

## Eudaimonia, Self-Transcending and Learners' Intrinsic Motivation

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### Abstract

*This paper was an attempt to briefly explore the theoretical background of the concept of intrinsic motivation, specifically within the context of education. We tried first to revisit and relate early Greek terminologies, such as eudaimonia, and more recent concepts, such self-transcending to intrinsic motivation. We then gave details about the most important intrinsic motivational aspects within the modern framework of Self-Determination theory. We finally opted for two exemplary researches that showed the extent to eudaimonia (or self-transcending) was associated with intrinsic motivation from the perspective of Self-Determination theory.*

**Keywords:** *intrinsic motivation; Self-Determination Theory; education; self-transcending; innate needs.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant traits of childhood could be intrinsic motivation. All children are supposed to go through the process of playing, exploring and discovering. The result is new learning every day. They tend to touch and handle things; they are equipped with the necessary natural qualifications that make them observe, examine objects and people, and try. While playing with water, for instance, they explore contact with a liquid, and may experience the incident of wetting their clothes. They learn that water can change states, whether temporarily or permanently or, whether of fabric or another thing. A second example is that any child likes to observe

adults (e.g. parents); scan their way of talking and behaving; imitate them subsequently. In a different example provided by Ryan (2020), children, in fact, are doing a great deal of learning when manipulating the sand. They are doing physics, and learning about social relationships and the world around them as a whole.

Children do all these things for the sake of having fun and growing. They are intrinsically motivated to find enjoyment through playing and learning new social behaviours. Recently however, research has demonstrated that intrinsic motivation is decreasing through time, and mainly during adulthood. The parents, and also the school of course, tend to interfere and (un)intentionally correct their children's behavioural manners, by offering them external rewards (e.g. gifts, money, games, clothes, extra-points). In fact, they introduce them to extrinsic motivation. Due to the increasing responsibilities and duties over time on the one hand and on the other, because of the quality of today's media information, individuals are likely to lose their intrinsic motivation. Rather, they are becoming slowly extrinsically motivated.

The aim of this article is part of a longitudinal and educational study which seeks to convert the classroom challenges into opportunities to help the learners to “get back” their “childhood's intrinsic motivation”, and therefore engage them in their learning process. So, this paper is only a beginning; it will shed light on the historical background of intrinsic motivation and its basic aspects. It will initially review a number of definitions formulated earlier mainly about eudaimonia and self-transcending, that could significantly relate to intrinsic motivation. It will next tackle this type of motivation together with other types within the framework of self-determination theory. In another section, two research studies will be outlined to show how the Self-Determination Theory, and intrinsic motivation in particular, is both theoretically and empirically intertwined with eudaimonia (or self-transcending).

## **2. Daimon**

Socrates, who was a street Philosopher, used to say to his students, whenever they asked him a question, that he needed first to check with his true self, or see with his inner *daimon* before providing them with any response (Strecher, 2020). Indeed, he used to consult his inner daimon before getting back to his students who liked his way of teaching them. They even used to perceive him as that golden figurine inside the terracotta sculptures that were made by the Greeks at that time. The golden figurine was a god-like self and referred to as the daimon by the Greeks. Plato, who was one of Socrates's students, believed in the importance of preserving the daimon in a well-ordered state within the self. If so, he added that this well-ordered daimon would make the human lead a well-fulfilled and happy life (Strecher, 2020).

### **3. Eudaimonic vs Hedonic**

“Daimon”, or true self, constitutes the root of another term, “eudaimonic”, being popular in ancient Greece, and even more lately. Aristotle, who was a student of Plato, opposes eudaimonic to hedonic, and says that they are two different forms of happiness. While the eudaimonic form, or eudaimonia as employed by the latter philosopher, entails the regular consultation of the inner true self, the hedonic form has to do with the pursuit of prestige, status, pleasure, possessions (e.g. car, house) and all kinds of external attractiveness: hedonia, in other words, associates happiness with materialism. Aristotle also clarifies the fact that all human beings have a mixture of both eudaimonic and hedonic orientations. The difference is that some individuals conceive happiness and/ or well-being more eudaimonically whereas others think of it more hedonically. Yet, Strecher (2016) confirms that eudaimonic happiness/ or well-being is more necessary for the humans as it can lead to a more harmonious life. Recent developments in the areas of happiness/ or well-being are placing emphasis on the importance of this fact in the human life: many philosophers, cognitive scientists and psychologists have jumped to such a conclusion while contrasting eudaimonically happy individuals with hedonically happy individuals (see Strecher, 2016).

