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EUDAIMONIA AND TEMPERANCE

A pathway to a flourishing life

Miia Grénman, Outi Uusitalo, and Juulia Rääkkönen

Introduction

Humankind has entered the Anthropocene Epoch, in which human activity is so massive that it leaves a lasting imprint on the entire planet and its systems. We also live in a time of transition, where the ecological crisis challenges our future on Earth. Profound questions regarding human and nonhuman flourishing are critical since human activities—particularly production and consumption—are among the root causes of the ongoing ecological crisis. Excessive consumption will eventually result in irrevocable damage, including the deterioration of human well-being and nonhuman nature (Amel *et al.*, 2017; Dasgupta, 2021; Díaz *et al.*, 2019; The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), 2019, 2020).

Nevertheless, humans are part of nature and depend on its systems. Recently, there has been a growing recognition that humans have a moral responsibility for future generations and biodiversity (Dasgupta, 2021; Díaz *et al.*, 2019; IPBES, 2019, 2020; Van Tongeren, 2003). Accordingly, the solutions lie in transforming human values and behaviour and shifting the prevailing sociocultural, political, and economic paradigms towards embracing enhanced visions of the “good life” (Amel *et al.*, 2017; Dasgupta, 2021; Díaz *et al.*, 2019; IPBES, 2019, 2020). These discussions often occur in the environmental philosophy—a discipline focusing on the ethical relationships between human beings and nature and the intrinsic value and moral status of the environment and its nonhuman components (Brennan and Lo, 2010; Van Tongeren, 2003).

What constitutes the good life is also a topical issue in current consumer research and positive psychology. Critical questions are whether and how material consumption and quality of life interrelate. These questions are further fuelled by the

ongoing ecological crisis that has raised new concerns about ethics¹ and individual and collective well-being (Mick *et al.*, 2012; Mick and Schwartz, 2012; Petrescu-Mag, Petrescu and Robinson, 2019). As a response, transformative consumer research (TCR) emerged from the need to improve human, societal, and environmental well-being, which refers to the state of human flourishing involving health, happiness, and prosperity to achieve a good life (Mick *et al.*, 2012). Similarly, positive psychology emerged to enrich the scientific study of human flourishing, primarily to articulate enhanced visions of the good life and what makes individuals, communities, and societies flourish (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

The concept of planetary well-being suggests a non-anthropocentric systemic conceptualization of well-being on multiple scales of interaction (Kortetmäki *et al.*, 2021). This concept is based on understanding well-being as a system's functional integrity allowing continuation of its existence and realization its system-specific characteristics and capacities. Planetary well-being is defined as “a state in which the integrity of Earth system and ecosystem processes remains unimpaired to a degree that lineages can persist to the future as parts of ecosystems, and organisms (including humans) can realize their typical characteristics and capacities” (*ibid.*).

The needs-based approach is integral to planetary well-being because all organisms—human and nonhuman—have specific universal basic needs that must be satisfied to have a good life (*ibid.*). In understanding human needs, marketing and consumer research have primarily been built on humanistic psychology, especially on Abraham Maslow's (1943) motivational theory and hierarchy of needs, consisting of deficiency needs (basic and psychological) and growth needs (self-fulfilment). Notably, planetary well-being focuses on shared conditions for well-being that equal Maslow's basic needs (physiological and safety needs). After these shared conditions are fulfilled, planetary well-being acknowledges the existence of species-specific higher needs that, in humans, include psychological needs (love and belonging, esteem) and self-fulfilment needs (self-actualization).

In response, we extend the needs-based approach towards moral philosophy, transformative consumer research, and positive psychology by bringing Aristotelian eudaimonia and the virtue of temperance into the discussion as a path to a flourishing life for humans and nonhumans. Eudaimonia encompasses the aim to pursue a life of meaning, virtue, and excellence (Waterman, 2008). Eudaimonia equates to “living well,” requiring that one identify one's virtues, cultivate them, and live according to them. According to a Neo-Aristotelian approach, humans should develop what is best within themselves and use those virtues to serve the common good: The well-being of others, society, and nonhuman nature (Mick *et al.*, 2012; Peterson, Park, and Seligman, 2005).

Aristotelian ideas lead us to examine how temperance (*i.e.*, the virtue of control over excess) can be achieved in everyday life, how humans can pursue the good life, and how temperance can foster human and nonhuman flourishing. Regarding planetary well-being, humans can achieve a good and fulfilling life by reducing materialistic desires, particularly consumption, that are irrelevant to basic human

needs and well-being (Kortetmäki *et al.*, 2021). However, achieving subjective well-being with significantly less material consumption may be challenging, as, in Western consumer societies, individuals' self-definition and society's collective definition are still fuelled by ever-increasing production and consumption, transmitting the message that “the goods life” is the path to “the good life” (Petrescu-Mag, Petrescu and Robinson, 2019).

