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The Folk Concept of the Good Life: Neither Happiness nor Well-Being

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Abstract

The concept of a good life is usually assumed by philosophers to be equivalent to that of well-being, or perhaps of a morally good life, and hence has received little attention as a potentially distinct subject matter. In a series of experiments participants were presented with vignettes involving socially sanctioned wrongdoing toward outgroup members. Findings indicated that, for a large majority, judgments of bad character strongly reduce ascriptions of the good life, while having no impact at all on ascriptions of happiness or well-being. Taken together with earlier findings these results suggest that the lay concept of a good life is clearly distinct from those of happiness, well-being, or morality, likely encompassing both morality and well-being, and perhaps other values as well: whatever matters in a person's life. Importantly, morality appears not to play a fundamental role in either happiness or well-being among the folk.