### **4. Self-Transcending vs Self-enhancing**

Another today's alternative terminology for the classical Greek eudaimonia vs hedonia is respectively self-transcending vs self-enhancing (Strecher, 2020). If eudainomically thriving individuals possess a self-transcending thinking which reflects the moral values, hedonically thriving folks have a self-enhancing purpose seeking for statusful position, fame and wealth. Aristotle actually expresses his opposition to those who exaggerate in their hedonia (or hedonism) since, he explains, hedonic outcomes, unlike eudainomic ones, are only short term, and therefore temporary (Strecher, 2016). In recent years, there has been an increasing scientific interest in the effects of both self-transcending and self-enhancing-oriented behaviours on the human physiology and psychology.

According to Strecher (2016) and on the basis on a number of research studies, it was found out that participants with a self-transcending-oriented behaviour were physiologically healthier compared with those participants with a self-enhancing-oriented behaviour. In a different research study, participants with a self-transcending aspirations were more concerned with positivity, higher self-esteem and life satisfaction, and led a more meaningful and successful career. By contrast, those with self-enhancing aspirations went through more anxiety, showed further health issues, and displayed a less meaningful career. In this study, we try, as mentioned earlier, to display the relation that prevails between eudaimonia, self-transcending and intrinsic motivation according to the Self-Determination Theory. So, what is meant by this theory, and what are its scientific and academic preoccupations?

## **5. Self-Determination Theory**

The behaviourist theorists tend to consider that individuals are stimulated by extrinsic motivations (Lamprinou and Paraskeva, 2015). In education, many instructors believe that they can achieve motivation of their students by offering them presents, extra-points, certificates, labels or other rewards. According to motivation theories, such as Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci and Ryan, 1985) however, teachers can definitely gain their learners' interest in class in this case but only as long as

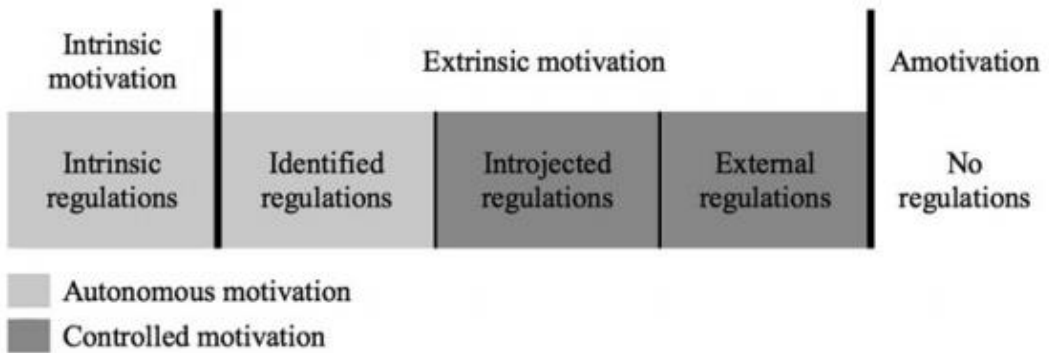
they give them such rewards. Once they stop rewarding, their students will quickly lose this interest. SDT could be defined as follows,

“Self-determination theory (SDT) is an empirically based, organismic theory of human behavior and personality development. SDT’s analysis is focused primarily at the psychological level, and it differentiates types of motivation along a continuum from controlled to autonomous. The theory is particularly concerned with how social-contextual factors support or thwart people’s thriving through the satisfaction of their basic psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy” (Ryan and Deci, 2017, p. 3)

Just like Aristotle, SDT theorists view the impact of such hedonic rewards as temporary while they opt more for intrinsic motivation as the latter has long-term positive effects on the learner. To increase students’ intrinsic motivation in class, the learning activities need to be a source of fun for them and to meet their internal satisfaction (see 5.4).

### **5.1. Types of Motivation**

Individuals are, in fact, either motivated or unmotivated. When motivated, they can be driven by extrinsic motivation or intrinsic motivation. If not, amotivation takes place. Deci and Ryan (2004) illustrates the types of motivation as follows,



**Figure 1:** Types of motivation (Deci and Ryan, 2004) (Source: Roy and Zaman, 2017, p. 489)

Intrinsic motivation, as shown, is based on intrinsic regulations whereas extrinsic motivation rests on extrinsic regulations. As mentioned on the diagram, there are no regulations as for amotivation. In education, amotivated learners display no interest in a given instructional practice. By contrast, the learners who are motivated intrinsically or extrinsically are stimulated to learn a new behaviour or develop a certain skill, but to various degrees. It happens that the learners with extrinsic motivation get the desire of transferring extrinsic regulations and re-orienting them to their inside. This process is known as internalisation. Before tackling the latter process, let us first talk about some differences between intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation.

