

(draft)

What is This Thing Called Happiness?

Since the earliest days of Western philosophy, philosophers have wanted to understand happiness. Some have wanted to understand happiness because they thought that the good life is the life full of happiness. Some have wanted to understand happiness because they thought that morally right actions are ones that maximize the happiness of all affected parties. Others have wanted to understand happiness because they thought that happiness would be the reward one would get for having lived a good life. Still others have been interested in happiness more or less intrinsically, just because it is a puzzling and important phenomenon.

When I speak here of happiness, I mean to be talking about some presumably psychological state. To say that a person is happy (in the relevant sense) is merely to describe him. In itself, it is not a moral or aretaic evaluation. Thus, I am probably not using 'happy' as a synonym of 'eudaimon' as Aristotle or others have used it. Of course, it might turn out that those who are happy (in the non-evaluative sense) will as a result have to live good lives. But this will be a substantive axiological fact and not a merely analytic claim true simply as a result of the meaning of 'happy'.

Two projects are often confused in the happiness literature. One of these is fundamentally a project for empirical psychology. This is the project of trying to determine what is likely to make a person deeply and lastingly happy. