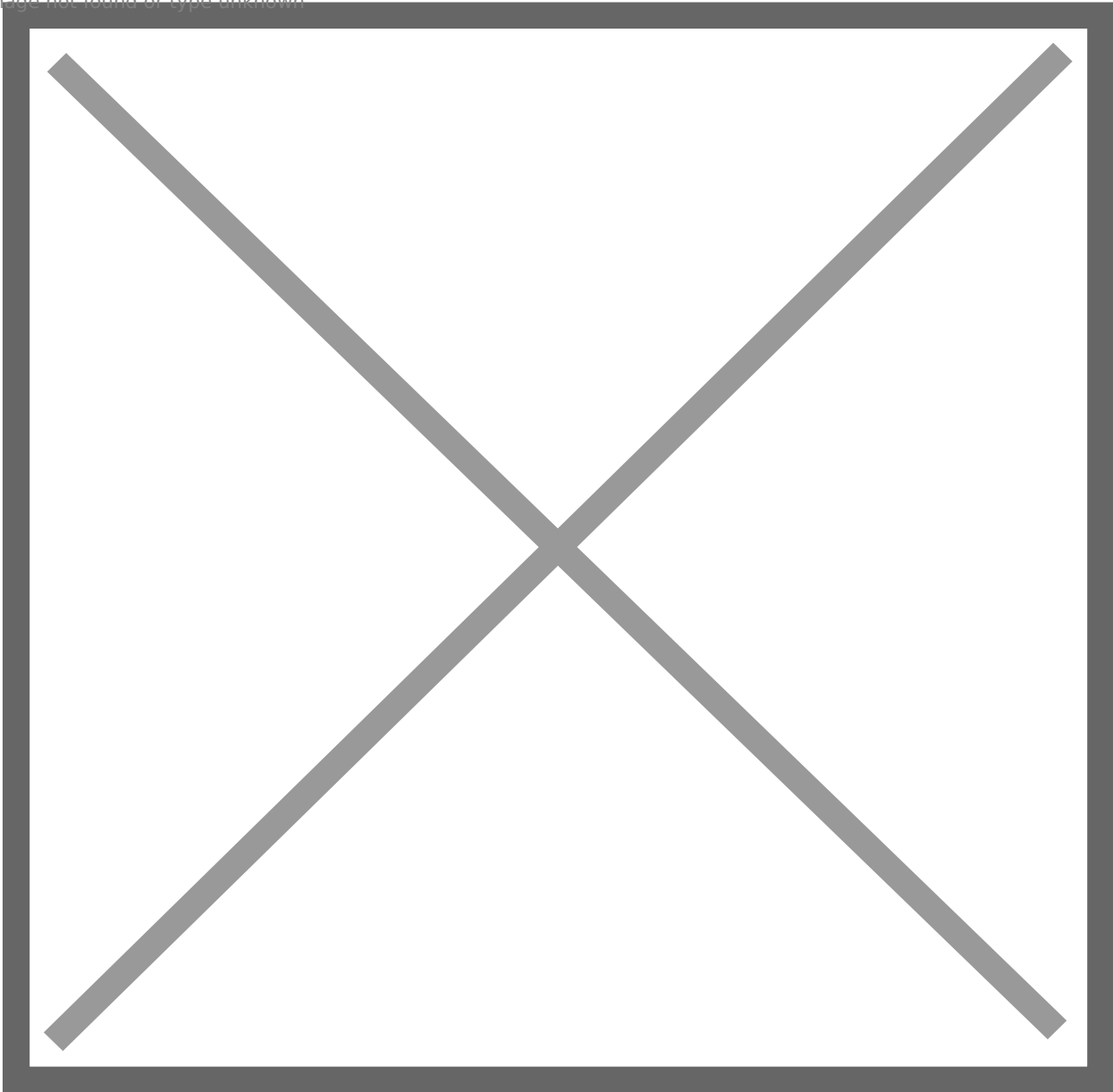


A psychologist and a functional medicine practitioner discuss happiness, eudaimonia, wellness, free will and more

Post by "Godfrey" of August 13, 2021 at 1:23 AM

This showed up in one of my feeds and could be fruitful for discussion:

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[RHR: How to Achieve Happiness and Well-Being, with Kennon Sheldon](#)

In this episode of RHR, I talk with Kennon Sheldon about how to understand and cultivate happiness in order to improve our overall health, well-being, and...

chriskresser.com

The link is to a podcast and comes with a full transcription, which is quite convenient.

