

Chapter 98

Foundations and Future of Well-Being: How Personality Influences Happiness and Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

This chapter begins by exploring subjective well-being and its origins dating back to ancient thinkers such as Aristotle. It discusses two main forms of subjective well-being; eudaimonic and hedonic well-being. The chapter then delves into the roles of personality, emotional intelligence, positive emotions, economics and religion in influencing subjective well-being. Measures of well-being are discussed as well as the notion of the Hedonic Treadmill and how it operates with the Set-point Theory of happiness. In addition, this chapter also presents the latest research from neuroscience and discusses how neuroscience potentially challenges personality and set-point theories. A few practical steps for subjective well-being are also discussed. Overall, this chapter covers the historical and contemporary theories of subjective well-being and explores a new positive direction on the association of personality, health and subjective well-being.

INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of happiness and wellbeing has recently gained attention among academics despite being a subject of inquiry since ancient times. Aristotle, in his book *Nicomachean Ethics*, spent a great deal discussing *eudaimonia*, which translates as ‘happiness’ or ‘well-being’. The Aristotelian concept of *eudaimonia* has provided a mechanism for recent theories on wellbeing and positive psychology. The association between personality, health, and well-being has relationship with moral philosophy and positive psychology. Traditionally psychology has focused on the negative side of human behavior patterns.

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Whereas, recent theories on well-being argue for new ground, based on human strengths. Furthermore, the study of personality traits has provided further clarity to the mechanisms of wellbeing. In addition to personality, this chapter also takes into account concepts from moral philosophy, neuroscience, and positive psychology in addressing wellbeing. Overall, the goal of this paper is to describe various approaches to wellbeing.

BACKGROUND

Subjective Well-Being

The concept of subjective well-being refers to an individual's evaluation of overall life satisfaction and feelings (Kesebir & Diener, 2008; Marks & Shah, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). It includes positive and negative evaluation of cognitive, emotional, economic and social aspects of one's life. Interventions such as positive thinking, exercise, eating well and spirituality help to promote subjective well-being (Ryff, 2014). Life satisfaction (including pleasure and enjoyment), personal development (engagement in life, social cohesion, curiosity and resilience), and general social wellbeing (positive attitudes and belongingness in social activities) are important dimensions of subjective well-being (Marks & Shah, 2005). Well-being and happiness is also associated with success in various domains of life (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005).

Origins of Research on Well-Being

The underpinnings of well-being are ancient and have existed since Aristotle's times. For Aristotle, the essential philosophical roots of *eudaimonia* (happiness) were not about feeling good or satisfying hedonistic appetites, but rather practicing and acting according with virtue, (i.e "activity of the soul in accord with virtue" (p.11) and exercising unique human potential (Ryff, 1989; 2014). Aristotle banded virtues such as courage, temperance, patience, friendliness, and honor that can lead to *eudaimonia*. Similarly, philosophers Socrates and Plato, were in tune with the good life as the result of practicing virtuous living. Aristotle was the disciple of Plato and Plato was the disciple of Socrates. Similar to Aristotle, Plato suggested that desire and doing good things leads to happiness (Plato, 1999). In addition to Aristotle's *eudaimonia*, ataraxia which is aimed at finding happiness within, existed among Greeks (Leahey, 2000). Similar to Aristotle, other Stoic philosophers endorsed happiness as the result of leading a virtuous life. The current notion of subjective well-being in positive psychology is slightly contrasted with Aristotle's *eudaimonia* despite its underpinnings of ancient views on happiness.

The research on subjective well-being in positive psychology has focused on the hedonic view of well-being. Yet the Aristotelian concept of *eudemonia* has been used by recent scholars on wellbeing (e.g. Seligman, 2002). The positive psychology notions of 'flourishing', 'wellbeing' and 'happiness' are also used in the Aristotelian view of *eudemonia*. Seligman has contributed to positive psychology through utilizing ideas from moral philosophy. Living well in terms of intellectually, and morally is associated with happiness (Spieker, 1999). A healthy life is acting virtually and employing excellence in physical and mental activities leading to sustainable happiness. Based on this tradition, practicing excellence in virtues leads to a state of well-being.

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