs to be primary, and justifies the role of practical reason insofar as it plays an important role in needs satisfaction.

The psychological and philosophical conceptions of eudaimonism represent different efforts to give content to the structure of eudaimonism. Both provide helpful springboards for thinking about what is involved in living well, and in what human flourishing consists. Let us now consider some specific dimensions of eudaimonism, making distinctions where necessary between the philosophical conception of eudaimonia and the psychological conception of eudaimonic well-being.

### **Dimensions of eudaimonism: virtue**

Eudaimonism is perhaps most familiar not as an independent theory of well-being, but as a theory of well-being that anchors virtue ethics. This is the context in which Aristotle discusses *eudaimonia* and in which many contemporary eudaimonists explore it (for examples, see Hursthouse 1999; Annas 2011; and Besser-Jones 2014). Annas even defines eudaimonism in terms of involving “an entry point for ethical reflection,” which consists in “thinking about how your life is going, thinking that can arise in people who already are, or are becoming, adult, and who are aware that everything in their life is not satisfactory” (2011: 121). Thinking through how to improve one’s life involves thinking about how to be a good person; eudaimonism and virtue go hand-in-hand.

The thought is that living well involves being virtuous such that one develops *eudaimonia* or eudaimonic well-being through being virtuous. Consider Hursthouse’s definition of the virtues: “A virtue is a character trait a human being needs for *eudaimonia*, to flourish or live well” (1999: 167), which follows straightforwardly from Aristotle: the highest good (*eudaimonia*) is activity in accordance with virtue (*NE* 1.7, 1098a16–18). This position is standard fare for the philosophical

conceptions of eudaimonism, which, as the quote from Hursthouse illustrates, posit a conceptual connection between virtue and eudaimonia. To those working outside the eudaimonistic framework, however, this claim is apt to be met with considerable skepticism.

Consider Haybron, who believes we can find many examples of individuals who lack virtue yet experience well-being, including:

[T]he successful Southern slaveholder who enjoys the approbation of his community and a comfortable existence with a loving family has obvious moral shortcomings, yet it is hard to see in what sense his life must be “impoverished.” Why must he be in any way worse off than he would be were he more enlightened about human equality? Why must he be worse off than a morally better counterpart who enjoys as much wealth, comfort, success, love and reputation, but without ever wronging anyone? (We can assume that both are well-settled in their moral convictions, equally convinced of their righteousness.) This point arises with greater force in the case of a brutal warlord like Genghis Khan, who directed the slaughter of tens of millions. He appears to have done so largely with the blessing of his culture’s moral code. It is not hard to imagine that his relatively long life, which appeared to be rather successful on his terms, went very well for him indeed. And while his idea of happiness or well-being is not exactly yours or mine, it is difficult to see the grounds for gainsaying it (as a conception of well-being!). Is humanitarian concern for strangers really necessary for a full or rich, or even a characteristically, human life? History offers little reason for optimism on this count.

(Haybron 2007: 5–6)

Haybron’s challenge is both a challenge to the idea that there is a conceptual connection between virtue and *eudaimonia* and to eudaimonism, insofar as it emphasizes the perfection of one’s capacities (a view he describes as “welfare perfectionism”).

What are we to make of this kind of challenge? Hursthouse, anticipating these kinds of challenges, writes that the claim is not that virtue *guarantees eudaimonia*, but only that it is our best bet: “they are the only reliable bet—even though, it is agreed, I might be unlucky and, precisely because of my virtue, wind up dying early or with my life marred or ruined” (1999: 172). Can even this more modified claim hold up, though?

On the psychological conception of eudaimonic well-being, any claims regarding the connection between virtue and eudaimonic well-being are ones that must be borne out by empirical research. Because eudaimonic well-being is defined through reflection on needs satisfaction, rather than through the exercise of practical reason, where virtue is taken to imply the standard set of character traits (being a “good person,” let’s say), it must be an open question whether or not being virtuous is the only, or even a, reliable bet towards developing eudaimonic well-being. Challenges like Haybron’s must be taken seriously.

Do we need virtue to satisfy our innate psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence and so to experience eudaimonic well-being? The case for thinking comes largely through reflection on the need for relatedness.<sup>9</sup> Reflection on the nature of the need for relatedness suggests that its satisfaction requires relating *well* to others we encounter, and treating them with care and respect. While this may not mean that the development of eudaimonic well-being requires the development of the virtues as they are traditionally construed, it does suggest that being a good person and acting well to others is an important component of needs satisfaction—it is one we are driven to and it appears to be our best means for satisfaction of the need for relatedness. It also is one that allows us to satisfy our needs for autonomy and competence,



making it, as I argue elsewhere, our best bet: “acting well—understood to consist in engaging in positive social interaction marked by a mutual level of caring and respect—is the most promising route to the development of eudaimonic well-being” (Besser-Jones 2014: 95). This doesn’t mean it is not *possible* for the Southern slaveholder or Genghis Kahn to experience eudaimonic well-being, but it does mean that if we are seriously interested in developing eudaimonic well-being, and in living well, we ought not to gamble on immorality and should instead focus on becoming a good person.

