



# The Coalescence of Being: A Model of the Self-Actualisation Process

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Published online: 8 June 2019  
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## Abstract

Self-actualisation is a central theme in many accounts of well-being. Yet theories of how self-actualisation is prosecuted and how exactly it leads to well-being are relatively underdeveloped. This paper addresses this shortfall by explicating a novel theory of self-actualisation—the coalescence of being. The theory is founded on insights from existential philosophy, but these are built upon substantially by integrating recent ideas from psychology, notably self-determination theory, self-discrepancy theory and terror-management theory. The central mechanism of coalescence is the individual trying to harmonise their actual-, ideal- and ought-selves. They do this by positing their ideal-self and ought-self as a goal and then living in accordance with this aspiration. When their actual self is disclosed to them in their actions or in the assessment of others they can gauge their progress towards this goal. Success brings positive affect, while failure gives rise to negative affect. Introspecting upon these signals helps the individual to better understand whether their goals are self-congruent or need adjusting. Iterative recalibration of the three self-constructs on the basis of this introspection accelerates the coalescence process. The final part of the paper analyses how coalescence leads to well-being as defined by a range of theories of well-being.

**Keywords** Eudaimonia · Existentialism · Self-actualisation · Well-being · Self-determination theory

## 1 Introduction

The notion of “self-actualisation” is a central component of several theories of or schools of thought about well-being. Jung spoke of “individuation” (von Franz 1964), Nietzsche of self-affirmation and self-creation (Nietzsche 1888/2000, p. 496). The ancient Greeks counselled: “know thyself” and “become who you are”. More modern versions of Hellenic eudaimonism maintain this theme. Norton (1976) focused explicitly on self-actualisation. Annas (2004) argues that happiness is about “achievement” as the end result of a way of living wherein “my plans are shaping [my life] and actively *organising* what is going to

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happen in it". Recent literature in those schools of clinical psychology that refer to themselves as "eudaimonic" also emphasises "self-determination" and "personal expressiveness" as fundamental to living well and thereby attaining well-being (Ryan and Deci 2017; Waterman 1990, 1993).

Despite this centrality to many theories of well-being, there has to date been relatively little attention paid to the nuts and bolts of self-actualisation. There does not appear to be a detailed theory of the core mechanisms of self-actualisation, nor do we have a way to describe the process to someone who would like to deliberately accelerate it.

This paper attempts to fill this gap by articulating a relatively elaborate theory of self-actualisation and explaining how it leads to well-being as defined by a range of different theories, from hedonic psychology to flow. The theory is called *the coalescence of being*, or coalescence for short. It is founded on ideas in existentialist philosophy, especially the writings of De Beauvoir and Nietzsche, but extends these substantially with insights from more recent psychological theories, including self-determination theory, self-discrepancy theory, and terror-management theory, among others.

The paper is set out as follows. I begin with a brief discussion of the notion of "living well" and "self-actualisation" as articulated in the eudaimonism literature in both philosophy and psychology. This provides an initial argument for the importance of self-actualisation, but only a limited understanding of how it works. I then pick out the roots of the coalescence of being in the writings of Nietzsche and the French existentialists before turning to theories and results from modern psychology to flesh out the idea further. In the final part of the paper I explain how the coalescence of being brings about a range of well-being outcomes including a balance of positive over negative affect, a sense of meaning and purpose, the nourishment of our basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness, and flow.

## 2 Well-Being as Process: "Living Well" in the Eudaimonic Tradition

The well-being tradition most closely associated with self-actualisation is the eudaimonic one. There are two separate though related literatures herein—one in philosophy, the other in psychology. The two literatures are united by two shared themes (Besser-Jones 2015). The first is that all eudaimonic accounts of well-being emphasise that it is a matter of *living* well rather than *being* well. Eudaimonic theories argue that well-being is a *process* rather than an *outcome*, though outcomes certainly feature, especially in psychological accounts (Ryan and Huta 2009). Both philosophical and psychological accounts agree that well-being emerges out of the active exercise of agency; hence the central place held by self-actualisation in eudaimonic theories. Second, eudaimonic theories of well-being argue that the correct way to live in the sense that it ensures well-being emerges from human nature in some way.

It is on human nature and its implications for eudaimonia that the philosophical and psychological accounts diverge (Besser-Jones 2015). Philosophical accounts almost invariably exist in the Aristotelian tradition and focus on humanity's capacity for reason and morality as central to well-being. The Aristotelian definition of eudaimonia is activity of the soul in accordance with reason and virtue (Aristotle NE 1999, 1.7). More recent accounts in this tradition give a similarly central role to practical wisdom in ensuring the well-being of humans. This includes reasoning about how our life fits together into a coherent whole (Annas 2004), and about what behaviour and values are

virtuous (Annas 1998, 2011; Russell 2012; LeBar 2013). Norton (1976) is in some ways an exception to this. In his philosophy, humans need to actualise their unique *individual* nature, rather than express their *human* nature, in order to achieve eudaimonia. However, one could argue that this account emerges from a conception of human nature where it is defined by the need for individuation—something like the existentialist maxim: “for man, existence precedes essence” (Sartre and De Beauvoir 1946/1960).

Psychologists tend to be sceptical of emphasising reason because there is extensive empirical evidence that we don't behave in accordance with reason, and this is true even of people who seem to have high levels of well-being and reasoning ability. We are influenced by unconscious biases (Bargh and Chartrand 1999; Kahneman 2011), and some of these are conjectured to have important buffering effects on self-esteem and other things often associated with well-being in psychology (Johnson et al 1997). Many of our behaviours are unconscious and automatic (Doris 2002; Kahneman 2011). And our moral reasoning tends to come after moral instincts, which are what actually drive our behaviour (Greene 2014; Haidt 2001, 2012).

Rather than reason and virtue, psychological accounts instead ground their conception of eudaimonia in basic human needs, the kinds of lives that nourish these needs, and the positive states that flow from living and satisfying the needs in this way (Ryan and Deci 2017; Ryff and Singer 2008; Waterman 2008). This focus on needs goes back at least to Maslow (1964) and the early days of humanistic psychology. Psychological accounts of eudaimonia argue that humans have evolved to be a particular kind of organism that is programmed to behave so as to satisfy its basic needs and that the organism will experience ill-being if it deviates from this nature.

