Why being morally virtuous enhances well-being: A Self-Determination Theory approach

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Abstract

Self-determination theory, like other psychological theories that study eudaimomia, focuses on general processes of growth and self-realization. An aspect that tends to be sidelined in the relevant literature is virtue. We propose that special focus needs to be placed on moral virtue and its development. We review different types of moral motivation and argue that morally virtuous behavior is regulated through integrated regulation. We describe the process of moral integration and how it relates to the development of moral virtue. We then discuss what morally virtuous individuals are like, what shape their internal moral system is expected to take and introduce moral self-concordance. We consider why morally virtuous individuals are expected to experience eudaimonic well-being. Finally, we address the current gap in self-determination theory research on eudaimonia.

Keywords: eudaimonia, morality, virtue, self-determination theory, self-concordance, happiness.

Why being morally virtuous enhances well-being: A Self-Determination Theory approach

There are two primary approaches to the study of well-being in psychology. The first and dominant approach, the hedonic approach, focuses on the presence of positive affect, the absence of negative affect, satisfaction across different life domains, and general life satisfaction (Diener, 2000). It takes the subjective viewpoint of the person and avoids bringing objective moral criteria into the study of well-being (Diener, 1984). The second approach, the eudaimonic approach, attempts to bring moral criteria into what it means to live well. Aristotle's definition of eudaimonia (translated as 'human flourishing') features prominently in this field: eudaimonia is "activity in accordance with virtue and, if there are more virtues than one, the best and most complete" (NE I.7). We encounter similar views in eudaimonic notions in general; they rest on the hypothesis that there is a connection between what is admirable and what is pleasant or satisfying (Curren, 2013). This connection is not clear, however. At the same time, researchers in the field have different conceptualizations of eudaimonia (Huta & Waterman, 2014), which are often so divergent that they raise objections to its usefulness in the study of happiness (Kashdan et al., 2008).

In this paper, we focus on moral virtue, which is underemphasized in psychological conceptions of eudaimonia (Proctor & Tweed, 2016). Our approach draws on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to illuminate how moral virtue can contribute to well-being. While SDT shares the premise that human beings' well-being is related to some type of self-realization with other eudaimonic theories (e.g. Ryff, 1989; Waterman, 1993), what is distinctive about this theory is that it identifies *organismic integration* as the primary vehicle of growth. Organismic integration refers to the inherent tendency of the human organism to assimilate social regulations and bring them in line with previously integrated values and norms (Ryan & Deci, 2017). This

tendency can be either facilitated or thwarted by the environment. A range of positive psychological outcomes are expected if it is cultivated and expressed. With regard to well-being, the theory especially focuses on life aspirations, autonomy, psychological needs, and mindfulness, in an attempt to explain the processes of living well (Ryan et al., 2013; Ryan, Huta et al., 2008; Ryan & Martela, 2016). The focus is on the content of individuals' lives rather than the attainment of positive affect (Ryan, Huta et al., 2008).

The SDT account is broad and describes the antecedents of human flourishing in general. It does not, however, refer to a specific psychological process that links morally virtuous activity to eudaimonic accounts of well-being. In order to tease out this link, we start with a general discussion of virtue (from a neo-Aristotelian perspective), and then discuss morally virtuous activity and the development of moral virtue through the lens of SDT. We then discuss how moral virtue is connected to well-being. Finally, we talk about how our approach is situated within the current SDT eudaimonia perspective. Although we argue throughout that trying to synthesize SDT with virtue theory yields important insights for both perspectives, we will also note areas where it is less clear how to reconcile their perspectives.

An overview of virtue – Relationship to eudaimonia

A virtue is, in general, a characteristic that contributes to flourishing or living well (Annas, 2011; Russell, 2009; Snow, 2010; Stichter, 2018). Virtues such as courage, honesty, kindness, temperance, and the like are necessary characteristics for living a flourishing life. The concept of virtue is appealing because it "is the concept of something that makes its possessor good: a virtuous person is a morally good, excellent or admirable person who acts and feels well, rightly, as she should" (Hurstouse, 2003, p.13). A person with the virtue of kindness, for example, "can be relied on to behave kindly when that is what the situation requires,"

because “a kind person knows what it is like to be confronted with a requirement of kindness” (McDowell, 1998, p. 51). Importantly, virtues are acquired characteristics, which shape a person’s thoughts, emotions, motives, and behavior. Acquiring a virtue is a process that shapes how we perceive and react to situations of moral import, for we are cultivating new habits or dispositions.

