A Model for Good Life

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Abstract   How could we define good life in a way that the result would be acceptable for the majority of people independent of their personal beliefs, attitudes, and position in society? To solve this problem we need a systematic, convincing procedure that integrates the subjective assessment of individual's well-being with objective evaluation of the society's well-being. The share of happy or very happy citizens of a society appears to be a simple and intuitive metric. However, it overlooks two important aspects. First, while happiness is a focal part of a good life it does not take into account all essential aspects of life in a balanced way. Secondly, the share of happy people totally ignores the condition of less happy people. The basic logic of our approach consists of four parts. First, we introduce four elements of self: feelings, narratives, compassion, and actions. Secondly, we define the concept eudemony to help determine the meaning of better and worse life. Thirdly, we design a simple mathematical model to illustrate a feasible relationship between the elements of self and eudemony. Finally, we discuss the consequences of the framework, in particular, how we could utilize the framework to assess the merits of a society from the viewpoints of an individual, society, and economy.

Introduction

Modern societies tend to be fully consumed by economic considerations and actions. Nevertheless, we are human beings with fundamental needs and wishes that have not disappeared after the development of the modern economy. Thus, it is not feasible to assess the successfulness of life based only on economic metrics. This simple remark is valid on both individual and societal levels. Individuals struggle with their desires for material goods and their inner need for a meaningful life. On the level of the society, the same dilemma appears between Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the overall well-being of citizens. Although there is a positive correlation between GDP per capita and average quality of life (see, e.g., Kilkki 2012: 32), correlation does not mean causality. Consequently, an intervention that increases the GDP of a country would not necessarily increase the overall well-being of citizens. This is a fact that seems to be more widely accepted today than several decades ago. On a broad scale, this change is part of a long term process in which the well-being of human beings has become more important than the success of any social system such as a clan, church, nation, or firm (Elias 1991; Benkler 2006; Pinker 2011; Judt 2013). As a salient indication of the change, several winners of the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences have stressed the need to put more emphasis on the well-being of humans in the case of economic decisions, see e.g., Kahneman et al. (2006), Phelps (2007) and Smith (2008).
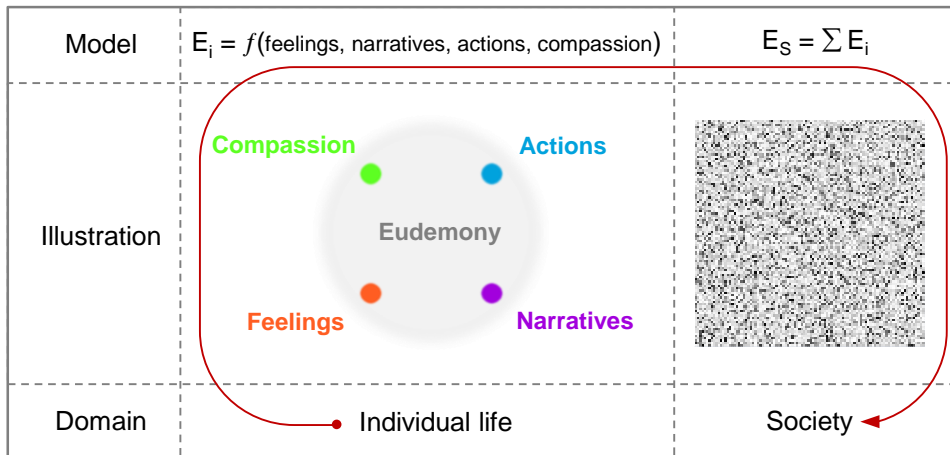
Enormous amounts of (more and less scientific) literature has been written during the past two and half millennia addressing both the life of individuals and the general properties of society. Still, it seems that there is a lot of confusion about the relationship between what the members of a society desire and what is desirable for the society as a whole. This essay, while acknowledging the great challenges of the task, aims at providing a systematic examination of the

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relationship between individual life and the well-being of the society. Our approach is based on a simple division between individuals and the society as illustrated in Figure 1 and a simple mathematical model.
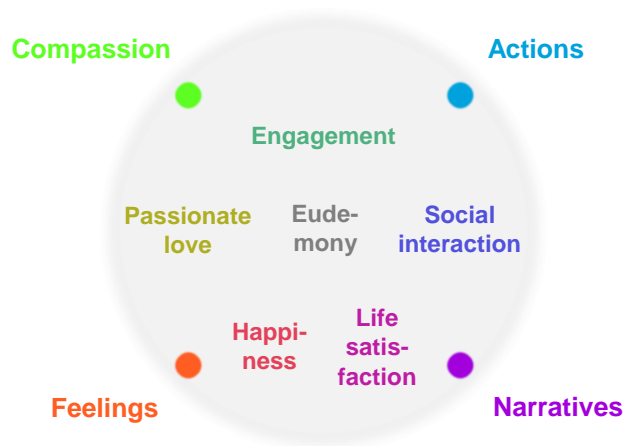

| Model | $E_i = f$(feelings, narratives, actions, compassion) | $E_S = \sum E_i$ |

Compassion Actions
Eudemony
Feelings Narratives

| Illustration | | |

| Domain | Individual life | Society |

Fig. 1. The structure of this essay from individual life trough mathematic models to the society.

Our method is founded on three fundamental assumptions. First, we divide the self into four principal elements and assume that it is possible to reliably assess the state of each element on a scale from -3 to +3. Secondly, we assume that it is possible to estimate the overall quality of life of a person on a linear scale from 0 to 100 either by means of the four elements of self, or by means of another feasible method. We call the result of this estimation "the eudemony of a person" (E_i in Figure 1). Thirdly, we assume that the linearity of the eudemony scale makes it possible to define the well-being of the society as the average of the individual eudemonies.

If these assumptions are valid, then it is possible to compare different societies with different rules, laws, belief systems, and institutions in a fairly objective manner. At the same time, the model leaves a lot of freedom for every individual to define what she wants to pursue in her life and to decide what is desirable for her without directly dictating any specific pattern of behavior or actions. Accordingly, the life of a member of the society can be colorful and diverse as illustrated in Figure 1. In contrast, the overall state of the society looked at from a distance shall be depicted on a gray-scale in order to enable meaningful comparisons between societies. For instance, in Figure 1, the society becomes better when the average grayness becomes lighter. Still, abstract numbers and figures hide the diversity of human life, and provide only a cold calculation which makes any utility model suspicious (see e.g., de Waal 2013: 184). The following account based on eudemony aims at alleviating at least some of those concerns.

Four elements of self

The approach of this essay is to consider the question of good life first from the perspective of the everyday life of an ordinary person. First, we introduce the four principal elements of self illustrated in Figure 2: feelings, narratives, compassion, and actions. We do not claim that these four elements are clearly separable, fixed blocks that together form something that can be called self. Instead, we believe that, to use Thomas Metzinger's (2009: 208) expression: "The self is not a thing but a process." The definition of self as a process permits us to make a vital observation: while the chosen elements of self are deeply interwoven with each other, the elements can be seen and used as different vantage points that direct the thinking and the behavior of a person in dissimilar ways. Moreover, the concept of process makes it natural to argue that while various parts of the process are necessary for the functioning of the whole process, excessive development of any individual part of the process will likely be detrimental for the complex system called self.

Fig. 2. Self as a process with four principal elements (feelings, narratives, compassion, and actions), five other elements, and eudemony as a unifying element.

The simple model of self shown in Figure 2 is one of numerous possible constructions to illustrate human life. Instead of four elements, one may even try to cope with two elements, for example, emotions (often discussed under the term happiness) and the meaning of life are required elements of any reasonable model of self. However, we agree with Marvin Minsky (2006: 318): "…when thinking about psychology one should never start with less than three different parts or hypotheses!"

The specific problem with including only feelings and meaning is that they both tend to treat life primarily as an individual endeavor instead of a common effort shared by a group of people. Therefore, we assert that a third element is needed to embrace the overall nature of human beings; here we call this element *compassion*. However, it seems that even with these three elements something integral is missing. A person might have a highly respectable inner life with positive emotions, a great personal narrative, and strong compassion towards others and still not have any real accomplishments—hence the forth element of *actions*. These four elements make it possible to create and discern a vast number of hues of life. Happiness, satisfaction, interaction, engagement, and love, are among those (as depicted in Figure 2).

This set of four elements is similar to the five measures employed by Martin Seligman (2011: 12): positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationship, and accomplishment. Compared to those measures we aim at defining kinds of ultimate elements. Feelings refer to the pure momentary feelings without any interpretations or reflections. Narratives concern primarily an individual life without any need to consider the lives of other people (unless the person herself wants to consider others). Compassion refers to unconditional compassion or sympathy towards all other human beings. Actions occur in reality based directly on the choices made by the person and reflect more or less accurately the content of other three elements of self.

So far, we have not said anything about what is good (or bad) for an individual person. In principle, a person may prefer any kind of combination of elements. However, it is feasible to assume that there are some natural rules that define what people normally prefer. Positive feelings are preferred over negative ones, and a good story is, well, better than a bad story. We are so deeply social beings that a total loss of humanity may have devastating consequences (Aronson 2011: chapter 6; Frankl 1985; Pinker 2011: chapter 3). Actions that are able to better reflect the ideals of other elements are preferable to actions that are in an obvious conflict with other elements of self. The reason for the conflict might either be external (that is, a person is forced to do something against his own will or values) or internal (that is, a person's actions are based on self-betrayal or on a flawed model of reality). Lastly, we may argue that a kind of complete individual shall contain all four principal elements at least to some degree.

In order to claim anything specific about the relationship between the elements of self and the overall well-being of a person, we use the concept of *eudemony*. Sir Charles Goodeve (1960) seems to be the first scientist to apply eudemony in scientific context. However, Stafford Beer was the main promoter of eudemony as a concept to understand the fundamental objective of human society (see Beer 1975). Later, Beer (1983) explained eudemony somewhat puzzlingly as "I-like-it-here kind of happiness, that does not prejudge the nature of the well-being that the people's will seeks to

express," while Oxford English Dictionary defines eudemony briefly as "happiness, prosperity." Even though we use eudemony in the same spirit as Goodeve and Beer, our aim is to define it more systematically. To achieve this goal, we define the following principles for eudemony (see Kilkki 2012: 49):

1. A larger value of eudemony always means a more preferred state of life.
2. When a person considers her life totally worthless and hollow, her eudemony is 0.
3. When a person considers she has been able to realize the full potential of her life, her eudemony is 100.
4. The same amount of change in eudemony, say, from 50 to 60 or from 80 to 90, is equally valuable for the person.

These principles mean that eudemony is close to the definition for well-being given by Haybron (2008: 29): "a normative concept that concerns what benefits a person, is in her interest, is good for her, or makes life go well for her." The additional property of eudemony used in this essay is that eudemony is assessed on a linear scale.

While the four elements of self form a diverse and multidimensional system, eudemony is purposefully a one-dimensional and linear scale that describes what state of affairs are more (or less) preferable from the viewpoint of the person herself. Thus, eudemony can be illustrated by a gray-scale instead of a combination of colors.

Relationship between eudemony and the elements of self

Now that we have defined the four principal elements of self. The next step is to make the following definitions for the parameters describing the state of each element:

$F =$ feelings as evaluated by the subject. A similar approach is The Happiness Seismogram developed by Baucells and Sarin (2012: 32-36). It should be noted, however, that the effect of nonlinearity of human assessments must be carefully considered when the momentary feelings are added up.

$N =$ narratives as evaluated by the subject taking into account both the meaning of the narrative for the person him/herself and the meaning of the narrative for other people *assumed by the person*.

$C =$ the deepness of compassion, that is, the strength of emotional, honest concern about other people and the ability to see other human beings as ends in themselves instead of merely instruments. This is the hardest element to assess. However, we may assume that measuring compassion is possible if the person has no reason to be biased and the assessing process is carried out appropriately (see, e.g., Sprecher and Fehr 2005).

$A =$ the consistency of real actions, that is, how well everyday actions are in harmony with the inner life of the person.

These four elements are intentionally subjective. In contrast, the "objective" value or quality of a person's life depends substantially on the effects the person's life has on other people's lives. The philosophy of our framework is, however, that those external consequences are fully included in the eudemony of other people. In order to avoid duplicated effects in the model, every individual eudemony assessment must be subjective. Thus, the eudemony of a person is not a measure of the "objective goodness" of the person, but the person's subjective evaluation of her life. The social goodness of a person can then be evaluated based on the impact the person has on the total eudemony of the society. Note that the social impact is not limited to the intentional actions performed by the person, but also includes unintentional effects, for instance, emotional contagion, ignorance of others, and serving as a low or high reference point. To some extent, our model is similar to conventional subjective well-being models (Layard 2010; Bowling and Windsor 2000; Binder 2013). However, our 4-element model puts more stress on factors that are often ignored from subjective well-being studies, particularly compassion and actions.

The scale (called here the survey scale) used for assessing the state of each element is from -3 to +3. In a descriptive form the scale could be: as bad as can be, very bad, bad, alright, good, very good, as good as can be (similarly as in Bowling and Windsor 2001). Our objective is to formulate a credible model to connect the survey scale results and the eudemony (E) defined on a scale from 0 to 100. As a first assumption we presume that if $F = N = C = A = -3$ then $E = 0$, and if $F = N = C = A = +3$ then $E = 100$. These assumptions make the extreme values ($E = 0$ or 100) unlikely, if not unreachable, at least in normal conditions. A value below -3 on the survey scale can be considered so critical that that element of life does not anymore support the continuation of person's life. Note that an extreme pain can be worse than what an ordinary person is able to imagine before experiencing it.