Maslow posited a hierarchy of needs with self-actualisation at the top and physiological needs for sustenance and the like at the foundation. Maslow's theory has been criticised for its hierarchical structure, among other things (Neher 1991), but more recent theories in the tradition of humanistic psychology maintain a similar emphasis on needs and self-actualisation. For example, self-determination theory (SDT), one of the more prominent branches of humanistic psychology, argues that humans have basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan and Deci 2017).

Autonomy is the need to self-regulate one's experiences and actions. An autonomous individual feels volitional, congruent and integrated (DeCharms 1968; Ryan 1993; Shapiro 1981). The behaviours of an autonomous individual are self-endorsed and self-concordant in the sense that they align with the individual's authentic motivations and values. Autonomy in SDT is not about independence, self-reliance, freedom from all social influences, detachment from others, or individualism (Ryan and Deci 2017, p. 568). It is about freedom from external control, including duress and subtler forms of manipulation like contingent parental love.

Competence is about being adept with the skills and tools needed to flourish in the world. Additionally, it is about being good at activities that you value and refers to a need for mastery and effectiveness (Ryan and Deci 2017). It is implicated in a huge range of behaviours, from athletics and video games to scientific research and puzzle solving. However, it is also easily thwarted by excessive challenge, pervasive negative feedback and overwhelming social comparisons (such as to professional athletes).

Relatedness concerns having healthy and satisfying relationships with valued others (Ryan and Deci 2017). More generally, it is about social connectedness. It is nourished both by being cared for by others and by being valuable to others, notably as a result of contributions to the group. Relatedness is closely related with to a “sense of belonging”

(Baumeister and Leary 1995) and a sense of being integral to social organisations—what Angyal (1941) called *homonomy*.

Environments that nourish these basic needs, like safe and supportive households, foster well-being (Chen et al 2015; Church et al 2013). Those that do not, like prisons, foster ill-being (Deci et al 2001; Iardi et al 1993; Baard et al 2004; Jang et al 2009). A similar relationship has been found for activities that nourish these needs, like the pursuit of hobbies, and those that do not, like the pursuit of wealth, fame and other goals that are contingent to activities themselves (Kasser and Ryan 1993, 1996).

## 2.1 Self-Actualisation in the Eudaimonic Tradition

Both the philosophical and psychological accounts of eudaimonia ground their theories of self-determination in *motivation*. For example, Annas (2004, p. 47) argues that the eudaimonic account of well-being is founded on the question of *why?* “Why am I doing it? Why am I getting up?” This kind of thinking leads to the issue of unification—I need to be able to prioritise my different ambitions and bring them into some kind of coherence: “Confused or self-undermining aims force me to get clearer about my priorities and to sort out competing claims on my time and energy” (ibid. p. 47). The process of straightening out my motivations and goals naturally leads me to define an identity and from there to affirm this identity in my choice of which values to endorse through my choices. When I am living a life that is a “best-fit” for me I experience eudaimonic well-being because inconsistencies in my identity are minimised, I affirm the values that resonate most strongly with me, and I engage in activities that suit me and are therefore intrinsically enjoyable. This notion of bringing about a “best-fit” is the essence of self-actualisation and its connection to well-being. Waterman’s (1990, 1993, 2008) psychological account is similar. He emphasises that hedonic (emotional or sensual) enjoyment arises easily and frequently when individuals are engaged in personal expression, such as when they are “engaged in activities for which [they] have a natural affinity or sense of connection (Waterman 2013, p. 9).

The philosophical and psychological accounts of self-actualisation in the eudaimonic tradition share the view that humans possess some kind of innate self that guides self-actualisation. Perhaps the most uncompromising articulation of this view in the philosophical literature is Norton (1976). He posited that humans are born with an innate “true-self”—their *daimon*. Adolescence is a period wherein people scout around and eventually *discover* this true self (ibid, p. 188). The rest of life is then a single long act in which they *actualise* this daimon in reality by living in accordance with the promise they made to their “self” that they would “become who they are” (ibid, p. 229). The end result is eudaimonia; literary *eu*, healthy in ancient greek, *daimon*—true self. Norton leaves the state of eudaimonia largely undescribed—it is simply the positive feeling that attends living in accordance with the true self (ibid, p. 14).

Relative to philosophical accounts, psychological accounts tend to place less emphasis on self-*discovery* and give a greater role in self-actualisation to self-*creation*. This accords more closely with recent evidence from development psychology, which nowadays emphasises genetic *predispositions* rather than *pre-determinants* (Carver 2012).<sup>1</sup> Metaphorically, we are born a lump of clay with certain dimensions, like potential height and

<sup>1</sup> Norton should be given credit for trying to ground his theory in the work of contemporary developmental psychologists, notably Piaget, but the science has moved on since.

bone structure, but our final form is shaped through individual interaction with environmental factors. An elegant summary is provided by Neuroscientist Gary Marcus (2004, pp. 30–40): “nature provides a first draft, which experience then revises ... ‘built-in’ does not mean unmalleable; it means ‘*organised in advance of experience*’”. Developmental psychology also emphasises the existence of “multiple selves” that we must harmonise as our personality develops (Showers and Zeigler-Hill 2012). Adolescence is punctuated by a growing awareness of these multiple selves and “a dramatic rise in the detection of contradictory self-attributes that lead to conflict and confusion” (Harter 2012). This is a radically different picture to that developed by Norton. He posits that adolescents find themselves misunderstood by *others* and subsequently embark on a quest of *self-discovery* (Norton 1976, p. 111). Present developmental psychology instead argues that adolescents can’t understand *themselves* and consequently set out on a quest of individuation that is part self-discovery through introspection and part *self-creation* through the affirmation of desired character traits (Higgins 1991). This process of identity formation is ongoing throughout life, so Norton’s notion that we can choose an identity at the end of adolescence is naïve.

Rather than the expansive notion of an innate self, eudaimonic psychology instead emphasises the more limited notion of intrinsic motivations (Waterman 2013; Deci and Ryan 2000). We are each born with drives that incline us towards different values and activities. An example of partially innate *values* is political leanings, where some people appear to be instinctively conservative, others progressive (Hatemi et al 2014). A common example of innate dispositions towards particular *activities* is people born with athletic inclinations rather than artistic ones and vice versa. These intrinsic motivations are much vaguer than a fully-articulated “true self”, but alongside physical limitations they nonetheless constitute a core of identity that parameterises who an individual can be if they want to achieve well-being. If these intrinsic motivations are thwarted by controlling environments, like draconian parents, the result is ill-being (Chen et al 2015; Church et al 2013; Sheldon et al 2004, 2009). Eudaimonic psychology provides a partial account of how these intrinsic motivations are refined into particular values and activities across the spectrum of life in such a way as to constitute a sophisticated and deep identity over the life course.