To explain the nature of eudaimonia, Aristotle referred to the significance of moral virtues, such as courage, temperance, and justice (NE II-V), as well as the importance of intellectual virtues, such as theoretical wisdom (sophia) and practical wisdom (phronêsis) (NE VI). Although Aristotle treats virtuous activity as choiceworthy for its own sake, he also treats it as choiceworthy for the sake of eudaimonia, which he considers the most ‘final’ of human goods—in other words, the ultimate end (NE I.1). In this sense, virtues are a constitutive element of eudaimonia. That is, virtues are not merely means to the end of living well, but rather are constitutive of what it is to live well. For Aristotle, morality encompasses the whole of a well-lived life (as opposed to other approaches which view morality as picking out a distinct and narrow domain of behavior). Some approaches to well-being pick up on this constitutive view of the relationship between virtue and eudaimonia. For example, Fowers et al. (2010) drew on Aristotle’s notion of eudaimonia in connection with constitutive goal activity. They suggested that eudaimonic well-being (i.e., meaningful activity) and hedonic well-being (i.e., positive affect) should be construed as two different aspects of human flourishing and found that instrumental activity promotes hedonic well-being and constitutive activity promotes eudaimonic well-being.

How is virtue acquired? Aristotle, for example, claims that acquiring virtue involves a process of learning by doing, which should be familiar to us from our own experiences of

acquiring skills. Aristotle makes numerous analogies to skill acquisition in explaining how virtue is acquired. Learning a skill is a process of acquiring practical knowledge, that is, the knowledge of how to do something, like driving a car or playing an instrument. With virtue, the practical knowledge is the knowledge of how to act well, like acting honestly or kindly. Virtues, like skills, require experience and practice to acquire. You learn by doing – acquiring the virtue of kindness requires doing kind acts on a consistent basis. The possession of virtue is, also like skill, a matter of degree, and so for anyone there is always the possibility of improvement. Moral improvement, importantly, requires sufficient motivation to engage in an ongoing process of moral learning and self-improvement. That is, one needs to be strongly motivated to put effort into becoming a more courageous, honest, and kind person.

However, simply saying that people need to be 'highly' or 'strongly' motivated does not seem to shed much light on how this kind of motivation gets sustained. For example, one would expect problems to arise with sustained motivation if moral standards are viewed as merely externally imposed standards, for which failure to comply is punished. As Batson (2017, p.35) points out: "Learned in this way, such standards are apt to create obligations rather than desires – oughts rather than wants . . . They are accepted as self-standards but not as part of the core sense of self". This sort of approach is unlikely to lead people to be motivated in the right way to put effort into moral self-improvement and the development of virtue (even if they are highly motivated to comply merely to avoid being punished). In response to these issues surrounding motivation, we will argue that SDT can shed light on the processes of the development of virtue by focusing not only on the amount of motivation but, more crucially, on the type of motivation that should be associated with virtue.

Moral motivation through the lens of SDT

One of the most important contributions of SDT is the influence it has exerted in shaping the notions of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Sansone & Tang, 2021). Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity for its pure enjoyment whereas extrinsic motivation involves an external reason, an outcome that is separable to the activity itself. At the same time, not all extrinsic motivation exhibits the same properties. SDT makes an important distinction between autonomous and controlled extrinsic motivation and has shown that in an array of different life activities, from sports to work, autonomous reasons for performing activities are associated with better quality of performance (for a comprehensive review, see Ryan & Deci, 2017). The distinction between autonomous and controlled extrinsic motivation has to do with whether the person perceives the action as emanating from one's self versus from an external source.

Let us take an example of a person who is confronted with an incident of fraud by a co-worker and considers reporting to the authorities. There are many issues to consider, ranging from the consequences to the co-worker, other employees and the potential whistleblower herself to general considerations of what the right thing to do is. A deep consideration of these issues as well as a constellation of values and principles may lead seasoned philosophers to the conclusion that whistleblowing is the right thing to do. But a person who decides to engage in an act of whistleblowing may do so on the basis of a variety of motivations. Perhaps the person believes that company rules require whistleblowing and punishment will follow from not complying with the rule, or maybe instead the person hopes to be rewarded for doing so. This is different from instances where a person thinks that whistleblowing is the virtuous (i.e. the courageous, honest, just) thing to do, regardless of external rules and rewards/punishments. Though in this latter instance, as we will see from an SDT perspective, while the judgment that whistleblowing would

be the virtuous thing to do is made internally, there are still important differences with respect to how these moral values may be embedded within the self.