The crucial assumption here is that the eudemony for an individual person (E_i) can be estimated by means of the weighted average as follows:

$$E_i = w_f F_i^* + w_n N_i^* + w_c C_i^* + w_a A_i^*$$

where $w_f + w_n + w_c + w_a = 1$, X_i^* denotes the value of element X on a linear scale from 0 to 100 (similar to the eudemony scale) where $X = \{F, N, C, A\}$. As to the conversion between the survey scale (X) and the linear scale (X^*), we use the following function:

$$X^* = \frac{100\alpha(X + 3)}{(\alpha - 1)(X + 3) + 6}$$

Consequently, we have one free parameter (α) to describe the convexity of the conversion between survey and linear scales. If $\alpha = 1$, the conversion is linear, while for larger values of α, the conversion is convex. In the following numerical examples we use value $\alpha = 9$ as illustrated in Figure 3.
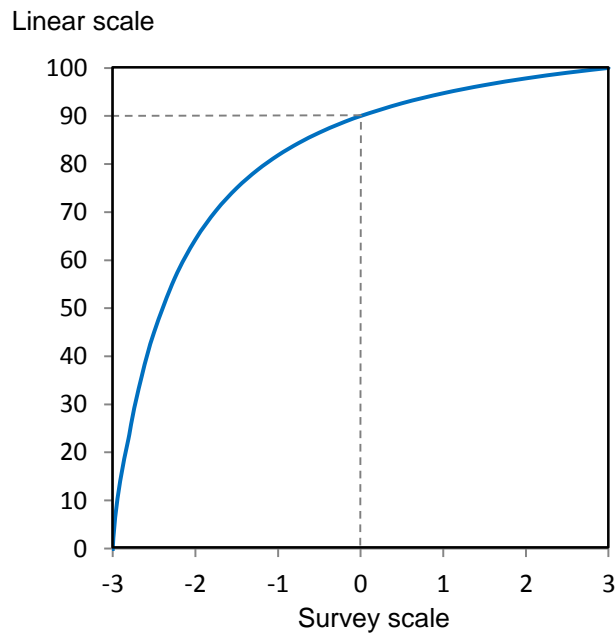
Fig. 3. Conversion between survey scale and linear scale for $\alpha = 9$.

It is not apparent, however, that the weights for different elements would be the same for each person and independent of the life situation of the person. For instance, we tend to pay more attention towards those aspects of life that are in very bad condition than towards those that are in better condition. This is obvious if we consider first a normal situation in which a person experiences most of time neutral and positive emotions and only rarely strong negative emotions. In contrast, if the same person feels most of time a strong pain, anger, or despair, it will be almost impossible for the person to pay attention to anything else. Thus, we might assume that the weight for the momentary feelings is higher than in a normal situation. However, we do not want to complicate the model by adjusting the weights; instead, we increase the convexity of the conversion in a way that takes into account the effect of increased attention towards very bad elements of life. Naturally, the weights can also vary between people. As an example, historian Tony Judt obviously has a larger weight for the narrative part of self, because according to Judt (2013: 263): "a badly written history book is a bad history book." Without a solid narrative there is no past.

When $\alpha = 9$, the eudemony of a person with +1 (good) for each of the elements (feelings, narratives, actions, and compassion) is 94.7. This value for eudemony is likely higher than what would be the result, if the same person directly assesses her well-being on a scale from 0 to 100, because we usually do not use linear scales to assess our experiences. Thus, we assume that people are unable to express their well-being on the linear eudemony scale without the assistance

of a more intuitive scale. Furthermore, the model implies that the following two periods of life would be equally preferable for a person:

- Ten months of life with alright quality ($F = N = C = A = 0$, $E = 90$).

- One month of as bad life as can be ($F = N = C = A = -3$, $E = 0$) in the middle of nine months of as good life as can be ($F = N = C = A = +3$, $E = 100$).

These two periods would produce an average eudemony of 90. Extreme cases are, however, notoriously hard to imagine and assess in a realistic manner. Thus, the application of the four elements of self can assist in this task and ensure the integrity of the eudemony assessment.

Modeling society

If we trust in the feasibility of the eudemony concept, the well-being of the society can be defined by the summation of individual eudemonies. Note particularly that eudemony provides (by definition) an exact and unequivocal measure for the state of an individual citizen, even if we acknowledge that the "true" eudemony of a person is difficult to measure. In addition to the four principles used to define the eudemony for an individual person, we introduce two additional rules to define the total eudemony of the society:

5. No one except the person herself is able to judge his or her eudemony.
6. The same change of eudemony of a person (for instance, +10), always has the same effect on the society's aggregate eudemony.

As a result, the eudemony of the society is the sum of individual eudemonies:

$$E_S = \sum_{i=1}^{N} E_i$$

where N is the number of members of the society. The average eudemony (E_S/N) is then a logical metric to compare the quality of different societies. Note particularly that the summation of individual eudemonies does not require that individual persons must agree on the relative importance of different aspects of life. In this sense, different opinions do not entail any conflict on the level of total eudemony. Thus, we disagree with Robert Nozick (1997: 260) who claimed that "there is the possibility of objective conflict of shoulds [in the case of a similar model as the eudemony model]." The eudemony model claims that the standard for a good rule ("should") is whether the rule is able to increase the total eudemony of the society. And that is the sole criterion independent of the individual opinions and values behind the individual eudemonies. Still, the design and acceptance of rules in a society with large variations in fundamental values (described by the weights of elements) is more difficult than in a society with lesser variations, which means that some level of harmonization of values likely is beneficial for the society.

A number to illustrate the well-being of the society, say 92, incites hardly any feelings. The result might be somewhat more intuitive when the result is converted back to the survey scale (the result would be +0.37), but still it is hard for us to imagine the enormous amount of people that are hidden behind a single number. Another approach to describe the situation is the illustration in Figure 1 which includes 10000 people in a way that a white dot means a eudemony of 100 and a black dot means a eudemony of 0. However, a small black dot is hardly an effective way to incite strong feelings, in particular compared to a narrative about a miserable or tremendous life.

Our eudemony framework can be seen as a method that enables us to think about the nature of moral truth that we should follow, that is, the second project in the classification by Sam Harris (2010: 49). In principle, we may state that an action, rule, or institution that improves the total eudemony of the society is morally good. The eudemony framework can also be seen as a consequentialist approach (Shafer-Landau 2012: 117) in the sense of "what is right is whatever produces the most good" where good is measured by the total eudemony of the society. The eudemony framework has similar properties as the Kaldor–Hicks efficiency (Hicks 1939; Kaldor 1939), if we assume that the utility scale is defined by eudemony instead of a monetary metric like income.

However, at the same time we have to be aware of the fundamental dilemma of modeling: if human interactions are treated as a system, then that system tends to automatically objectify those human interactions (e.g., Stacey 2010: 76). Therefore, a result of a mathematical model can rarely convince the majority of people, when the result is at odds with their intuition or personal interests. As a possible solution, the result could be explained for the general audience as a part of a credible narrative that creates the desired feelings and appeals to the compassion of the people. Our framework with the four elements of self can also be used for that instructive purpose.

Good and bad lives

What can we say about the nature of a good life based on the framework sketched in this essay? Many people believe, understandably so, that life is an individual pursuit. A person may select happiness, satisfaction, love, faith, prosperity, success, personal flourishing, or serenity as the main goal of her life relying on either an established ideology or her own contemplation. Consequently, it seems impossible to define any objective criterion for assessing the true quality of life.

Here we have approached this dilemma from two perspectives. First, we consider the four principal elements of self largely as results of biological and cultural evolution. All these elements of self are integral parts of most human beings, although in variable portions. Every individual feels something. Every individual tries to makes sense out of the environment where he is living; and narratives are the human way to attain that goal. The objectives defined by the narratives are pursued by means of concrete actions. Because we are social animals, a life without at least minimal compassion would likely become a disaster.

In a way, it is more illustrative to present examples of bad life—because all instances of good life likely resemble each other. However, it would be useful to define a reference point achieved by person that can be called satisficer based on the term introduced by Herbert Simon (1996: 27). Barry Schwarz (2004: 78) gives the following definition: "satisfice is to settle for something that is good enough and not worry about the possibility that there might be something better." In the context of this essay that something is life. Thus a satisficer is satisfied with his life when all elements of self are on the level of +1 as presented in Table 1.

Many world-class performers seem to struggle with their personal life. Tiger Woods is an example from sports and Michael Jackson and Whitney Houston are recent examples from the music business. The history of entertainment business in general is full of similar cases. The actions of world-class performers are on the highest possible level ($A = +3$) both in their own and other people's standards. We may also assume that their great achievements and affluent life-style create positive feelings ($F = +2$). In contrast, it seems that the fundamental meaning of their life will often be lost. The performers might have had great but superficial narratives that could not guide their life ($N = -1$). Moreover, the complete focus on developing their professional career and enjoying the fruits of fame and prosperity may lead to a permanent lack of compassion towards other people ($C = -2$). When all these assumptions about the elements of life are put together, the result will be eudemony of 88.4 as shown in Table 1. That is not a devastating figure, but still below zero on the survey scale. The main issue, then, is how the performers can improve their well-being. If the performer puts even more emphasis on his own achievements and momentary feelings, the consequences can be damaging.

Accomplishments are also important in many other fields of human activity. In the area of science, history, economics, and psychology credible narratives (assessed by peers) are so important that it is difficult to maintain a strong reputation for a long time without true merits. It seems that in business the situation less convincing, because money is money almost independent of its source. Enron Corporation is a notorious example. Its reported financial condition was sustained by systematic and planned accounting fraud. As to the persons involved in Enron's scandal, Kenneth Lay was the main character. He has been used as an example of an extreme taker by Adam Grant (2013: 27) and as an example of a person with fixed mindset by Carol Dweck (2006: 119). In our framework, we may depict Lay's life during the heyday of Enron as follows: in his own opinion his feelings, personal narrative and actions were on a very good level (+2) while it seems that he did not really feel any noticeable compassion towards other people (-3). Whether the imbalance due to the lack of compassion bothered him at all, is hard to assess. However, the eudemony framework suggests that total lack of compassion would reduce his eudemony to a somewhat negative (-0.9) level on the survey scale. What is more certain is that after the bankruptcy of Enron and ensuing lawsuits his happiness collapsed. He died of a heart attack before imprisonment. Our estimation of his situation at the end is depicted in Table 1. Note that we assume that he gained some small improvement in compassion.

Then we can consider a less serious case: a wannabe artist with great ambition and belief in himself, without any real accomplishments or other justification for his personal narrative. This state of affairs likely leads to a serious conflict between inner life and real accomplishments. Therefore, even if his personal narrative is great in principle ($N = +2$) and the unfounded beliefs may create some positive feelings ($F = +1$), the outcome will remain mediocre ($E = 88.9$) because of the serious inconsistency between actions and beliefs ($A = -2$).

Finally, as a real example we may consider the case of George Price portrayed by Oren Harman (2010). Price lived an extraordinary life. In his notable career in population genetics, he tried to solve the quandary of altruism through mathematical models (Frank 1995). His conclusion was that, according to evolution theory, altruism could evolve within groups but only at the expense of increased aggression towards outside groups. At this scientific phase of his life, he behaved very selfishly. However, during the last years of his life he turned into a devout Christian, and spent all of his wealth, time and energy helping homeless people while neglecting his own needs. He committed suicide at the age of 53, probably partly because of the disappointing results of his great sacrifices. Table 1 aims at describing Price's life in the light of our model at his altruistic phase: extreme compassion ($C = +3$) with proper actions ($A = +2$) and narratives ($N = +1$) cannot compensate the total inability to satisfy his own needs ($F = -3$). The resultant eudemony (63) is far above 0 but still the situation is very sensitive to further degradation of feelings. We may indeed assume that -3 is not the ultimate state, but even lower values are possible in extreme situations. If we assume that the feelings element fell below -3.5, Price's eudemony fell below 0 as depicted on the last row of Table 1. In general, the description for -3 on the survey scale (as bad as can be) could be reformulated as "so bad that below that level the element of life would not support the continuation of life."

Table 1. Estimation of eudemony for different types of people
F: feelings, N: narrative, C: compassion, A: actions
Parameters $\alpha = 9$, $w_f = 0.35$, $w_n = 0.30$, $w_c = 0.15$, $w_a = 0.20$ [1)]

Case	F	N	C	A	F*	N*	C*	A*	E	Survey scale
Satisficer	+1	+1	+1	+1	95	95	95	95	94.7	**+1.0**
Performer	+2	-1	-2	+3	98	82	64	100	88.4	**-0.2**
Kenneth Lay	+2	+2	-3	+2	98	98	64	98	83.2	**-0.9**
at the end	-2	-2	-2	0	64	64	64	90	69.4	**-1.8**
Wannabe	+1	+2	0	-2	95	98	90	64	88.9	**-0.2**
George Price	-3	+1	+3	+2	0	95	100	98	63.0	**-2.0**
at the end	-3.5	+0	+2	+1	-225	90	98	95	-18.1	**-3.1**

[1)] These values reflect our intuition of real life; however, we do not claim anything about what the weights ought to be, except that negative weights appear unfeasible.