Based on this background, this chapter discusses planetary well-being from the premises of Aristotelian eudaimonia, regarding TCR and positive psychology as paradigmatic lenses to address individual, social, and environmental solutions. We elaborate on whether humans can be wise and live well, seeking meaning and temperance rather than prosperity in an economy driven by global responsibility regarding planetary limits. These considerations bear relevance to reflections on the relationships among material consumption, the good life, and planetary well-being. Yet, these considerations contribute to mainstream marketing and consumer research, where such viewpoints have largely been missing.

Aristotelian eudaimonia equates to living well

Conceptions of happiness and the “good life” have been central concerns for philosophers and great thinkers—from Aristotle's time, fourth century BCE, to the present (Kashdan, Biswas-Diener and King, 2008; Ryan and Deci, 2001). Originally, the concept of well-being evolved around two Western philosophical perspectives: Hedonism and eudaimonism. Hedonism posits that the pursuit of pleasure is the greatest good and that happiness is the totality of one's hedonic moments (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Conversely, eudaimonism holds that one should pursue a life of virtue and excellence by focusing on psychological well-being connected to meaningful and valuable actions in opposition to “vulgar” pleasure-seeking (Waterman, 2008). According to Aristotle's definition of eudaimonia, true happiness is found by leading a virtuous life and doing what is worth doing, meaning that functioning well and realizing human potential is the ultimate human goal (Ryan, Huta and Deci, 2008; Waterman, 2008).

Aristotle posited that living well requires one to identify one's virtues, cultivate them, and live according to them (Peterson, Park and Seligman, 2005). Virtue is a trait or quality deemed morally good and is thus valued as a foundation of principle and good moral being (Hursthouse, 1999). Aristotle defines virtue as the excellence in human character and the mean between extremes of deficiency and excess by which human beings can accomplish their greatest purpose: The highest good of eudaimonia or human flourishing² (Sanz and Fontrodona, 2019). This notion is embedded in the concept of eudaimonia: *Eu*, meaning “good or well,” and *daimon*, meaning “true self” (Huta and Waterman, 2014). To live well, one must recognize and live in accordance with one's true self—to identify one's character strengths and choose goals providing personal meaning and purpose in life (Peterson, Park and Seligman, 2005; Ryan and Deci, 2001).

Living well consists of doing something intrinsically worthwhile rather than being in a certain state or condition, including activities actualizing the virtues of the rational part of the soul (Sanz and Fontrodona, 2019). Thus, Aristotelian eudaimonia is not conceived as a subjective state of feeling (*e.g.*, happiness) or condition (*e.g.*, life satisfaction) but as *a way of living* wherein one strives to improve by developing oneself through using one's virtues and potential, meaning when an individual is fully functioning. Similarly, contemporary psychological definitions consider eudaimonia a way of living in which individuals should first develop what is best within themselves and then use their skills and talents to serve the common good: The well-being of others and society (Mick *et al.*, 2012; Peterson, Park and Seligman, 2005). Many recent studies and examples indicate these skills and talents can be extended to the well-being of nonhuman nature (Dasgupta, 2021; Díaz *et al.*, 2019; IPBES, 2019, 2020).

The search for an understanding of human well-being has also extended to various fields of psychology. Interest in the hedonia–eudaimonia distinction has proliferated recently, especially in positive psychology, as many studies address well-being within these paradigms (Huta and Waterman, 2014; Kashdan, Biswas-Diener and King, 2008). Notably, while hedonism and eudaimonism are competing ethical perspectives addressing questions regarding the nature of the good life within philosophy, within positive psychology hedonic and eudaimonic traditions complement each other. Several researchers have argued that hedonic and eudaimonic well-being indicators tend to positively correlate and influence one another, implying they are not mutually exclusive but overlapping: Individuals high in hedonic and eudaimonic motives tend to experience the most well-being, known as human flourishing (Huta and Ryan, 2010; Huta and Waterman, 2014).

Virtue of temperance

For Aristotle, virtues represent “states of character,” including practical wisdom, prudence, justice, fortitude, courage, liberality, magnificence, magnanimity, and temperance, which are tightly bound (Young, 1988). Temperance is considered one of the most important virtues and a crucial aspect of ethical behaviour (Sanz and Fontrodona, 2019). Aristotle defines temperance as a “moderation or observance of the mean with regard to pleasures” (Young, 1988). Accordingly, temperance is commonly understood as a certain *balance* or a *golden mean* to pursue pleasures and other appealing desires for an ethical purpose. Sanz and Fontrodona (2019) further noted that temperance represents three other vital characteristics: Temperance is the most elementary and fundamental virtue, a necessary condition for moral development, and is considered self-mastery.