While obviously recognising its importance, neither philosophy nor psychology has to date produced an especially detailed account of the self-actualisation process. Their theories have operated at a higher scale of analysis. I attempt to redress this shortfall below. I build on the significant contribution of self-determination theory to this project, extending and augmenting it substantially. The theory I develop—the *coalescence of being*—has its roots in the philosophy of Nietzsche and the French existentialists, so that is where the analysis begins. I then return to more recent theories in psychology, including SDT, to develop the theory further.

### 3 The Roots of Coalescence in Existential Philosophy

Existentialism arose in response to a range of sociological shifts in Europe that undermined existing sources of identity. The first and perhaps most important was the decline of faith as a result of the enlightenment and its attacks on the credibility of religious postulates about the way of the world and cosmic justice. Nietzsche famously declared the death of God and took the resulting normative vacuum as the foundation of his philosophy (Nietzsche 1887/1974, p. 181). Similarly, Sartre and De Beauvoir (1946/1960, p. 294) wrote of the

damage the march of reason in the enlightenment had done to the credibility of prevailing norms:

Towards 1880, when the French professors endeavoured to formulate a secular morality, they said something like this: God is a useless and costly hypothesis, so we will do without it. However, if we are to have morality, a society and a law-abiding world, it is essential that certain values should be taken seriously...nothing will be changed if God does not exist; we shall rediscover the same norms of honesty, progress and humanity...The existentialist, on the contrary, finds it extremely embarrassing that God does not exist, for there disappears with him all possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven.

The normative vacuum unsealed by the death of God was compounded by the rise of the metropolis and the associated decline in normatively tight agrarian communities.<sup>2</sup> Simmel (1903/1950) in his seminal *The Metropolis and Modern Life* documents how cities gave individuals greater capacity to express themselves freely because they did not stand out in the vast crowds. However, this also meant that it was difficult to be recognised as a unique individual and to find groups with which to form bonds of normative camaraderie. Some people consequently felt dislocated. They had the freedom to define unique identities, but relatively little opportunity to socially verify these personal expressions.

The currents of the existentialists' cultural milieu reached their zenith around World War 2 (Kaufmann 1991). The yearning fresh norms to undergird identity and guide behaviour provided fertile ground for the growth of new ideologies to replace that of the church and the community. The most notable of these were fascism and communism, which provided comprehensive, coherent and readily accessible norms and identities founded on race and nation or class, respectively (Fromm 1941/1994).

Existentialism can be seen as an attempt to provide a philosophy of norms and identity grounded in an axiomatic repudiation of all "outside" norms. If our values define us then they must come from within. One of Nietzsche's foundational assumptions, for example, is that "there are no moral facts" (Nietzsche 1889/1990, p. 66). He was also infamously acerbic in his criticism of Germanic racial pride, though this didn't stop the Nazis from appropriating his works to suit their needs (Santaniello 1994). The French existentialists were similarly atheist in their perspective and opposed to fascism (De Beauvoir 1947/2002).

Given this objective of providing a philosophy of self-creation and self-expression, it is unsurprising that existentialist philosophy contains many ideas of relevance to a theory of self-actualisation. I pick up four in particular: a comfort with ambiguity, noble morality, integrity and the disclosure of being. These are foundational ideas in the coalescence of being.

### 3.1 Ambiguity

A fundamental tenet of existentialism is a comfort with normative ambiguity. Initially, the dissolution of normative certainty following the death of God was felt to be something of a catastrophe. Without a divine cosmic order, how could people know what was good and

<sup>2</sup> "Tight" cultures are those that have strong (extensive, palpable, frequently practiced, omnipresent) norms and a low tolerance for deviant behaviour, whereas "loose" cultures have weak norms and a high tolerance for deviant behaviour. Agrarian communities typically have tighter cultures than metropolitan ones. See Gelfand et al. (2011) for a review of theory and cross-country evidence.

evil? How could they know what they should do? As Dostoevsky (1880/1994) famously worried: “If God does not exist, then all things are permitted”. Existentialism recast this normative vacuum as liberating. It revealed to us our nature as ontologically free, value-creating entities. The death of God constituted a psychic movement within humanity whereby we took up our yoke as masters of our own destiny, free to choose who and what we wanted to be. Nietzsche saw this as a tremendous boon and attacked febrile attempts to resuscitate objective ethics, like utilitarianism, arguing that “above all, we should not want to rid the world of its rich ambiguity” (Nietzsche 1886, p. 343).

Accepting the ambiguity of the world is a precondition for self-actualisation because it frees individuals to define their own goals, values and meanings and reorients their efforts to do so inwards. Rather than looking outwards to family, community, race, nation, religion or ideology for guidance, individuals instead begin with introspection. Being comfortable with ambiguity is also important because it frees the individual to learn from anguish rather than be discomforted by it. Anguish in existentialist philosophy refers to our realisation in the moment of a tough decision that we are ultimately responsible for the choice we make; no higher power or external moral orders compels us—we must have our *own* reasons for choosing (Sartre and De Beauvoir 1946/1960). It is when confronted by anguish that we are most likely to reach for ready-to-hand sources of normative authority like customs and ideologies (McGregor 2004). But in so doing we miss the opportunity to engage in substantive reflection upon what we personally think is a relevant consideration and how we want to be defined by the choice we eventually make. Comfort with ambiguity allows the individual to reflect calmly on the various salient and often contradictory normative issues at play in any meaningful decision and choose the view they would most like to be associated with (Pyszczynski et al. 2012). Anguish thereby becomes a frequent source of personal growth and definition. Nietzsche articulates this eloquently when he writes (Nietzsche 1887/1974, p. 289):

One could conceive of such a pleasure and power of self-determination, such a freedom of the will that the spirit would take leave of all faith and every wish for certainty, being practiced on maintaining itself on insubstantial ropes and possibilities and dancing ever near abysses. Such a spirit would be the *free spirit* par excellence.

Ambiguity and the opportunities it provides for personal growth are central themes in a young branch of social psychology called “Terror-Management Theory” (TMT) (Greenberg et al. 2004). TMT begins from the hypothesis that humans are unique among animals because consciousness makes us aware of our eventual death. According to TMT, we have evolved a range of defence mechanisms that prevent this primordial terror from debilitating us. The most prominent of these is culture, which imbues the world with meaning and value (Solomon et al. 2004, p. 16). An important finding of TMT is that once we have developed a basic identity and value system that assuages our terror, we react aggressively towards challenges to that value system (Florian and Mikulincer 2004, p. 61). The most common of these responses is to demonstrate in-group bias when mortality is made more cognitively salient.