From an SDT perspective, there are six motivational possibilities to any action or activity. These possibilities are differentiated on the basis of the Perceived Locus Of Causality (PLOC). First, the act of whistleblowing in this case could be *amotivated*, that is non-intentional, and could result from random events rather than from the agent herself. In this case, the PLOC is impersonal. Second, it could be *externally regulated*, that is motivated by external rewards or punishments. In this case, the emphasis for the whistleblower is on what she can gain or avoid through her actions, not on her internal sense of what's just. The required course of action is imposed by external contingencies and, therefore, the PLOC is external. This is regarded as 'controlled motivation' in SDT because the PLOC is external to the person. Third, the act of whistleblowing could be *introjected*, which is a term referring to partial internalization of an initially external contingency. It is associated with internal rewards, such as pride, and internal punishment, such as guilt, and results from inadequate motivational processing of the associated values. The PLOC is still somewhat external and the motivation is considered controlled because the person experiences pressure to conform to an internal mandate, feels conflicted and does not fully endorse it.

Fourth, whistleblowing could be regulated through *identification*, which refers to an endorsement of an internalized value. In our example, identification would involve the acceptance of the value of whistleblowing and the PLOC would be somewhat internal. At this level, we see a transition from controlled to autonomous motivation, given that the PLOC is internal. Though, what is missing at this level is its alignment with other values or other aspects of the self. That is, there may still be an unresolved tension between this endorsed value and

other values the person has identified/integrated. Fifth, whistleblowing could be *integrated*, meaning that it could be fully endorsed and brought in line with all other aspects of the self. This type of motivation secures that any action is consistent with a broader range of values, assuming that the action has a moral component. Sixth, the act of whistleblowing could be *intrinsically* motivated, meaning that it could be performed for its inherent enjoyment. In this case, there has to be some type of (hedonic) pleasure involved, e.g. a challenge that a person may find satisfactory in itself. This type of motivation, though, does not refer to actions that are primarily intended to satisfy a moral criterion that exceeds the province of a particular activity (Arvanitis, 2017).

Morally virtuous behavior

How are the above motivational possibilities related to morally virtuous behavior? In answering this question, we should take into account that morally virtuous action is choiceworthy for its own sake. In other words, moral action should not be motivated by external rewards such as money, or internal rewards such as pride, or even by a natural inclination that produces pleasure and enjoyment if expressed.

It will be helpful at this point, especially for those coming from a virtue theory perspective, to note that while SDT distinguishes between ‘intrinsic’ and ‘extrinsic’ motivation, the autonomous-controlled distinction will end up mattering most for grounding moral motivation. What would be most important from the perspective of virtue theory is for moral behavior to be autonomously motivated, and preferably as ‘integrated’ (rather than merely ‘identified’) moral values on an SDT account.

While ‘intrinsic’ motivation is autonomous, it is probably unlikely for moral behavior to end up being ‘intrinsically’ motivated in the SDT sense – since this refers more narrowly to

activities we engage in because they are inherently enjoyable or pleasurable. For example, one might play video games simply because they're fun to play – this is behavior that is 'intrinsically' motivated in the SDT sense. In other words, because the activity is itself very satisfying, there's no need for any other kind of reward to motivate engaging in it. Note, however, even behavior that is intrinsically motivated in this way can, under certain conditions, become problematic, such as if one is spending too much time playing video games while exhibiting low levels of need satisfaction in other important areas of their life (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

It is also worth pointing out an important difference between SDT's view that 'intrinsically' motivated activities are done "for their own sake" (Ryan & Deci, 2020), and a virtue theory perspective of virtuous activity being done for its own sake (Aristotle, 2009). In general, an act being done "for its own sake" refers to not having instrumental reasons for the action – as in, the act is not being done merely as a means to an end. According to virtue theory, virtuous behavior is done for its own sake, because it's not engaged in as a means to some further end. In terms of the relationship between virtuous activity and living well (or *eudaimonia*), virtuous activity is not a means to the end of living well but rather is partly constitutive of what it is to live well.

While it's also the case that 'intrinsically' motivated activities according to SDT are done for their own sake, that claim is meant to apply more narrowly to those activities which are also sought out (i.e. motivated) *because* they're inherently enjoyable (as previously described). This characterization, though, does not necessarily apply to virtuous activity. While virtuous behavior might sometimes be inherently enjoyable, it need not be on every occasion. Nor does virtuous behavior need to be something that people seek out opportunities to engage in because they

enjoy it so much (as one might do with playing games). Thus, the sense in which virtuous activity is most likely 'extrinsically' (though autonomously) motivated according to SDT should not be a cause for concern (since it should not be understood as ruling out virtuous activity being done for its own sake in the more general sense).

There are further grounds for why motivation for morally virtuous behaviors cannot be intrinsic. Morally virtuous behaviors are often accompanied by the intention not to engage in immoral behavior or the intention to resist temptation. Pertinent work in SDT lies in the field of health psychology where the focus of research is on motivation both for performing health-related behavior such as taking medicine and for refraining from harmful behaviors such as smoking or consuming alcohol (Ryan, Patrick et al., 2008). Reasons for refraining from such activities cannot be intrinsic since they are associated with a separable outcome. Whereas intrinsic reasons are reasons only to engage in an activity, integrated reasons include broader considerations on the significance of related values and interests and may, therefore, include reasons for not performing an activity. In this sense, morally virtuous behavior cannot be intrinsically motivated but is best considered to be integrated.