I'm not sure where to begin the discussion so I'll just post this and see where it goes 🤔

Post by “Cassius” of August 13, 2021 at 4:51 AM

It appears to me from reading at least the early part of the doctors statement that he is pretty clearly in Aristotle's "good person" camp without entirely admitting it:

Quote

Eudaimonia is a tricky term. It goes back to Aristotle. People debate it in lots of different ways. But to me, it just means trying to grow and connect to be a good person. And so that's a very broad description that could apply to a lot of different things that we might do. And how do we tell if things are eudaimonic or not? Well, we've come to the strategy of it's eudaimonic if it makes you happier. If it increases your subjective well-being. And the reason we say that is that [for] almost every eudaimonic-type activity that we measure when people do it, it increases their subjective well-being. But again, we don't think that's the main thing. It's just a side effect. But it's also a very important side effect because if you start doing something eudaimonic, like you're going to express gratitude, or you're going to try to be a kinder person, it's awesome if that behavior can be reinforced by good feelings.

He's trying to avoid what Aristotle eventually admits - that being a good person makes being "good" the goal, and there is no objective meaning of "good,". It is my understanding that Aristotle is more honest and says in Nichomachean ethics that "good" can be defined only as looking to see what good men do, and so he ends up with a circular definition that answers nothing - except providing a means for an "elite" to justify their rule over the rest.

Post by “Godfrey” of August 13, 2021 at 2:01 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2144-a-psychologist-and-a-functional-medicine-practitioner-discuss-happiness-eudaimon/>

It's interesting to me because he is by his own description *not* a philosopher and is studying effective strategies. So I guess we could expect that some things would end up in one philosophical camp and some in another, and that's what he gets. Some statements sound Epicurean to me, others very anti-Epicurean. Probably there are a lot of preconceived ideas, perhaps Aristotelean, that he is unconsciously working with as well.

Post by “BrainToBeing” of December 25, 2023 at 10:05 AM

In my view, the problem when grappling with "being good" or eudaimonia is a perspective limited to self. Being "good" (in the philosophical sense) requires a much bigger centrism - one that encompasses all life, if not more. Likewise, eudaimonia is not achieved, IMO, without seeing, and respecting, the web of life much more broadly than self. If we stay within "self" we are either caught up in narcissism or at least admitting our lack of internal harmony. But, this may be just my view.

Post by “Godfrey” of December 25, 2023 at 4:56 PM

Being good or being eudaimonic seems to me to necessarily begin with the self. The only way that we can affect ourselves or others is through our own agency. However that doesn't imply that we direct our actions strictly toward ourselves.

Part of the beauty of this particular philosophy, to me, is that it places the self within a view of all that is. And it provides us with effective tools with which to increase our agency as well as our eudaimonia. Each of us grapples with measuring the limits of our effectiveness in a wide variety of realms. The sensations, anticipations and feelings provide input. The feelings in particular provide guidance: will pursuing "x" increase my agency (which is pleasurable) or make me miserable (which will decrease my effectiveness)? This guidance serves to join the self with the other in, arguably, the most effective manner.

Post by “Pacatus” of December 27, 2023 at 6:21 PM

Just thinking “out loud” here -

Assuming for the sake of discussion that we all have the same understanding of what “good” means, it seems the sort of “meta-ethical” questions are: (1) Why does one *want* to be good? And (2) - **more to the ethical point** - why ***ought*** one (anyone) ***want*** to be good? **All ethics is about how one gets from an “is” to an “ought.”**

From an instrumental point of view, an agent’s “good” behavior would aim at some goal: In order to achieve G, one ought (that is, one’s best course of action is) to do A. For the Hellenistic schools (e.g. the Stoics and Epicureans), following Aristotle, there is an ultimate goal (a telos, and end-value in itself) - which is eudaimonia (happy or satisfied well-being) - which all interim goals support, and toward which appropriate actions (virtues) are aimed. They disagreed on what is necessary for that telos. But both the Stoics and the Epicureans agree that some measure of social justice is entailed (I don’t think the Pyrrhonian skeptics go there).

The only non-instrumental view I am aware of is deontology: that is, moral rules are exogenously given - either in terms of some divine command theory, or some ideal categorical imperative (e.g., Kant - although that seems to be ultimately based on its own instrumentality: a universal desire to do one’s duty; but that may also be metaphysically given). But maybe there is some evolutionarily determined “given” (or givens) that dictates at least some oughts?

An Epicurean might say that any satisfaction about being/doing good (say, because one has followed Stoic virtues or obeyed some exogenous moral commands) just **is** (a) pleasure. And what are the grounds for suggesting that one would (or ought to) feel dissatisfied for doing so - in determining if one has acted ethically/morally? I would suggest that, from an Epicurean view, it is our evolutionary human nature that provides the guidance (in terms of pleasure/pain - both physical and mental - assessed by our sense, feelings and intuition;* and abetted by reason).

Again: All ethics is about getting from an “is” to an “ought.” And the Epicurean view (to my mind) readily includes a host of social justice considerations (consideration of “the other”) in the mix.

~ ~ ~

OK: My brain is now a scrambled omelet. 🤪

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* I am using “intuition” here - as a translation of *prolepsis* - in the sense of “a: the power or faculty of attaining to direct knowledge or cognition without evident rational thought and inference; or b: immediate apprehension or cognition” (Merriam-Webster)



Post by “BrainToBeing” of December 29, 2023 at 5:28 PM

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2144-a-psychologist-and-a-functional-medicine-practitioner-discuss-happiness-eudaimon/>

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

All ethics is about how one gets from an "is" to an "ought."

Hi Pacatus, I did previously respond to your excellent contribution above; however, apparently it was lost in the upgrade.

Anyway, I have a different framework for your quote above. I would say ethics is about getting from "me" to "we". The trouble with "ought" is "who do we consider to be authoritative in defining 'ought'?" It involves an expectation that has debatable foundation. In addition, "ought" is external - what the psychologists call "an external locus of control". Thus, it is not something that someone wants to do, but rather something that someone feels an obligation to do. I think real ethics are internal, not external. I think we achieve excellent ethics when the foundation of our behavioral choices is not "me" but "we" - involving a larger group of valued considerations. And, I think at the top of optimal ethics is a "we" that is planetary large. However, I realize that is "a bridge too far" for many.

Anyway, some other thoughts to put in the mix.

Post by "Pacatus" of December 29, 2023 at 6:27 PM

[Quote from BrainToBeing](#)

Anyway, some other thoughts to put in the mix.

Thanks, John. Yes,

That issue of "ought" has always been fraught. 😊

Post by "BrainToBeing" of December 29, 2023 at 6:58 PM

Fun discussion. Thanks for sharing your thoughts.



Post by “Godfrey” of December 30, 2023 at 1:00 AM

[Quote from BrainToBeing](#)

I think real ethics are internal, not external.

Agreed.

[Quote from BrainToBeing](#)

I think we achieve excellent ethics when the foundation of our behavioral choices is not "me" but "we" - involving a larger group of valued considerations.

Does this quote conflict with the previous quote? My take is that it doesn't: most people make choices which are concerned with matters involving themselves, as well as matters involving things outside of themselves. But the choices themselves are internal, including the choices as to which matters to pursue.

However I'm wondering if the second quote is suggesting that there's a way in which the external becomes internal. The Epicurean Canon relies on external inputs. Is this quote making the case for a faculty (perhaps neurological) in addition to the sensations, anticipations and feelings?

Post by “BrainToBeing” of December 30, 2023 at 6:16 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

However I'm wondering if the second quote is suggesting that there's a way in which the external becomes internal.

Certainly, in these philosophical discussions, a dilemma is variations of concepts and vocabulary definitions. With that acknowledged...

In my view the external becomes internal from at least the moment of birth. We learn about the outside world, and the other beings of the outside world. We begin the process of weaving our inside (me-we) relationships to all of these outside influences.

About age 2 things begin to "come to a head" (pun intended) as we begin developing in earnest our perspectives of relationship between "them" and "us" (group/tribal) and "they" and "me" (individual).

Many emotional illnesses develop when the balance points of these relationships are not good. For example, narcissism is "too much me, not enough we" in the balance of responsibilities. Neurosis develops when personal control and responsibility is "too much you, not enough me".

Of course, none of this is surprising since we are a social species. We have evolved with a group orientation. And, in group dynamics we individually work out the balance points of control and responsibility between self and other (what I call "the self-other dynamic"). All of this is "internal" even though the data for building these internal systems is predominantly based on external information and feedback.