This threat-response tendency can discourage us from seeking out opportunities to further develop our identity and value system so that it is more robust to future challenges, such as by deepening the arguments on which our values rest. Yet reflection upon and analysis of our value system is prone to make its weaknesses more salient to us, which is unpleasant. As such, there is a tension between personal growth in the long run and facing these unpleasant problems head on in the short run (Pyszczynski et al. 2012, p. 389). TMT’s arguments and findings mirror results in identity consolidation theory, which

examines people's responses to identity crises (McGregor 2004, p. 183). People respond to "personal uncertainty" by developing narratives and identities that give meaning to their lives, and by doubling down on these narratives in times of crisis, even if it is their weakness that allows for the crisis in the first place. Accepting the ambiguity of existence from the outset provides a healthy short-circuit to these dynamics. It allows us to engage more comfortably in existential analysis, which in turn allows us to achieve the fulfilling, pleasant and inspiring experience of personal growth on a more regular basis.

### 3.2 Noble Morality

A second idea from the existentialist tradition that is important for understanding self-actualisation in practice is Nietzsche's notion of "noble morality", which he distinguished from "slave morality". Simplistically, slave morality is about adherence to external normative codes, such as those laid out in the Bible or in community customs. It is slavish because it involves obedience to *someone else's* values. Noble morality instead involves embracing your nature as a value-creating entity and acting with fidelity towards your own good and evil: "The most basic laws of preservation and growth require the opposite: that everyone should invent his *own* virtues, his *own* categorical imperatives" (Nietzsche 1885/1990, p. 134).

As with accepting ambiguity, adopting a noble attitude to morality is a precondition for self-actualisation because it makes it necessary for the individual to define who they are and then to affirm this identity. Those with a slave morality are constantly engaged in a self-abnegating struggle to repress their intrinsic inclinations in order to better conform to external normative codes. Their ethics and self-interest are not in alignment, so ethical conduct is a source of identity-inconsistency and can easily lead to compartmentalisation. For nobles, ethical conduct is instead a form of self-expression and affirmation. It is an opportunity to demonstrate to themselves that they are the good person they believe themselves to be, and to demonstrate to others what values they stand for (Nietzsche 1888/2000, p. 495):

The proud awareness of this extraordinary privilege of *responsibility*, the consciousness of this rare freedom, this power over oneself and over fate...What will he call this dominating instinct...this sovereign man calls it his *conscience*.

This is not to imply that nobles must rely entirely on introspection to develop their values—they can certainly look for normative inspiration out in the world. However, it does imply that nobles can only adopt values that they find out in the world after introspecting on these values and thereby making them their own. Self-determination theory, discussed below, provides a motivational framework that explains this process.

### 3.3 Integrity

Noble morality is impossible without integrity. If we create and are responsible for our own values, then they appear open to capriciousness—what is to prevent us from changing our values on a whim when it suits the circumstances? Integrity is what mitigates capriciousness because it makes us *reliable*; it is "the right to make promises" Nietzsche (1888/2000, p. 493). Integrity ensures that we stick to our values over time even when it is inconvenient to do so. Integrity is the prime virtue because it discourages the individual from contravening their avowed values and thereby acting in an unvirtuous way. Integrity is critical to



self-actualisation because it allows us to consistently affirm the same identity over time. Without integrity we would affirm different identities whenever it was convenient to do so. This might seem beneficial in the short run, but ultimately it will short-circuit the coalescence of our identity and leave us with a vague and unintegrated identity that threatens our well-being. As De Beauvoir succinctly put it: “to will is to engage myself to persevere in my will” (1947/2000, p. 27).<sup>3</sup>

Integrity is itself arguably a choice, much like faith. So what is there to stop someone abandoning their integrity when it suits them? The answer is that it never suits them to do so because integrity is required for self-actualisation and self-actualisation is required for well-being. As such, there is a link between integrity and self-interest. An individual will only abandon some of their avowed values when they are in conflict with other avowed values. In this case, integrity demands the abandonment, and the abandonment is painful but not as painful as inconsistency and compartmentalisation because inconsistency and compartmentalisation would impede integration and self-actualisation.

For example, consider a Christian mother who loves her daughter and also considers homosexuality a sin. She then discovers that her daughter is a homosexual. In order to reconcile her competing values, she reinterprets the Bible in a way that allows her to maintain her Christian beliefs and still love her daughter. This might seem like a capricious act—a “serious” slave morality would require her to abandon her daughter. But it is in fact a very painful act, albeit one that provides an opportunity for self-expression in how the mother reorders her values. The mother wants to retain her sense of self, but this is impossible while her values are in conflict. She must consequently reconsider her identity, but integrity demands that she do this in a way that involves the least compromise. Minimising the compromise requires introspection on which values are most important to the mother and why. We see here the Hellenic doctrines made manifest. She must *know herself*. She must then act in accordance with the reasons that are born of this introspection. By doing so she *becomes who she is*.<sup>4</sup>

The following comment from Nietzsche is important to highlight because it links with these themes of Greek philosophy. He says (Nietzsche 1888/2000, p. 494) that:

Man himself must first of all have become calculable, regular, necessary, even in his own image of himself, if he is to be able to stand security for *his own future*, which is what one who promises does!

<sup>3</sup> Norton (1976) also wrote extensively of the importance of integrity for self-actualisation and eudaimonia. Perhaps his most emphatic statement in this regard is the following (ibid, p. 193):

The actualisation of personhood is progressive, requiring, in Nietzsche’s words: “long obedience in the same direction”. To re-choose is to annihilate all accomplished actualisation stemming from original choice; it is a re-beginning out of a lapse into indeterminacy. As such it poses to the life in question the spectre of final indeterminacy as a life without identity or necessity—a life that in the true meaning of the term has failed to exist.

<sup>4</sup> There are curious parallels here with coalescence argumentation (Gilbert 1995). This involves debate partners with differing opinions exploring each other’s positions in order to find common ground. This common ground can then be used to affect “coalescence, a joining or merging of divergent positions, by forming the basis for a mutual investigation of non-conflictual options that might otherwise have remained unconsidered” (ibid, p. 837). In this example and the coalescence of being more generally, the debate partners are two of the multiple selves that inhabit an individual. Some shock to the individual’s value system instigates the debate, in this case the discovery of the homosexuality of the woman’s daughter. The multiple selves must then explore common ground in an attempt to coalescence towards a relatively nonconflictual option.