Virtue theorists, though, might then be wondering about Aristotle's claim that virtuous behavior is pleasant (at least for the virtuous person). This claim can be true, though, without it being the case that the virtuous behavior is motivated because it's inherently pleasurable. As Annas (2008) highlights, "Aristotle is careful to specify that this does not mean that the brave person enjoys wounds and death; rather, the exercise of the virtue is pleasant insofar as it achieves its end. What the virtuous person finds enjoyable is the exercise of bravery itself, not the risks, dangers and so on that this involves." (p. 26). After all, if one values justice, and one

takes actions to help bring about a just result, achieving the end of justice should be an occasion for feeling good (though 'feeling good' wasn't what motivated the actions).

Furthermore, another implication is that we ought to be concerned if someone seemingly does a virtuous act, but does not feel good about it – or is even pained at having done so. As Annas (2008, p. 26) also remarks, "exercising virtue is something that in the virtuous person involves a harmony of feeling and deliberations, rather than overcoming inclinations". Someone who did not feel good, or worse was pained, by doing a virtuous act would seem to indicate that the person is conflicted about fully endorsing the value of that virtue. In which case, what this might signal from an SDT perspective could be either: 1) the virtue in question is one that has not been 'integrated' and is only 'identified' with (insofar as integrated regulation is on the basis of values that are congruent, rather than in conflict, with one's other values); or 2) it could signal more seriously that one's motivation is at either level of 'controlled' motivation ('introjected' or 'external').

The experience of inner conflict in moral situations does not necessarily imply lack of integrated virtue. Individuals may feel conflicted because of being caught in a moral dilemma, where they were either forced to choose between upholding two things of value (e.g. Sartre's example of someone having to choose to take care of elderly parents or going off to war to defend one's country), or faced with a choice of a lesser of two evils (rather than it being a conflict between doing something moral vs immoral). Hursthouse (2003) argues in such cases that, not only will one feel conflicted about what to do, but also that no matter the decision, there is a moral 'remainder', such that it would be appropriate for a virtuous person in such situations to still be pained (i.e. feeling remorse or regret), because either one is acknowledging the value of what had to be given up, or out of recognition of the harm they did in choosing a lesser evil.

But, insofar as a person does not feel good about doing the virtuous act merely because they would prefer to have taken a non-moral or immoral act instead, then this does imply that one isn't fully endorsing the value of that virtue.

Our discussion above focuses on the importance of autonomous motivation and, ideally, 'integrated' regulation (rather than 'identification' or 'intrinsic regulation') for virtue. As Ryan & Deci (2020, p.3) claim, "Autonomous extrinsic motivations share with intrinsic motivation the quality of being highly volitional, but differ primarily in that intrinsic motivation is based in *interest and enjoyment*—people do these behaviors because they find them engaging or even fun, whereas identified and integrated motivations are based on a sense of *value*—people view the activities as worthwhile, even if not enjoyable". In that sense, we presumably want people to still be motivated to engage in virtuous activity even when it isn't particularly enjoyable overall (notwithstanding that you could get some satisfaction from having achieved a virtuous end), and because people value being virtuous.

Moral integration and moral virtue development

So far we have argued that morally virtuous behavior is autonomously motivated and, more particularly, motivated through integrated regulation. For this type of moral motivation to be possible, the process of moral integration needs to have taken place first. Simply put, some type of moral element or structure needs to have been integrated into the self before individuals can operate with autonomous motivation on the basis of that moral element or structure. While it is relatively straightforward to see how activities pertinent to education, work, sports can be integrated, it is not as easy to see how moral activity can be integrated– as virtuous activity is much more diverse than the activities that are commonly studied within SDT.

Before we discuss moral integration, we need to probe deeper into the general process of integration. Integration is a special type of interaction between the person and the environment during which aspects of the environment are brought into the self. The process is not automatic and it is not random. Individual organisms have a natural propensity to grow according to innate tendencies. Therefore there is a specific direction that is set by those innate tendencies. At the same time, there is no guarantee that this propensity will be expressed; it can be thwarted by the environment. Decades of research have shown consistently that the propensity is facilitated when the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness are satisfied (Vansteekiste et al., 2020). For example, a student will genuinely value learning if the activity of learning is performed volitionally and choicefully, if it is tailored to the student's capabilities and if it is accompanied by fulfilling relationships. What may easily be derived from this example is that it is not the value of learning per se that leads to integration and it is not a property of the individual that drives integration either. Rather, integration occurs when there is a fit between individuals (their interests and values, their capabilities and their relationships) and a specific activity. Moral integration should be no different. A virtue-based approach may be well-suited to facilitate integration in this sense, given its view of morality as addressing the whole of a well-lived life (in contrast to approaches which foster a view of morality that is indifferent to, or even at odds with, one's interests and values).

Under need-supportive conditions, moral integration should be expected to occur when there is a fit or match between the person and virtuous activity. This fit is not determined at a specific moment but rather refers to a slow developmental process during which there is reciprocal action between virtuous activity and the developing virtue within the self. Aristotle, on this point, emphasized that it's crucial that children are raised to value virtue and cultivate good

habits, and further claimed that "We must therefore by some means secure that the character shall have at the outset a natural affinity for virtue, loving what is noble and hating what is base." (NE X.9) Aristotle made a point that virtue is a capacity that requires social development, and so it matters that children are raised with social norms that express virtue, encourage virtue development, or at least don't run counter to developing or expressing virtue. There is some overlap here with SDT's perspective that human development involves assimilating social regulations and norms into one's self, and so one's social upbringing matters for fostering virtue.

What might be a means to accomplish this? According to SDT, at the beginning of human life, the self consists of rudimentary intrinsic tendencies and is faced with crude social ideas of virtuous activity. For example, on the one hand, an intrinsic tendency that exists early on in life and has moral significance is empathy, that is the ability to experience the thoughts and the feelings of others. On the other hand, a crude social idea of virtuous activity, which individuals are confronted with at an early stage, is telling the truth. These two may match in certain cases, but it is not difficult to think of cases where the two may be inconsistent, such as the case of telling someone a painful truth. In fact, children develop early on the ability to tell prosocial lies (Nagar et al., 2020). While telling the truth might initially start being internalized, it will likely not end up being integrated in the form of a simple, stringent rule due to the complexity of human life. Integration is a long process that requires going back and forth between the self and the performance of virtuous activity. Aspects of honesty and other virtues can slowly make their way into the self through constant assessment and calibration of both intrinsic tendencies and environmental input. These aspects of virtue should not be expected to take the form of simple moral rules that are provided by society or of crude innate prosocial

tendencies. Integration will lead to a much more refined inner moral system that will be the cultivated product of both innate tendencies and social ideas of virtuous activity.

According to the above there are three basic factors for integration: a) The who - the interests and values, the capabilities and the relationships of the integrating organism, b) The what- the properties of the integrated activity, c) The how – the conditions under which integration might take place and, more specifically, whether these conditions facilitate basic psychological need satisfaction. For moral integration to be extensive and comprise a great part of the self, a person needs to have strong innate virtuous (e.g. strong prosocial) tendencies and have the opportunity to witness and engage in virtuous activity. At the same time, that person needs to experience need fulfillment in daily life, not only in the sense of becoming a passive recipient of environmental nutriments but also in the sense of actively seeking ways of psychological need fulfillment (Laporte et al., 2021). Moral virtue will grow out of a broad and long process during which the individual integrates aspects of virtuous activity and makes them part of the self. There are, however, many points where the process could be undermined. There will be individuals that have a strong control orientation (i.e. individuals who tend to focus on environmental rewards rather than integrated values – see Deci & Ryan, 1985) and will find it more difficult to integrate virtue; there will be social environments that do not value virtuous activity, so there will less chance for people to witness and engage in it; there will be environments that do not provide need support during virtuous activity. The development of virtue is a highly challenging endeavor that demands a lot from the individual and the surrounding social environment.

The complexity of moral development has implications for moral education, especially in a family and school context. While children have a built-in capacity to “take in” moral values,

the challenge for educators is to promote moral values without diminishing the curiosity, the vitality and excitement that lies at the core of intrinsic motivation and fuels the developmental process of internalization (Grolnick et al., 1997). On the one hand, SDT prescriptions concern the 'how': a social environment is conducive to moral development if it is need supportive and conveys the importance of moral values with clear rationale that is self-relevant to the child. This is achievable by taking the perspective of the child and attuning to its own frame of reference, showing empathic understanding and conveying meaningful reasoning (Vansteenkiste et al, 2018). On the other hand, SDT prescriptions concern the 'what': promoting intrinsic goals such as self-acceptance and affiliation is connected to the intrinsic tendencies of the child, whereas promoting extrinsic goals such as financial success and social recognition is connected to the contingent reactions of others (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). The self-congruence of intrinsic goals relates to higher chances of self-endorsement and deeper internalization. For optimal internalization (i.e., integration) to occur, an individual is not required to pass through the sequence of regulations specified by the SDT continuum. A person may, for example, identify with a certain value quickly and further need support may promote integration while need frustration may diminish it. Integration is not possible until a person gradually resolves possible value conflicts between identifications, so an age effect is also expected. More specifically, Deci and Ryan (2013) argue that integration is not expected until late adolescence, which is also supported by empirical evidence on the topic of moral motivation (Krettenauer & Victor, 2017).