## 5.2. Intrinsic Motivation vs Extrinsic Motivation

Someone who is motivated is someone who is moved into action, or to do something (Ryan and Deci, 2000). The process of motivation is psychological such that it energises and activates an individual's behaviour to reach a goal (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Roy and Zaman, 2017). It is one of the most important aspects that are well considered by scholarship in the field of education. Unlike motivated learners, those who do not display any drive and/ or ambition are, as indicated above, described as being unmotivated. Motivation, in reality, varies from very little to great one such that the instructor needs to consider this variation while interacting with the

learners (Ryan and Deci, 2000). One may always raise the question of how much the self and/ or others can be motivated. The two types that have been remarkably under intensive research are intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation is a natural human desire to learn. It arises when the learner, for example, is interested in a piece of knowledge s/he is expected to assimilate during a specific time. This individual who is intrinsically motivated exhibits pleasure and enjoyment in the activity s/he is learning. Intrinsic motivation type is fully autonomous from external conditions. It is seen as ideal and is targeted by experts and educators. The intrinsically motivated student moves into action to certainly achieve positive learning outcomes (see Roy and Zaman, 2017). Yet, extrinsic motivation manifests a clear variation in this autonomy ranging from self-regulation to external control (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Rewards, punishments, feelings of shame can be typical examples of external conditions that exert an outside pressure on the individual and make him/her under control as a consequence (Roy and Zaman, 2017). Unlike intrinsic motivation, educators are displaying less interest in the controlled types of extrinsic motivation.

### **5.3. Internalisation and Extrinsic Motivation**

The diagram above shows clearly that motivation forms a continuum between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and is a heterogeneous paradigm. SDT relies on such an illustration to examine the different manifestations of internalisation with regard to extrinsic regulations and explains why one type of motivation or another has taken place. This internalisation can provide a better understanding of one's behaviour as it hits the continuum, and as well can visualise the individuals' performance. As shown by the figure, extrinsic motivation is further divided into three sub-types: external regulations, introjected regulations and identified regulations, from right to left. Obviously, motivational internalisation does not occur in the case of external regulations (Deci and Ryan 2004) (reported in Roy and Zaman, 2017). In the classroom, for instance, the learners with external regulations

perform a given activity not because they are motivated, but “... in order to avoid punishment or get rewarded.” (Roy and Zaman, 2017, p. 490).

On the other hand, internalisation may take place in the case of introjected regulation, but just to a limited degree. Here, the extrinsic hints do not form yet sufficiently part of the learner’s inside. “People are thought to be driven by introjected regulations when they perform an activity to avoid shame or prove competence (Vansteenkiste et al. 2009).” (Roy and Zaman, 2017, p. 490). As for identified regulations, they still form a sub-type of extrinsic motivation, although they look like intrinsic regulations. The difference is that for individuals with identified regulations, the nature of the activity and its outcomes stimulate the learner’s performance of that activity, unlike those learners with intrinsic regulations which are an inner stimulator for performing the activity. Identified regulations also arise when there is a personal conviction of the significance in getting involved in a particular activity.

Another classification is integrated within the above diagram has to do with controlled motivation and autonomous motivation. The former includes mainly external regulations and introjected regulations as they share similarities in commanding the behaviour and giving it a particular outer direction. By contrast, the latter motivation embodies identified and intrinsic regulations which are far from external control and provide the individual with opportunities of personal choice and selection. Another distinction between controlled motivation and autonomous motivation is that people who are autonomously motivated feel psychologically comfortable with themselves and perform well. In other words, they experience the meaning of internal satisfaction and well-being. On the other hand, controlled motivation is highly characterised by temporariness and disappearance once the reward is eliminated (see 5.2).

#### **5.4. Basic Motivational Needs**

SDT supporters have come to the conclusion that three psychological basic needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness, require fulfillment during the performance of an activity, action or practice to reach one’s self-



determination, and experience flourishing, growth and well-being. This can occur particularly in association with autonomous motivation (Shi and Cristea, 2016). If a controlled motivation reaches the degree of satisfying together these innate needs, this means that internalisation of its external regulations has been an effective and a successful process. On the continuum (Figure 1), this motivation is interpreted as approaching intrinsic motivation (Roy and Zaman, 2017). If not, it will, on the contrary, tend to prevent the satisfaction of the innate needs, and thus prohibit the occurrence of any type of autonomous motivation (Roy and Zaman, 2017). To recapitulate, SDT has come to promote and foster intrinsic motivation by putting emphasis on the satisfaction the three psychological needs. So, what is the meaning of autonomy, competence and relatedness?

### **5.4.1. Autonomy**

It is volitional in the sense that a person is not forced by someone else to behave in a certain way. It is one internal need responsible for one's own meaningful choices, or an inner approval to perform an activity or something else; if something is done, it is meant personally to be done; there is a certain willingness behind an activity to be performed. The degree of autonomy increases only if someone is equipped with choices and freedom to pursue one's specific goal. Engagement subsequently takes place as a result of one's meeting own preferences. Here, the engaging individual is becoming motivated intrinsically. The less choices are available, the more external control over performance ensues, and the less intrinsic motivation manifests (Peng et al, 2012). Educationally, the fulfillment of the autonomy need opens the door to the learner's growth and wellbeing.