The renaissance of Aristotelian virtue ethics and temperance can be found in various fields. In positive psychology, temperance is considered “the virtue of moderation and control over excess,” especially regarding appetites related to food, drink, sex, and money (Peterson and Seligman, 2004). According to Peterson and

Seligman, temperance is best manifested through self-regulation (or self-control) in monitoring and managing one's emotions, motivations, and behaviour, protecting an individual against excess appetite and the excess and destabilization of certain emotions. Within TCR, temperance is viewed as helping people relocate production and consumption within sustainable boundaries, serving individual, collective, and environmental aims (Petrescu-Mag, Petrescu and Robinson, 2019). Moreover, environmental philosophy literature increasingly addresses temperance, suggesting temperance valuably contributes to environmental ethics in better understanding of how to interact with nature and our natural surroundings (Van Tongeren, 2003).

To this end, temperance is currently one of the most essential virtues not only because it promotes human flourishing (individual and collective) but because it sustains nonhuman flourishing as an end itself. Nevertheless, nonhuman flourishing is necessary to human beings as we are part of nature and depend on its systems (Gambrel and Cafaro, 2010; Petrescu-Mag, Petrescu and Robinson, 2019).

From temperance to sufficiency through societal transformation

Aristotelian virtue ethics leads us to discuss temperance in more detail concerning the doctrines of TCR. Due to the ongoing ecological crisis, global consumption must be dramatically reduced, requiring significant changes in human values and behaviour, as well as global business structures and policies (Díaz *et al.*, 2019; Gorge *et al.*, 2015; Petrescu-Mag, Petrescu and Robinson, 2019). Temperance can allow humans as well as societal, political, and economic structures to strike a balance between the well-being of human and nonhuman nature (Garcia-Ruiz and Rodriguez-Lluesma, 2014).

Various streams of literature within TCR reflect the core idea of temperance, yet different concepts are used to address this notion: Moderation, simplicity, and sufficiency. Garcia-Ruiz and Rodriguez-Lluesma (*ibid.*) discuss *moderation*, referring to the golden mean. The golden mean entails that underconsumption and overconsumption should be avoided to achieve the balance between these extremes. Gambrel and Cafaro (2010) address *simplicity* as a conscientious and restrained attitude toward materialism. This attitude dictates not only decreasing consumption but redirecting it towards nonmaterial consumption. By confining consumption within the planetary limits, humans simultaneously make conscious choices that can cultivate excellence in human character (Mick *et al.*, 2012; Peterson, Park and Seligman, 2005).

The concept of *sufficiency* emerged at the beginning of the 2000s, influenced by Ivan Illich's (1973) notion of "austerity," promoting an ecologically sustainable but socially enjoyable way of living (Gorge *et al.*, 2015). Gorge *et al.* (*ibid.*) discuss sufficiency to achieve a lifestyle nurturing human flourishing and the well-being of nonhuman nature. Compared to moderation or simplicity, sufficiency represents a more radical form of consumption limitation. Sufficiency calls for coercive measures, such as decreasing overconsumption, eventually lowering our standard of living.

Sufficiency is not considered a choice but a situation of adaptation and resilience. To this end, sufficiency refers to the consumption level fulfilling our basic needs and strongly challenges our current ways of consumption—or consumption itself.

A systemic transformation reaching the entire society is inevitable to address the current ecological crisis. An immediate need for fundamental system-level changes exists, as the human impact of life on Earth has sharply increased since the 1970s, driven by the demands of a growing population with rising income levels. Western societies, which maximize the flow of material contributions from nature to keep up with increasing consumption and a consumerist lifestyle, are built on conceptions and beliefs separating humans from nature and ignoring the planetary limits. Accordingly, humans must change their future trajectories through transformative action, addressing the social, economic, and technological root causes of nature's deterioration (Díaz *et al.*, 2019; IPBES, 2019).

The notion of *societal transformation* has become topical in academic discussions related to the recent ecological crisis (O'Brien, 2018; Sharma, 2007), including transforming values, beliefs, worldviews, and knowledge; the systems and structures, sociocultural, political, and economic relations; and technologies, practices, and behaviours (Schipper *et al.*, 2021). According to O'Brien (2018), societal transformation can occur in three embedded and interacting spheres: Personal (values and worldviews), political (systems and structures), and practical (technologies and behaviour). Individual and collective values and worldviews shape how the systems and structures are viewed and influence what types of technologies and behaviour are considered possible to achieve positive change.

Regarding the ecological crisis, the personal and practical spheres signify a shift in human values and behaviour from consumerism to the current quest for a good and meaningful life: Integrating meaning into life; striving for harmony and balanced living; embracing a more sustainable way of living, and valuing morality, ethics, and empathy—all highlighting the importance of Aristotle's timeless virtues (Grénman, 2019). By contrast, the political sphere denotes a shift from excessive production and unsustainable business structures to an increasing emphasis on societal and environmental responsibility addressing the planetary limits (*ibid.*; cf. Sharma, 2007).