Moral education could also help by fostering the virtue of practical wisdom. In virtue theory, practical wisdom often plays the role of helping to shape one's conception of eudaimonia, the conceptions of the constitutive virtues, as well as helping to specify what virtue requires in specific contexts. Virtue development requires some exercise of critical reflection on

one's values and practices, since nobody can rest assured that they have necessarily been raised with the right conceptions of what is virtuous, and you can't spell out in advance what virtue requires in every particular context that someone might encounter. While wisdom has not been directly addressed through the lens of SDT, SDT's concept of autonomy refers to the endorsement of values at the highest level of reflection and is associated with flexibility in thought, a disposition of reflective consideration and the ability to both differentiate and integrate factors within a situation, all of which may be associated with wisdom (Ryan et al., 2019). These qualities can be cultivated through autonomy support from an early age (e.g., Bernier et al., 2010) or thwarted in a controlling environment (e.g., Roth & Assor, 2010). They reflect the importance of practical wisdom in dealing with potential conflicts between values and facilitating integration (in terms of establishing a coherent set of values). Furthermore, there are similarities here to recent models of wisdom in psychology as a form of metacognition that deals with moral aspirations (Grossmann et al. 2020). The strategies for training metacognitive skills may be of direct relevance in teaching practical wisdom. But, given that there are competing conceptions of wisdom within both philosophy and psychology, we leave this as an area where further work would need to be done to reconcile these accounts and explore these possibilities.

Morally virtuous individuals and eudaimonic well-being

Integration is a process that can be conceptualized at the level of a situation, a domain, or a person (Ryan, 1995). It can be viewed, for example, in terms of specific work situations, such as those involving customers, it can be viewed in terms of a domain, such as academic work, or it can be viewed in terms of a person, that is, whether a person is generally integrated (i.e. across situations or domains) or not. Correspondingly, regarding moral integration, we can focus on specific moral situations, such as situations that require providing help to others, on domains that

have strong moral relevance, such as politics, or on individuals and their general level of moral integration. Moral integration is the motivational criterion we can use to assess whether a person acted well in a particular instance, whether a politician is virtuous in her work or whether a person is generally morally virtuous.

On the basis of a person-level criterion of moral integration, we can distinguish between broad categories of people. This distinction is similar to Aristotle's distinction between continent and virtuous people in his virtue-continence-incontinence schema (for a discussion, see Stohr, 2003). While the incontinent person does the morally wrong act, what distinguishes the virtuous person from the continent person who both do the morally right act is that the continent person feels conflicted about doing so (and the virtuous person does not). This internal conflict is supposed to signal that someone hasn't fully developed virtue, as the person is still strongly tempted to do the morally wrong act. Since the value one places on acting virtuously is coming into conflict with other values one holds, it would follow from the SDT perspective that this falls short of integration (and it could further be the result of merely controlled motivation).

Morally virtuous individuals are, therefore, individuals that have achieved a high level of moral integration across central activities and life domains. Sheldon and Kasser (1995) argued that integration exhibits the properties of coherence in the elements that make up the personality system (or, in the case of morality, an internal moral system) as well as congruence of those elements with the self. They also found that it is mainly congruence (in essence, autonomy as SDT conceptualizes it) that predicts positive outcomes such as vitality, positive affect and well-being. Sheldon and Elliot (1998) found that individuals are more effective in pursuing goals that are autonomously regulated while Sheldon and Kasser (1998) showed that goals that are autonomously regulated contribute to well-being. These early findings formed part of the basis of

the self-concordance model, which examines the extent to which an individual's personal goals are consistent with the self and has shown that such consistency predicts longitudinal well-being (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999).

Self-concordance is "the degree to which stated goals express enduring interests and values." (Sheldon and Elliot, 1999, p. 482). When a goal is not concordant, this negatively affects one's motivations, and reduces the contribution that achieving that goal can make to well-being. By contrast, there's a self-reinforcing cycle in adopting more concordant goals. Sheldon and Elliot (1999, p. 483-484) explain that "[b]ecause the developing interests and deep-seated values that such goals express are relatively enduring facets of personality, self-concordant goals are likely to receive sustained effort over time." So self-concordant goals are more desirable, providing more sustained motivation, leading one to put more effort into striving for such goals, and this leads to higher rates of goal progress and attainment. Thus, self-concordant goals provide higher well-being outcomes both because that cycle leads to higher rates of progress and attainment, and because there's a more substantial contribution to well-being from having a more desirable goal satisfied.