The interrelationship between reason, virtue and self-actualisation is clear enough. If you know yourself then you are *calculable*—rationally accessible—in your understanding of yourself. If you are proceeding to be the person who you claim to be and want to be by affirming your values through integrity then your identity is a *necessity*—you cannot deviate from it because then you would lose your integrity and, in so doing, lose your “self”. You are thus *regular*—you can be relied upon to uphold your values over time, to always “be yourself”. By being calculable, regular and necessary in your own image of yourself you are able to “stand security for [your] own future”, meaning that you can commit to the image of who you want to be—you can self-actualise.

### 3.4 The Disclosure of Being

A final foundational idea in the coalescence of being derived from existentialist philosophy is the notion of “the disclosure of being”. This is where one’s identity, one’s “being”, is revealed (disclosed) in the world by our actions and in the impressions and assessments of others. By this revelation, one’s being “exists” for a moment (De Beauvoir 1947/2000, p. 30):

My freedom must not seek to trap being but to disclose it. The disclosure is the transition from being to existence. The goal which my freedom aims at is conquering existence across the always inadequate density of being.

Disclosure is important because in it we are revealed as who we are in actuality. Self-actualisation is about manifesting an ideal conception of ourselves into reality. In order to gauge our progress towards this goal we need to be able to see who we *in fact* are in reality. We can then see whether we are who we want and believe ourselves to be. It is no good to have some romanticised image of ourselves in our mind if in reality we behave in a manner contradictory to this image (such behaviour is similar to narcissism). Our actions must align with our values. As Goethe is believed to have said: “To act is easy, to think is hard; but the hardest thing of all is to act in accordance with your thinking”.

## 4 Fleshing Out the Coalescence of Being with Theories from Psychology

In this next section I build on the foundational ideas of ambiguity, noble morality, integrity and disclosure using recent psychological theories to development the coalescence of being more fully. In addition to putting more meat on the bones, this integration of ideas from psychology has two benefits. The first is that it puts the coalescence of being on surer empirical footing. The theories integrated from psychology all have some experimental validation. The second is that it grounds the coalescence of being in an empirically sound conception of human psychology and its evolutionary history. For its own part, the existential philosophy outlined above helps to illuminate the normative implications of the psychological theories discussed below. It also helps to build a bridge from these psychological theories to their cultural and sociological implications viz. fascism and other movements that arise in periods of normative vacuum.

#### 4.1 The Core of Coalescence: Integration and Motivation

The notion of a “disclosure of being” and its links with self-actualisation and well-being are underdeveloped in the writings of the existentialists. Two things in particular are missing. The first is that it is possible not only to disclose a static being, by which I mean one’s being at a particular point in time, but also to gain evidence, via disclosure, that one is progressing *dynamically* towards a particular being in incremental steps. That is, that a particular being is *coalescing* over time. Integrity encourages an individual to behave consistently, and this consistency means that disclosure is not just of a being, but of a being that is more and more in-line with a particular ideal conception of who that being would like to be. Provided integrity is practiced, who you are increasingly aligns with who you want to be.

Second, insofar as the being that we disclose in our actions aligns with who we want to be we experience positive feelings, and insofar as it diverges from our ideal-self, we experience negative feelings. As such, coalescing our being by consistently affirming our ideal-self is the means by which we achieve not only self-actualisation, but also “happiness” as a by-product of actualising our ideal-self. An explanation emerges here for why Aristotle might have thought that “happiness” was to be achieved by manifesting our *telos*<sup>5</sup> (Annas 2004, p. 48).

This notion of bringing into alignment who you are with who you want to be is developed in some detail by self-discrepancy theory (Higgins 1987). It posits that self-actualisation proceeds by way of the harmonisation of one’s actual-self, ideal-self and ought-self. The actual-self is who one is right now; the ideal-self is who one wants to be; and the ought-self is who one has a duty to be. When one’s actual-self is disclosed to be aligned with one’s ideal-self or ought-self, one experiences positive affect. When one’s actual-self diverges from one’s *ideal*-self, one experiences depression. When one’s actual-self diverges from one’s *ought*-self, one experiences anxiety (Carver et al 1999). In reality, the self is fragmented and compartmentalised into many more “multiple selves” than these three parts (Showers and Zeigler-Hill 2012), but Higgen’s taxonomy provides a neat framework through which to understand the core process of individuation.

It should be noted that this idea of affect as a signaling device for communicating whether one’s behaviour is self-serving holds across many more dimensions than just self-actualisation (Carver 2012). Fear, for example, tells us to leave the area immediately. If we comply, as is in our interests, the fear abates, otherwise it continues. Similarly, exhilaration at achievement encourages us to continue in our pursuit. Affective signaling plays a critical role in the coalescence of being because it indicates to the autobiographical self—the conscious self—whether its behaviour is self-concordant and thus likely to promote its well-being. I will discuss this in greater detail momentarily. First, I must explain more thoroughly what the actual, ideal and ought-selves are.

Self-determination theory (SDT) can help us better understand these three self-constructs (Deci and Ryan 2000). SDT posits a spectrum of motivation from intrinsic to extrinsic. The actual-self is characterised by *intrinsic motivation* to pursue values and undertake behaviours that are attractive for their own sake. The actual-self may also undertake *extrinsically* motivated behaviours, but unless these are being undertaken with the goal of eventually transfiguring them into intrinsically motivated behaviours, this will result in

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle used *Telos* to mean end or purpose.

mental illness. This behaviour will be *self-regulated* rather than *self-determined*. The most extreme form of extrinsic motivation is duress. A less intense form of extrinsic motivation is *introjection*, where individuals undertake activities in pursuit of contingent rewards like parental approval, money or status.

The ideal-self takes in goals that are intrinsically attractive but have not been achieved yet, as well as *identified* behaviours. Identification is a form of extrinsic motivation but is one step closer to intrinsic motivation than introjection. It concerns activities that the individual deems *valuable* but does not necessary pursue *for their own sake*. A simple example is jogging for health. The individual values health and would like to be healthier but does not enjoy jogging in and of itself. Over time, perhaps as they become better at jogging and come to consequently enjoy it more, the value of health and jogging will become *integrated* into their broader value system, and they may at this point develop intrinsic motivation for jogging. They might notice that jogging makes them more aesthetically appealing for example, or jogging might bring them into an orienteering group that shares their appreciation for outdoor adventure. Integration is the point where motivation crosses over from extrinsic to intrinsic. The process by which values and behaviours move from being identified to integrated is called *internalisation* (Ryan and Deci 2017). This process is critical to the “self-creation” element of self-actualisation. Identification sees the individual notice things in the world and think “I would like to be more like that”. Through internalisation these things are brought into the motivational core of that person. They thereby in fact become “more like that”.