The main motive for presenting these examples is to demonstrate that a set of simple formulas is able to produce credible and illustrative results. Overlooking any principal element of self will gradually weaken the balance of life. Without an appropriate correcting action, the fate of the person could be similar to the fate of Michael Jackson, Kenneth Lay or George Price.

Of course, history is full of tyrants with much worse actions than the examples in Table 1. Hitler, along with Mao, Stalin and Pol Pot, would score very low on the compassion element of life (maybe even below -3 in the survey scale). However, their evilness is not due to their low personal well-being but due to the devastating effects they had on other people's lives. Thus, the main application of the eudemony framework is not to assess the well-being of dictators but the well-being of the society. In particular, the framework reminds us of the fact that the well-being of a society in which a large share of people is living in unbelievably cruel conditions as described by Frankl (1985), Solzhenitsyn (1973-1978), and Pinker (2011) cannot be properly measured by the share of happy people.

While it is easy to condemn evil dictators, there are people that are much more controversial. For instance, many notable artists and politicians have scored very low in the compassion element, because they were solely focused on their personal career. Low compassion and selfish narratives most probably had a significant negative effect on the

well-being of their families and other near-by people. Still, if the person's objective actions are valuable enough he will get high score in the eudemony metric, that is, they might have been good for the society. Possible candidates for this category include Bertrand Russell, Mohandas Gandhi, and Pablo Picasso.

But even then there is a hard dilemma: "Is the eudemony of the closest people of a notable person somehow more important than the eudemony of other people?" The answer given by the eudemony framework seems be "no." However, we need to distinguish between short term and long term effects. Indeed, if the notable person neglects his family, he likely reduces at the same time his compassion towards all people in general, which in turn, will have detrimental long term effects on other people as well. Besides, famous people often work as role models. Thus, when assessing the merits of notable persons, the four elements of self can used to assess the interaction between the notable person and his closest friends and family members. There are natural feedback loops within all of the elements: the feelings, narratives, compassion and actions that a person radiates to his closest people are reflected back to him. Therefore, it is particularly important that those people that affect the well-being of a large number of people maintain good relationship with his or her closest people in all elements of life.

What can an individual do then to improve her life? In the current society, deeply involved in economic pursuits, we need to develop our skills to choose options that serve our inner needs, compassion and long-term objectives instead of choosing options that may provide immediate monetary payoff or pleasure. It would also be beneficial for a person to create plans and rules for herself that serve the purpose of balancing her life. The person should also consume her precious willpower for realizing these plans and for obeying the rules and gradually internalize them (see Baumeister and Tierney 2011). Even compassion is something that can and should be developed systematically. As a practical example, Paphos seminar (see Saarinen 2012) provides a method to improve the balance of self together with other people.

Good society

If we accept the principles of eudemony, a good society is simply a society that provides, on average, high eudemony for its members. One of our integral claims is that in eudemony analysis, every individual member shall be given equal weight. Still, some people may disagree with us. For instance, it is natural to think that the leaders or other eminent or competent people are more important than people with lesser abilities to contribute to the overall well-being of the society. Similarly, it may appear natural that if a person does not support the well-being of the society, his eudemony is less important than other peoples. However, we shall make a clear distinction between weights, rules, and outcomes.

Equal weights do not necessarily imply equal rules or equal eudemony among all members of the society. The maximizing of average eudemony may mean that the leaders of a community are treated in a special way leading to a situation in which the well-being of the leaders will become higher than the well-being of other people. This difference, and accordingly the preference rule defined by the society, is justified if *the adoption of the rule* increases the average eudemony of the society. Similarly, if a certain level of inequality in wealth distribution provides the highest average eudemony (because of optimal incentives to work for the society) then that level of inequality is desirable for the society.

This conclusion is contrary to various other definitions of the best possible society. Some hard-core economists wanted to maximize GDP; John Rawls (1999) wanted to maximize the lowest well-being among the members of the society, while Nietzsche wanted to maximize the flourishing of the Übermensch. However, it shall be noted that our eudemony analysis tolerates the existence of different opinions about the nature of the best possible society. The analysis even takes into account the (negative) effect of the possible conflict between reality and the desired state of affairs on the well-being of those people. In general, every personal opinion has an effect on the eudemony of the society, but only through that person's own eudemony.

We prefer to maximize the average eudemony according to principles of eudemony because of the fundamental impartiality of the model. The principles of eudemony ensure that the changes in different parts of the eudemony-scale, from bottom to top, are equally valuable for the person himself. Thus, people with different levels of well-being are treated in a fair manner. For instance, a change from -2 to -1 on the survey scale has almost the same effect on the eudemony scale (+17.5) as a change from -1 to +3 on the eudemony scale (+18.2). It would typically be easier to increase the eudemony of a person from -2 to -1 on the survey scale than to increase the eudemony of another person

from -1 to +3 on the survey scale, particularly if we require that there should not be substantial, negative effects on other people's lives. Consequently, the proper application of the eudemony model in a society likely results in only moderate differences in well-being.

Yet there is an alluring argument against the principles of eudemony. One may genuinely believe, even after all the discussion above, that the society should reward those people that deserve reward, and punish those people that deserve punishment *regardless of any eudemony calculations*. For instance, if a person has become rich by lawful means, the person *deserves* his wealth and is entitled to use it any suitable way. We do not refute that this idea might have positive effects on the personal narratives and momentary feelings of many (typically affluent) people. However, those inner and positive effects are already included in the eudemony calculation together with all other consequences of the actions selected by the person when pursuing wealth. Furthermore, the eudemonic calculation shall incorporate the motivational effect of getting a fair compensation for greater effort and contribution, and correspondingly, the preventive effect of punishments. It is important to note that we shall avoid duplicate procedures when considering issues and situations that create strong immediate feelings.

What could be said about the proper rules and institutions? The society should support the development of a balanced life for individual members without overemphasizing any specific element, be it hedonistic pursuit of happiness, grand narratives of the individual or the nation, or extreme compassion (in the manner of George Price). Moreover, a permanent, deep conflict between the fundamental value and the realized actions in a society will likely have a considerable negative effect on the well-being of the members of the society. Thus, all institutions of a society (especially the economic ones) have instrumental roles: they are good only as far as they increase the average eudemony of the society.

For example, what economists believe about the merits of economic activities, has only a minor role in an appropriate analysis of the overall well-being of the society, because the opinions of economists are likely biased towards the positive aspects of economic activities (compared to the results of more objective eudemony analysis). Note that the same bias occurs in all fields of human activities, be it politics, arts, religion, or science because of the natural characteristics of social systems (see e.g., Luhmann 1995). One of the objectives of the eudemony analysis is to minimize the effect of those biases when assessing what is good for the society.

Conclusions

This essay provides a framework to answer the question: What does good life mean from the perspective of an individual and the society? The approach is based on a simple model that includes four principal elements of life and details the relationship between an individual life and the society. The intermediating concept between individual and society is defined as eudemony; eudemony describes the level of well-being of a person on a linear scale. Because eudemony is an abstract concept and the processes of the human mind are mostly nonlinear, it is more reasonable to divide the challenging task into subtasks. The four principal elements of self—feelings, narratives, actions, and compassion—serve that purpose.

An important characteristic of the presented model is that imbalanced life typically leads to a lower eudemony than a balanced life in which the state of all elements is at least moderate (that is, at least -1 on a scale from -3 to +3). In contrast, when the state of one element falls below -2, that element starts to draw more attention in the mind of the person and, thus, makes it difficult to improve the overall well-being of the person by improving the state of other elements. In other words, more pleasure cannot solve the problem of emptiness in life, and an additional explanation for selfish behavior (a kind of improved narrative) cannot solve the social problems induced by a lack of compassion.

Eudemony is a concept that enables the analysis of the well-being of a society in an objective manner. In principle, it does not limit in any way the criteria and methods used by an individual to assess and decide what makes life good for her. However, in practice we believe that it would be difficult for most of us to achieve high eudemony without reaching at least a moderate level on all main elements of life.

The main use of eudemony is to design the rules and institutions of the society in a way that they serve the lives of the members of the society as well as possible. In short, as well as possible means as high average eudemony as possible. Because of the non-linearity between material scales (income, wealth, GDP, etc.) and the eudemony scale, excessive

disparity between the members of a society is hardly ever justified from the eudemonic viewpoint. Still, moderate differences in wealth are likely beneficial for the society because these differences motivate people and satisfy the intuitive feeling that good work should be rewarded appropriately. Still, it might be better to encourage co-operation primarily through increased compassion and trust between people than by providing individual incentives. Good life is, instead of a collection of individual efforts towards wealth or happiness, a joint pursuit involving all principal elements of self.

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