Extending the notion of integration and self-concordance to the field of morality requires that we answer what form would a moral system with self-concordant virtuous goals take. On the one hand there definitely needs to be consistency among an overarching goal of being virtuous and the values of virtuous activities. The cultural and social environment in which we are raised (parents, religion, community, friends, social media, cultural norms, and others) furnishes us with some initial ideas about what it is to live well, as well as some rough conceptions of virtuous and vicious behavior, which can help to guide us. These virtues and vices give us concrete goals to aim for and ideas about how to behave (or how not to behave) in order to live

well, but they are not necessarily coherent as they come from various sources that may contradict each other. Even if ideas about living well come from a single source, that source could be contradicting itself. Therefore, individuals are faced, early on in their lives, with several ideas about the importance of virtuous life and contradicting ideas on how to lead it. One basic challenge of moral self-concordance is to build a coherent moral system that sets the goal of being virtuous on top of a pyramidal structure and is intertwined harmoniously with the elements of virtuous life that lie beneath it. This is typically where the virtue of practical wisdom is invoked by virtue theorists, in helping to provide a specification of the virtues that is internally consistent and in reference to their constitutive role in living well.

On the other hand, these elements of virtuous life need to be congruent with the self. Simple consistency of principles in the form of structures that lie outside the self cannot reliably guide behavior (given that it would be controlled rather than autonomous motivation). Furthermore, the process of moral integration is not limited to just acquiring moral knowledge. It also refers to *emotional integration*, the capacity to manage one's emotions volitionally (Ryan et al., 2006; Roth et al., 2019), which would offer the ability to act virtuously even in the face of adverse emotional conditions. This further involves developing a congruence of moral elements with underlying intrinsic tendencies and psychological needs in a way that virtuous behavior is truly owned and endorsed by the self. On the basis of the complex nature of moral integration that brings cognitions, emotions and motives in harmony within the self, Arvanitis and Kalliris (2020) discuss moral integrity in terms of a tripartite type of consistency, cognitive, emotional and motivational consistency. This broader notion of psychological moral consistency, which can be called *moral self-concordance*, accords with a neo-Aristotelian perspective on virtue, in that acquiring a virtue shapes a person's thoughts, emotions, intentions, and behavior.

Moral self-concordance should be expected to make a positive contribution to one's well-being. As discussed above, autonomously regulated goals and self-concordant goals make a positive impact on longitudinal well-being. So, it should also be expected that moral behavior is likely to make less of a contribution to well-being when it hasn't been integrated into the self. A self-concordant moral system could be associated with actions that promote well-being on situational, domain-specific or general levels of experience (these three levels of experience and their interrelational effects on well-being have been researched with regard to need satisfaction – see Milyavskaya et al., 2013). Nevertheless, especially under a Kantian view, morality is often contrasted with the experience of positive emotions: when positive emotions are present, they characterize mostly egoistic rather than morally good behavior. A eudaimonic account does not preclude the possibility that positive emotions result from morally good behavior but instead predicts that they are likely to co-exist with morally good behavior. It is conceivable, though, that doing the right thing (for example, taking care of an ill family member) can be accompanied with negative emotions. This is exactly why hedonistic concepts of well-being do not capture well the concept of eudaimonia. The distinction between the two makes it possible to study the conditions under which they are likely to converge or diverge (Pancheva et al., 2021).

Also, to the extent that virtuous activity permeates one's life, it should make a greater contribution to well-being. Recall that on a virtue ethics approach that moral concerns are not treated as if they pertained to a narrow domain of behavior. So, in one's daily life one can carry out interactions with others more or less honestly or fairly, one can exhibit greater or lesser care and concern for relationships; one can face fears more or less courageously, indulge in pleasure with more or less temperance, etc. The contributions made to well-being from these expressions of virtue may often be small in-and-of themselves, but could be significant in aggregate over the

course of a lifetime. What is more, it is difficult to think of any human activity as entirely lacking moral implications. Consider, for instance, a mathematician, whose mathematical work does not in itself have moral standing. Inevitably, though, questions that are pertinent to her mathematical work will be raised. How much of her time will she devote to friends, how much money does she want to have, what practices does her work potentially involve, does her family need her? Her answers to these questions will determine the quality and quantity of the mathematical work that she does, and will likely require some considerations of virtue. For example, working more could mean time away from her family. Or a different line of mathematical work could potentially have a more positive impact on society. While it is possible for the mathematician to compartmentalize and keep the different domains isolated within the psyche (Ryan & Deci, 2003), full endorsement of her mathematical work requires dealing with these questions in a coherent, integrated manner, taking into account all relevant moral considerations (and likely drawing on the virtue of practical wisdom). Hence, it is likely that full integration of life activities will involve some sort of moral component.