Self-determination theory also provides powerful insights into the nature of the ought-self. Some behaviours that are considered duties are introjected and require *self-regulation* to undertake. However, by the process of internalisation, they can come to be intrinsically motivated and thus *self-determined* over time with sustained effort if they arise out of identification rather than introjection (Ryan and Deci 2017). This taxonomy of motivations explains how individuals can restrain their raw self-interest in order to perform privately harmful ethical acts, how they can come to see privately harmful behaviour as actually valuable because of the psychic payoffs associated with drawing closer to your ought self, and how these behaviours thereby ultimately no longer feel at all privately harmful but rather affirming. An individual who has identified certain values as part of their ideal-self must act with integrity in order to gradually internalise those values and be intrinsically motivated to pursue them, at which point their affirmation will come to be a source of meaning and fulfilment. This connects ethical conduct and self-interest in a previously unexplored and very important way that echoes Nietzsche’s noble morality.

#### 4.2 The Vehicle of Coalescence: Goal Setting, Achievement and Recalibration

The coalescence of being is basically a process of setting and achieving goals. The ideal-self is a multi-faceted goal that you try to reach by affirming its various characteristics in your own actions. Importantly though, this goal-attainment will only result in substantial eudaimonia and positive affect if the goals are *self-concordant* or, in philosophical terms, *authentic*. While people with clear goals have been found to have higher levels of well-being than those who are, in a sense, aimless, achieving inauthentic goals has been found to have only small effects on well-being (Deci and Ryan 1985; Oyserman et al. 2012; Locke & Latham 1990). Achieving self-concordant goals, on the other hand, has large and sustained well-being effects (Sheldon 2002).

There are two prerequisites for a goal to be self-concordant. The first is that it must be autonomously pursued in the sense that the individual is intrinsically motivated towards it. This autonomous pursuit might begin through identification, but the well-being payoffs are strongest in the latter stages of internalisation. The second is that the goals are associated with “intrinsic pursuits” like personal growth, affiliation and community rather than “extrinsic pursuits” contingent to the activity itself, like financial success, image and popularity (Sheldon and Kasser 2008). The achievement of extrinsic pursuits like fame have relatively minor well-being payoffs compared to intrinsic pursuits like hobbies because extrinsic pursuits do not effectively nourish the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness (Kasser and Ryan 1993, 1996, 2001). Similarly, the *process* of pursuing extrinsic goals is typically unsatisfying because this activity does not nourish the basic needs, whereas the activity of pursuing intrinsic goals does (Sheldon et al 2004). Indeed, intrinsic pursuits can enhance well-being even if the goal is not ultimately obtained (Howell et al 2011; Sheldon and Krieger 2014).

These findings relate to the fact that extrinsic pursuits are contingent to rather than intrinsic to self-actualization (Sheldon and Kasser 2008). For example, pursuing fame for its own sake sees the individual engage in activities not because they are intrinsically motivated by those *activities* but because those activities may lead to fame. Similarly, the individual does not sustain engagement in those activities in order to satisfy their need for competence, but because the activity is related to the contingent reward of fame. Likewise, individuals engaged in extrinsic pursuits will gravitate towards others who help them achieve fame, status, wealth or whatever it might be, rather than people who directly nourish their need for relatedness (Sheldon et al 2004).

An individual can get a sense for whether they are pursuing a self-concordant ideal-self goal by paying attention to the affective signals they receive in the moment of disclosure. This is a key insight of self-discrepancy theory, discussed above (Higgins 1987). I will use the goal of “fitness” and a “fit” ideal-self as a simple example. An unfit individual must come up with some standard or evidence by which they can confirm that they are actually fit. This evidence provides the means of disclosure. They may set the goal of “being able to run a marathon” as achieving this goal would forcefully disclose that they are fit. With this goal identified, the individual sets about affirming their ideal-self as a fit person, first by jogging regularly. If the individual is able to jog say, 5 km, they disclose that they are somewhat capable of running and thus somewhat fit. This will be associated with a burst of positive affect because they are revealed to be the person they want to be. As they steadily improve their running skills to the point where they are able to run a marathon, these affective signals will become more common as they coalesce more and more towards their ideal-self. Provided affective signals are positive at each step in the process, the individual can assume that fitness and jogging more specifically are self-concordant goals and activities.

If, on the other hand, they discover that they detest jogging, they will receive a signal in the form of negative affect. A common one is a lack of motivation—they struggle to put their jogging shoes on and often terminate their runs earlier than planned. This could mean two things. First, it could mean that fitness is a self-concordant value, but jogging is not a self-concordant way to pursue it, hence the struggle for motivation. It is possible that by sustained effort they can turn jogging from an introjected activity to an identified one, but it seems more straightforward in this case to simply try a different sport. Alternatively, it could suggest that even fitness in general is not a self-concordant goal and that they should revise their ideal-self as their current conception of it does not jibe at all with their actual-self, which is the primary source of our intrinsic motivations.

According to self-verification theory (Hixon and Swann 1993; Swann and Buhrmester 2012), there are two primary means by which we “disclose” evidence about who we are in reality: our impacts on the world and the observations of others. Running a marathon is an example of the former. For most people, regardless of what others say, if you are able to run a marathon you will consider yourself fit. However, there are many goals that are hard to confirm in any way other than the comments of others. For example, it is hard to maintain that one is a competent philosopher if one’s works can’t pass peer review. In such cases, we need respected peers to tell us that we are something, such as a great teammate or a reliable colleague (Swann and Buhrmester 2012). Importantly, such social appraisals exert a stronger effect on our self-appraisals, and consequently our affective state, when the peer in question is an in-group member, desirable, valued or otherwise important (Wallace and Tice 2012). We don’t care about the opinion of everyone. The differences between these two ways of disclosing evidence is thus important for understanding the social dimensions of existentialism’s problems. In the first method, the individual themselves sets the definition of the “ideal” self. In the second method, others set the standard, and coalescence is thus somewhat out of the individual’s hands.