Societal transformation requires sufficiency thinking, promote a good and meaningful life, and provide possibilities for a more ecologically sustainable way of living as the “ethics” of the good life instead of merely regarding sufficiency as a source of economic disadvantages, slower growth, and profit loss. Societal transformation can also lead to a *flourishing life* that considers and embraces human and nonhuman well-being by acknowledging Earth's limits.

Can humans be wise and live well?

Focusing on achieving a flourishing life through “functioning well” is common to Neo-Aristotelian eudaimonia and planetary well-being. The latter pursues the possibility of functioning well for all organisms by satisfying basic needs

and acknowledging the intrinsic value of human and nonhuman well-being. Conversely, eudaimonia seeks optimal human functioning through virtues and excellence and doing something intrinsically worthwhile. In eudaimonia, functioning well refers to the quality of the activity; eudaimonia occurs when an individual is fully engaged in activities congruent with one's deeply held values (Ryan and Deci, 2001). While these activities may be effortful or challenging and include a negative effect in the short term, they often yield greater overall well-being for an individual and nonhuman nature in the long term (Mick *et al.*, 2012; Peterson, Park, and Seligman, 2005).

The severity of the ongoing ecological crisis challenges humanity to take urgent actions concerning transforming human values and behaviour: Moving from hedonic happiness to living well. This shift already occurs in Western societies while excessive material consumption continues expanding, leading to the critical question of whether humans have the wisdom and capacity to live well—to practise temperance and self-regulation for the greater good (Grénman, 2019; Mick and Schwartz, 2012). Culture and communities have crucial roles in encouraging and supporting individual choices through shared values, norms, and traditions. Societal and political priorities, decisions, incentives, and regulations can shape the cultural conditions where individuals can make their own choices towards sufficiency while avoiding societal marginalization (Gambrel and Cafaro, 2010; Gorge *et al.*, 2015).

In advancing the TCR approach, Mick and Schwartz (2012) discuss wisdom—a superior, complex, and desirable form of knowledge—by drawing from Aristotle's conception of practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is essential for organizing other virtues to pursue human flourishing and the common good. In this discussion, *balancing* is critical, reflecting Aristotle's emphasis on the golden mean: Wise solutions and behaviours that are not extreme but master large entities. Finding the right balance depends on one's values, the relative importance of their various interests, and the resulting consequences (*ibid.*). Due to the ongoing ecological crisis, balancing should no longer concern just the individual level but address the planetary one.

Balance is also central in temperance and sufficiency thinking. However, while temperance is practised through moderation and self-regulation (Peterson and Seligman, 2004; Sanz and Fontrodona, 2019), sufficiency is not considered a choice but a situation of adaptation (Gorge *et al.*, 2015). Thus, ethical discussion on whether humans should be persuaded or forced to transform their current way of living is necessary. Planetary well-being and sufficiency thinking call for reducing the current consumption level and secure life on Earth. Conversely, Aristotelian eudaimonia and temperance rely on special human characteristics: The ability to make moral judgments and practise moderation through self-regulation to become a moderate human being and serve the greater good.

Forming ethical character and basing one's actions on virtues necessitate taking responsibility for the well-being of other humans and nonhuman nature. Aligning with the TCR approach, living well implies adherence to humane values, building awareness of the consequences of one's decisions, and recognizing the capacity to

make conscious choices, contrasting current consumption practices: Unnecessary habitual purchases, following the crowds, or passively adapting to the mainstream market's easy solutions. Due to the ecological crisis, humans must consider societal transformation to manage the major changes required. Likewise, not only transformative consumption but transformative markets and marketing are needed, given the scale of and time available for the needed changes. Mainstreaming the core idea of TCR to conventional marketing would imply that marketers replace fuelling material consumption with developing their business to serve individuals' pursuit of well-being and wise ways of living.

In the era of ecological crisis, we can sell the idea of refraining from consumption and trading our current standard of living for the good of the planet. By contrast, the TCR approach implies voluntarily returning to the basics and achieving the good life and human flourishing through eudaimonia. While the end goal of planetary well-being and eudaimonia is the same—a flourishing life—both “pathways” to achieve such a life require a renaissance of the virtue of temperance.

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Notes

- 1 Ethics refers to a set of standards of right and wrong indicating what people must do, distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour (Petrescu-Mag, Petrescu and Robinson, 2019).
- 2 Notably, the Aristotelian view represents one sub-type of virtue ethics: not all virtue ethics approaches closely connect with human flourishing (Hursthouse, 1999).

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