Adding to the SDT eudaimonia literature

Part of the promise of an SDT-virtue approach is that SDT might help virtue theorists to better explain the psychological processes involved in achieving integration and integrated regulation. In other words, virtue theorists encourage people to come to value virtuous behavior, such that they actively try to cultivate virtue and express it in their daily lives. This requires integrating ideals of virtue into one's self, rather than merely following abstract moral rules. But virtue theorists have yet to offer a coherent picture of how that moral integration happens in practice, and so the hope is that SDT can help to explain the processes that promote the kind of integration that virtue theory assumes it is necessary to achieve.

Our account may also prove useful in showing how different SDT concepts contribute to virtuous activity and, therefore, to eudaimonia. Perhaps the most central concept is the concept of basic psychological needs. One might assume that integration is solely dependent on the individual, but the environment plays an important role in providing the nutriments of growth tendencies. Optimally challenging activities, positive feedback, provision of choice, warm and secure relationships are facilitating factors for organismic integration because of the need support they offer (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Need satisfaction appears so central to integration that it may be treated as a constituent of eudaimonia (Ryan & Ryan, 2016). It should be pointed out that, in need-thwarting contexts, individuals may claim need satisfaction themselves (Laporte et al., 2021; Legault et al. 2017). In this sense, a need-supportive environment does not directly contribute to eudaimonia, but it is useful for moral integration, even for setting morally self-concordant goals (Milyavskaya et al., 2014). Thus, we expect a need-supportive environment to facilitate the development of a harmonious internal moral system, which promotes eudaimonic well-being.

The question that remains open is whether psychological needs should be treated as constitutive elements of eudaimonia (as virtues are considered) or as facilitating factors of eudaimonia. Answering this question depends in part on the extent to which the SDT account of psychological needs is plausible, as well as what conception of eudaimonia we think most defensible. Because of this, it could turn out that some psychological needs would end up being accepted as constitutive elements of eudaimonia. But this outcome is not necessarily to be expected, as meeting basic psychological needs (like meeting basic physiological needs) does not have to be directly connected to expressing moral virtue and achieving eudaimonia. For example, one could satisfy a need for expressing personal autonomy by choosing actions that are

harmful to others (since this need is general in content and not the same as the moral ideal of having respect for the autonomy of others – a more deontological ideal that is closer to the notion of 'moral autonomy'). Within SDT there is ground to argue that personal autonomy is connected to moral autonomy and the two concepts may converge the more integrated an individual is (Arvanitis & Kalliris, in press). The relationship of psychological needs to acquiring virtue needs to be further elaborated through empirical research before a definitive answer can be given to whether psychological needs are constitutive elements of eudaimonia.

Whichever the answer to the question above is, psychological needs have to be taken account with regard to moral education. If you're trying to inculcate virtue, then you need to take seriously the psychological possibilities and limitations for doing this. The idea then is not to change the focus to merely meeting one's individuals needs instead of promoting virtue development, but instead to figure out how we can work with these general psychological needs (rather than fighting against them) in trying to educate for virtue. To the extent that we structure moral education in a way that also helps to fulfill these needs, the expectation would be that we are increasing the likelihood that children will be motivated to value and develop virtue (though this supportive role is also an open empirical question).

In general, SDT focuses primarily on the concept of basic psychological needs to approach eudaimonic well-being and has consistently found that their role is central in the positive outcomes found in the life activities that it studies. It is so central that their satisfaction has been directly linked to eudaimonia. What is missing, though, from a virtue theorist's point of view, is a motivational account of how moral virtue develops and how it is linked to eudaimonia. This is important given that eudaimonic theories of well-being are drawing on this ancient concept which centrally consists in exercising virtue. In accordance with a virtue perspective,

we have set the focus on virtuous activity as the primary vehicle for the attainment of eudaimonia and have argued that moral integration is intertwined with the development of moral virtue. We consider the study of how moral virtues are linked to psychological needs to be an important next step in the SDT study of eudaimonia.

Conclusion

Self-Determination Theory is one of the main psychological theories that has played a role in the psychological study of eudaimonia. It has proposed that the general motivational processes that it has identified in their contribution to well-being are important aspects of eudaimonia. We have taken a slightly different view and concentrated on moral integration, moral virtue and their relationship with eudaimonic well-being. While our perspective seems to narrow the focus, from general human activity to morally virtuous activity, we argue that the majority of human activity has moral relevance. Our approach, like other virtue approaches, considers virtue and the development of virtue as an important aspect of eudaimonia that needs to be studied further through the lens of SDT.

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