Now just as people will detach in the long run from pursuits that are not associated with positive affective feedback, they will also detach from such groups and peers (Ryan and Deci 2017). The lack of encouraging affective signals suggests that these groups are not a good fit for the individual. They likely to do not support their basic psychological needs, nor provide a sense of meaning and purpose. Staying with the example of jogging, an individual jogging for fitness might initially join a social jogging group, the Woden Wombats, focused on couch potatoes and others who need a group to help them stay active. The members are all lovely people—there is nothing inherently wrong with this group. But it is a bad fit for this individual. They want to take jogging more seriously. They want to build up to a marathon and perhaps even run competitively. As such, they eventually leave the Wombats and join a different club, the Braddon Bolts, which is more oriented towards intense training. The Bolts will support the individual’s sense of competence and relatedness, and the individual’s departure from the Wombats will potential be helpful to remaining members who won’t miss the individual’s die-hard attitude.

### 4.3 A Summary of the Mechanism of Coalescence

The coalescence of being is an iterative process of defining an ideal- and ought-self, disclosing our actual self in the world, and introspecting on the affective signals we receive as a result. If we disclose that our actual-self aligns with our ideal-self and ought-self *and* these constructs are self-congruent then we experience positive affect. This encourages us to invest further in these constructs and their associated values and behaviours. If we receive negative affective feedback then we must update our self-concepts. Perhaps our ideal self is overly ambitious given the parameters of our actual self, or perhaps we are not paying sufficient regard to our ought-self. Perhaps we have simply misinterpreted some aspect of our actual self—we might mistake our love of Rome for a more general fondness for cities, for example. In any case, we must recalibrate our goals and how we intend to pursue them, and then start the process over. And so on perpetually. The coalescence of being thus combines self-discovery in introspection and intrinsic motivation with self-creation through identification and affirmation. This understanding of self-actualisation as the development of identity guided by affective signals through iterative interactions with the world and introspection upon those experiences aligns with theory and evidence from

personality and developmental psychology regarding how identity forms. Consider, for example, the following quote from Morf and Mischel (2012, p. 22), which provides a neat summary:

The self and its directly relevant processes (e.g. self-evaluation, self-regulation and self-construction) may be conceptualised fruitfully as a coherent organisation of mental-emotional representations...but it is also a motivated, proactive knowing, thinking, feeling action system that is constructed, enacted, enhanced and maintained primarily in interpersonal contexts within which it develops. Through this organised system the person experiences the social, interpersonal world and interacts with it in characteristic self-guided ways, in a process of continuous self-construction and adaptation.

## 5 Self-Actualisation and Well-Being

So how does the coalescence of being work to produce well-being? To answer this question, we must first have some conception of well-being. Rather than get bogged down in the debate about what well-being is (Fletcher 2015; Alexandrova 2017), I will instead follow the example of Haybron and Tiberius (2015) and simply explain how the coalescence of being works to satisfy many different conceptions of well-being. I will begin with the eudaimonic definitions, then move on to competing definitions from hedonic psychology. Finally, I will briefly explain how the coalescence of being provides meaning and purpose.

### 5.1 Coalescence and Aristotelian Eudaimonia

I have already hinted above at how coalescence brings about well-being in the Aristotelian sense of a life lived in accordance with reason and virtue. Coalescence requires integrity, that is, fidelity towards one's avowed values, including one's moral values. Self-actualisation therefore requires virtues—values to be lived in accordance with, including virtues of character—and virtuous behaviour: the actual living in accordance with. In the coalescence account, people have a self-interest in abiding by their ethical values because it speeds along their coalescence. It should be noted though that this account of virtuous living is robust to the most common critique levelled at Aristotelian accounts of well-being. Namely, that they require living in accordance with some objective standard of “the good” and that this is impossible because nobody knows what “the good” is (Kraut 1979; Haybron 2008). In the coalescence framework, the good is *subjective*—individuals define their own good and evil and then live in accordance with it. Recall Nietzsche's maxim: “There are no moral facts”.

Practical reason is a central feature of Aristotelian accounts of eudaimonia (Nussbaum 2000) and plays a major role in coalescence through introspection. Individuals engaged in coalescence must actively reflect on and intellectually digest the information they receive from the disclosure of being and the affective signals it provokes. This makes their actual-self rationally accessible and helps them to understand in a reasoned way why some conceptions of their ideal and ought selves may or may not be self-congruent (Tiberius 2008). Armed with these reasons they can deliberately will themselves to affirm particular values and engage in appropriate behaviours that will speed them along the path of self-actualisation. An individual who does not introspect sufficiently will amble about ineffectively

trying to discover by instinct at best what values and behaviours suit them the most. They will also not be able to articulate to themselves the reason why they hold particular values and engage in particular behaviours, so when they are confronted by inconsistencies in their values or other challenges, they will be unable to navigate through them. “Living in accordance with reason” in the coalescence framework does not mean purging the emotions or behaving like the “rational actor” of neoclassical economic theory (Angner 2012). Indeed, the emotions in the form of affective signals have a very important role to play in guiding coalescence. Rather, it means engaging one’s reasoning faculties in order to better understand emotional signals so as to effectively comport towards those values and behaviours that inspire the most positive responses and away from those that provoke a negative reaction.

## 5.2 Coalescence and Psychological Accounts of Eudaimonia

Coalescence ensures life is lived in a self-expressive way that jibes with Waterman’s (2013) account of eudaimonic well-being, and that nourishes the three basic psychological needs posited by SDT. The noble mindset of the coalescing individual encourages them to see life as being about value creation and affirmation. This is a self-expressive enterprise. In pursuing those activities for which they have an intrinsic motivation, affirming their own values as against external ones, and gradually integrating identified values, the coalescing individual nourishes their sense of autonomy. The simple jogging example used earlier illustrates that comporting towards intrinsically attractive activities tends to see the individual pursue things they are good at and abandon activities that are excessively challenging. This nourishes their sense of competence. More broadly, coalescence is a process of goal pursuit. As the individual adjusts these goals to align with the parameters set by their actual-self they will become more attainable. As the individual then succeeds in achieving these goals they will experience a growing sense of competence. Finally, coalescence sees individuals comport towards groups that share their values, enjoy similar behaviours and affirm their identities. This nourishes the individual’s sense of relatedness.

## 5.3 Coalescence and Flow

Coalescence also brings about all the preconditions for “flow”. Flow refers to the feeling of being “in the zone” (Csikszentmihalyi 1992). It is most commonly associated with athletes and artists, especially musicians, who achieve a level of focus where time seems to stand still and they become totally absorbed in what they are doing (Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi 2011). The flow experience is often described as profoundly enjoyable. Its preconditions are an activity that is highly challenging but for which the individual has the appropriately high degree of skill. In addition, the activity must be intrinsically attractive, and the individual must be able to access high quality and rapid feedback regarding their success in it.