### **5.4.2. Competence**

It is the belief in one's ability to move into action successfully or it is the perception of one's performance as effective (Roy and Zaman, 2017). Someone is said to be competent if s/he is confronted to a challenge and/ or experiences mastery. In the case where satisfaction of the competence need is reached, the person's enjoyment and fun rank high: Increasing fulfillment of competence need correlates, not with negative but rather, with positive

emotions while performing a particular activity (Peng et al, 2012). “Research also showed that need satisfaction of competence was positively associated with more self-determined exercise regulations, which was also positively correlated with exercise behavior(u)r, attitudes, and physical fitness (Wilson, Rodgers, Blanchard, & Gessell, 2003)” (Peng et al, 2012, p. 180).

### **5.4.3. Relatedness**

It implies the need for the feeling of involvement and affiliation to a particular group (see Lamprinou and Paraskeva, 2015; Roy and Zaman, 2017). According to SDT, belonging to a specific community results in regular contact and linkage among its members which will probably lead to increase in intrinsic motivation, and therefore wellbeing (Shi and Cristea, 2016; Peng et al, 2012). “... research shows that people tend to internalize external regulations quicker and more thorough when they come from friends or family, a phenomenon caused by the feeling of relatedness (Ryan and Deci 2009).” (Roy and Zaman, 2017, p. 494). Illustratively, employees form teams at the workplace, so they need to satisfy their feeling of relatedness by interacting regularly and developing a group identity. The same could be said about the learners in both physical and virtual classrooms. They are expected to construct strong bonds among themselves if they will to flourish and move forward in their learning processes and practices. Learning in constant isolation will, but, lead to boredom and probably amotivation at the end. Reaching the need satisfaction of relatedness is a source of enjoyment and pleasure among the learners. Group work allows interesting competition or cooperation in the classroom depending on the instructional objectives (Peng et al, 2012).

## **6. Self-Determination Theory and Eudaimonia**

In their article entitled “Living Well: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective on Eudaimonia”, Ryan, Huta and Deci (2008) suggest a model that has to do with eudaimonia in relation to SDT. They describe eudaimonic (or self-transcending) living as being featured by four characteristics which are,

- targeting intrinsic outcomes, such as relationships, family, health, and personal development, for their own sake more than extrinsic goals, such as status, power, money, and fame.
- feeling volitional, autonomous, and self-directing more than heteronomous or forced.
- experiencing a high level of awareness and mindfulness.
- fulfilling the basic innate needs. i.e. autonomy, competence, and relatedness through one's performance and behaviour.

The first three characteristics of eudaimonic living, following the same authors, allow satisfaction of the basic innate needs to take place, so they "... have their positive effects of psychological and physical wellness..." (Ryan, Huta. and Deci, 2008, p. 139). Compared with hedonic living, individuals who are leading a eudaimonic living have generally a positive social behaviour that allows them to establish healthier relationships and stronger bonds within both the family and society (Ryan, Huta. and Deci, 2008).

On the other hand, a research was carried out in a physical education setting by Behzadnia and Ryan (2018) to examine the actual relation between motivation and eudaimonic and hedonic (or self-enhancing) orientations. It was found out that hedonic orientations could be sub-divided into hedonic pleasure and hedonic comfort. Another conclusion was that eudaimonic orientation was more associated with intrinsic motivation, identified motivation and introjected motivation, and wellness compared with hedonic pleasure orientation and hedonic comfort orientation. A further deduction was that hedonic pleasure orientation and hedonic comfort orientation were rather more connected to external regulations, in addition to the fact that hedonic comfort was also linked to amotivation. Still another finding was that eudaimonic living, or eudaimonic living together with hedonic orientations lead to more positive wellbeing results in comparison with hedonic orientations only. The last conclusion was that increase in eudaimonic living gives rise to intrinsic motivation which in turn lead to positivity and well-being.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

In this paper, we have tried to approach intrinsic motivation from the theoretical point of view. We have dealt with that concept historically, in connection to a number of classical philosophical terminologies and definitions. Eudaimonia or self-transcending, is more linked to autonomous motivation including intrinsic motivation within the framework of Self-Determination Theory, unlike hedonism, or self-enhancing, which is more associated with extrinsic motivation and amotivation, and this is according to research in the field. As a future perspective, we will try to explore intrinsic motivation in other different contexts and specifically higher education. In the latter setting, we hope for finding teaching/ learning methods, and more precisely digital technology tools that will energise students and make them more intrinsically motivated to engage in their learning processes.

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