### Challenges to eudaimonism

A challenge emerges when eudaimonism is presented, as it is considered here, as an independent theory of well-being to stand up alongside more familiar theories of well-being that involve desire satisfaction, or feelings of pleasure, and so forth. The challenge is to show not that eudaimonism captures a real form of well-being, but to show that eudaimonism captures a compelling form of well-being, and particularly one that we ought to see as normative for us. Theories of well-being, *qua* theory of well-being or prudential value, typically claim a somewhat unique value that carries with it a special sense of normativity in virtue of referring to that which is good for the individual. Unlike other values whose connection to the individual is often indirect and whose normativity often requires lengthy justification, the value and corresponding normativity of well-being are supposed to be direct and transparent. Yet some worry that eudaimonism lacks this kind of value. The problem is that eudaimonism tries to capture a kind of well-being that doesn’t just boil down to the having of favorable attitudes towards one’s life; for some, this means that eudaimonism lacks the kind of transparency found in other forms of well-being.

Targeting specifically the psychological conception of eudaimonic well-being, Tiberius and colleagues call into question the philosophical salience of the eudaimonic accounts, which they think cannot function as a normative theory of well-being (Tiberius and Hall 2010; Tiberius and Plakias 2010). The worry, in their words, is that the gap between well-being and subjective experience (by which they mean having favorable attitudes):

gives rise to concerns about the justification of eudaimonistic norms. If the justification of needs based norms ultimately depends on the assumption that satisfying these needs brings us more pleasure, or makes us subjectively happier, then the theory on offer is not really a distinct alternative to hedonism or life satisfaction. Moreover, if this is *not* how needs based norms are justified, it is difficult to see how eudaimonism can have a legitimate claim to be action-guiding in general (and not just for people who already identify with it).

*(Tiberius and Plakias 2010: 410)*

Tiberius and Plakias here, and throughout their discussion of eudaimonic well-being, express skepticism that there is any value inherent in needs satisfaction that is independent of its conduciveness to generating positive attitudes. That is, their discussion suggests that if fulfillment of the needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy is valuable for the individual, it is valuable only as means towards attaining happiness or life satisfaction.

While Tiberius and colleagues here target the psychological conception of eudaimonic well-being, the challenge is one that arises from the structure of eudaimonism and so applies as well to the philosophical conception of eudaimonia as well. It is based in the objectivity of eudaimonism, a point we touched on earlier. Eudaimonism is objective insofar as it presents a kind of well-being that is independent of the possession of favorable attitudes towards one’s life. This

means that it is theoretically possible for people to experience the kind of flourishing distinctive to eudaimonism without feeling the positive feelings associated more generally with well-being. While most defenders of eudaimonism defend the view that, in practice, agents who experience *eudaimonia* or eudaimonic well-being also experience pleasure, or some other subjective dimension of well-being, Tiberius and Plakias's challenge remains: if eudaimonism is to stand on its own as a distinct form of well-being, it must make some account of its normativity in a way that shows it to be distinctive.

We find in Philippa Foot one way to justify the normativity of eudaimonism that I'm particularly sympathetic to, and that has been appealed to to justify both the philosophical conception of eudaimonia (e.g., Hursthouse 1999) and the psychological conception of eudaimonic well-being (e.g., Besser-Jones 2014). Foot (2003) argues that *eudaimonia* can be justified by appeal to what she calls "natural necessity"—this refers to those features that are necessary for human development. Reflection on these features gives us a standard of value from which to evaluate the features of human nature. We can then hold up certain features of human nature as valuable in virtue of their role in human development, and from this basis justify norms directing us towards our fulfillment.

Foot uses this method to justify an Aristotelian-inspired focus on our mental capacities and particularly our practical wisdom, such that "rational choice should be seen as an aspect of human goodness" (2003: 81), a move also embraced explicitly in Hursthouse: "in virtue of our rationality—our free will if you like—we are different" (1999: 221). Besser-Jones uses this method to justify focus on innate psychological needs and suggests thinking about eudaimonic well-being in terms of psychological health: given that we have the innate psychological needs that drive us to engage in certain patterns of behavior and lead us to experience pathologies when we don't, "it is good for us to fulfill these needs" (2014: 25).

Appealing to this kind of natural necessity is one way we might establish the normativity of eudaimonism. But skeptics might still worry about whether this meets the challenge. For what this move does, and what eudaimonism going back to Aristotle in general does, is specify norms through reflection on what is "distinctively human" (be it our rational capacities, or our innate psychological needs). The claim is that these features are necessary for our development not as individuals, but as a member of the species. This, in turn, opens up yet another potential gap between eudaimonism and subjective theories of well-being.

Because eudaimonism presents a view of well-being that is specified in terms of our natures *qua* human being, it presents what Haybron (2008) describes as an "external" theory of well-being.<sup>10</sup> Foot's work presents a clear illustration of this aspect of *eudaimonia*. She argues, for instance, that "to determine what is goodness and what defect of character, disposition, and choice, we must consider what human good is and how human beings live: in other words, what kind of a living thing a human being is" (Foot 2003: 51). The relevant contrast here is with internal theories of well-being that specify well-being in terms of facts about the individual, i.e., the actual bearer of well-being. We can quickly see why some might find an internalist approach to well-being compelling. Haybron, for instance, argues that:

First, what counts toward my well-being must depend on what I am like. My welfare must not be alien to me, a value that floats down from some Platonic realm, and remora-like, affixes itself to me with little regard to the particulars of my constitution. Second, what counts toward my well-being must not depend on what any other individual, or group or class of individuals—actual or hypothetical—is like. It must be possible to specify the ultimate or fundamental conditions of my well-being without making essential reference to other individuals, or to classes or groups of individuals.

(Haybron 2008: 157)

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The externalist aspect of eudaimonism exacerbates the normativity challenge insofar as we think it possible that what is good for my species may not be good for me.

Is it possible that what eudaimonism holds to be good for me (be it the development of practical wisdom, or the satisfaction of innate psychological needs) is not *actually* good for me in the ways that eudaimonism claims? To deny this possibility, I think, would be to make a blatantly false empirical claim. The fact of the matter is that the kind of flourishing embraced by both philosophical and psychological conceptions of eudaimonism is one based on how human beings *tend* to behave and what kinds of things *tend* to enable them to function well. While this may not satisfy those fully committed to internalism about well-being, defenders of eudaimonism can make recourse here to the fact that, for most of us, following its prescriptions are a good bet towards developing well-being. We saw this move earlier in our discussion of whether virtue or being a good person is necessary for developing *eudaimonia* or eudaimonic well-being. Here, the plausible answers were not that virtue guarantees the development of *eudaimonia* or eudaimonic well-being, but that it provides us with a safe, reliable route—anyone who denies this is taking a risk, and gambling with her own well-being. In a similar vein, we can say the same thing about the individual who thinks that eudaimonism gives a view of well-being that is good for her species, but not good for her. The odds, quite simply, are against this line of reasoning.<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

Eudaimonism offers a distinctive way of thinking about well-being, marked by its commitment to describing what it means to *live well*—to how it is that we can work our way through life in a way that allows us to flourish. We've seen that while the philosophical and the psychological forms of eudaimonism differ insofar as what they take the distinctive features of human nature to be, they share the structure of eudaimonism by taking well-being to consist in the process of living well, and by seeking to describe an objective form of well-being that is independent of favorable attitudes towards one's life. We've also seen that, especially in virtue of the latter, defenders of eudaimonism face particular challenges justifying the norms it gives rise to. I've suggested that these challenges can be assuaged by thinking of eudaimonism as offering guidance, rather than as offering justifications.

What eudaimonism may not do, then, is provide a quick and easy answer to the question, why be moral (or, even, why embrace eudaimonism)? It has an answer—because doing so allows one to flourish—but, as we have seen, there are ways for the skeptic to challenge this answer. In a certain sense, though, it is misleading to see eudaimonism in these terms, as a theory of well-being seeking to be a normative theory. Eudaimonism rather is best seen as an effort to describe a life well lived, one that makes use of one's skills and capacities, and as a result that allows individuals to obtain a distinctive kind of well-being. It presents a theory of well-being that does not collapse into other, perhaps more familiar forms of well-being that are subjective, and is instead meant to capture a unique form of life, available only to humans. It should thus perhaps be seen not as just another competitor for the “right way” of thinking about well-being, but as offering a way of living that can be compatible with other, subjective forms of well-being.

## Notes

- 1 See also Russell (2012: Chapter 3).
- 2 Fletcher (Chapter 12, this volume) describes this in terms of attitude-independence.
- 3 Woodard (Chapter 13, this volume) explores the plausibility of hybrid theories.
- 4 I discuss this issue at length in Besser-Jones (2014: Chapter 7).
- 5 Doris (2009) takes this line of argument even further, arguing that when human beings are defined by appeal to their rational capacities, we will be forced to be skeptical about the very existence of persons.

- 6 To avoid confusion, I will use “eudaimonia” to refer to the philosophical conception of *eudaimonia* and “eudaimonic well-being” to refer to the psychological conception.
- 7 My specific focus here will be on the account of innate psychological needs offered within self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci 2000a). There are other ways of carving out and describing the needs in question (e.g., Ryff 1989; Ryff and Singer 2008).
- 8 See Besser-Jones (2014: Chapter 2) for a detailed overview of these benefits.
- 9 In Besser-Jones (2014), I argue that acting well and developing virtue are also important means for satisfying the needs for autonomy and competence, albeit, in the case of competence, not the only means.
- 10 See also Kagan’s discussion of the internal/external distinction with respect to well-being (Kagan 1992: 187–189).
- 11 For an alternative line of response to this challenge, as it is directed against an Aristotelian-inspired conception of *eudaimonia* that highlights the use of practical reason, see Foot (2003: Chapter 4).

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