Coalescence involves the pursuit of an intrinsically attractive ideal-self, which is challenging. However, as the ideal-self is calibrated over time to suit our actual-self, this level of challenge comes to be commensurate to our level of skill as manifest in our actual-self. Further, as we become adept at the iterative process of introspection, affirmation and disclosure, we develop the ability to quickly check to what extent we are coalescing towards our ideal-self. The coalescence of being thus satisfies all the conditions for flow—high challenge, high skill, intrinsic motivation and high-quality feedback. But coalescence is not



restricted to particular activities like sport; it extends to all aspects of our lives and personality, meaning that flow comes to permeate more and more of our conscious experience as coalescence progresses.

It is worth noting in passing that bringing flow to one's entire life was the original ambition of Csikszentmihaly's research. Consider the following quote (Csikszentmihaly 1992, p. 214):

What this involves is turning all life into a unified flow experience. If a person sets out to achieve a difficult enough goal, from which all other goals logically follow, and if he or she invests all energy in developing skills to reach that goal, then actions and feelings will be in harmony, and separate parts of life will fit together—and each activity will “make sense” in the present, as well as in view of the past and of the future. In such a way, it is possible to give meaning to one's life.

The need to experimentally verify flow theory seems to have encouraged researchers to focus on intense flow experiences, such as those that occur during virtuoso performances, and arguably lose sight of this grander vision (Engeser 2012; Rich 2013).

#### 5.4 Coalescence and Hedonic Well-Being

Recent decades have seen an enormous revival in the popularity of hedonic accounts of well-being that emphasise the importance of a preponderance of positive over negative affect (Kahneman 1999; Diener et al 2009; OECD 2013; Stone and Mackie 2013). The coalescence of being ticks this outcome because it sees individuals invest further in values and activities that are associated with positive affective feedback and steadily disengage from those that are associated with negative affect. Coalescence is also characterised by the pursuit of intrinsically motivated activities and the avoidance of extrinsically motivated ones, which helps the individual to feel energised and exhilarated rather than weary and beat. Furthermore, the individual has well-articulated *reasons* for why they behave the way they do and evidence from disclosure that they are a good person. In moments of doubt or existential crisis, they can fall back on these reasons and evidence to support their self-esteem. This makes them resilient, and gives rise to a broadly positive emotional *disposition*, meaning that the individual tends to be happy rather than depressed, falling into positive moods easily and bouncing quickly out of negative ones. Haybron (2001, 2008) has previously argued that disposition is a critical element of happiness that is overlooked in hedonic psychology accounts.

#### 5.5 Meaning and Purpose

The hedonic psychology literature has recently joined some branches of clinical psychology in emphasising the importance of meaning and purpose in life for well-being (Stone and Mackie 2013; OECD 2013). Ryff (1989) is commonly cited in this turn, but the importance of meaning is also emphasised in the logotherapy tradition (Frankl 1946/2008; Wong 2010). Furthermore, meaning was a major theme of existentialism, which saw rescuing meaning from the “nausea” of contemporary secular life to be one of the principle challenges of its age. Consider the following quote from Nietzsche (1887/1974, p. 75):

Gradually, man has become a fantastic animal that has to fulfil one more condition of existence than any other animal: man *has* to believe, to know, from time to time, *why*

he exists; his species cannot flourish without a periodic trust in life—without faith in *reason in life*.

More recent articulations include Seligman's (2012) PERMA (positive emotion, relationships, meaning and achievement) definition of well-being, and calls by the OECD (2013) to integrate meaning and purpose into definitions of subjective well-being.

A sense of meaning and purpose in coalescence comes from the pursuit of intrinsically motivated *values* and association with other individuals and groups who share these values. In essence, the individual endeavours to make the world “a better place”. They organise with others to form normative coalitions like political parties and cultural movements that strive to bring about this change. If they succeed, the world becomes more valuable. Making the world such is the purpose and the pursuit of this purpose in concert with others provides meaning. This is true even if the individual and their coalitions are unsuccessful. Even if they are thwarted by other coalitions with different normative views, the normative contest itself and its goal of reshaping the world is what matters. By way of a simple example, consider the jogger from earlier who has joined the Braddon Bolts. One can imagine this running group lobbying the national running association to host a major running event in their city so that the local running community can better participate in competitions. This is a purpose that the group rallies behind, and the activities associated with achieving it make their lives more meaningful.

## 5.6 Desire-Satisfaction Accounts

The dominant theory of well-being in public policy is the preference-satisfaction account of neoclassical welfare economics (Adler 2013; Fleurbaey and Blanchet 2013). The coalescence of being plugs quite neatly into this theory and its associated literature. The ideal- and ought-self constructs can be thought of as collections of preferences. Attaining them constitutes preference-satisfaction. An important corollary point is that coalescence, specifically the iterative recalibration of values and behaviours following affective signals, explains how preferences become “well-laundered” (Hausman 2015, p. 132). That is to say, coalescence provides an account of how individuals come to know which preferences are best for them, and helps us to distinguish right from wrong desires insofar as the individual's well-being is concerned.

## 6 Conclusion

This paper developed a novel theory of self-actualisation—the *coalescence of being*—and explained how it leads to well-being. It drew on insights from existentialism, the eudaimonic tradition, and a range of ideas and observations from recent psychological theories. The *foundation* of coalescence is a comfort with ambiguity, a noble moral outlook and a commitment to integrity, all of which encourage us to embrace the self-actualisation project and help us to prosecute it effectively. The central *mechanism* of coalescence is the pursuit of harmony between the actual-, ideal- and ought-selves. The *vehicle* for this is goal pursuit, which sees us disclose our actual self in reality. This disclosure brings with it affective signals that inform us, provided we introspect effectively upon them, as to whether our goals are self-concordant and thus appropriate for us. These affective signals thus help us to *discover* our “self” in terms of our intrinsic motivations, and also to *create* our self by

pushing us towards identified values and helping us to integrate these into our wider identity. The *result* of coalescence is well-being, regardless of which theory of well-being one employs.

**Acknowledgements** The author would like to thank Nicolas Lema Habash, Richard Ryan and 2 anonymous reviewers for helpful comments and suggestions.

**Funding** This work was supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship

## Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of interest** No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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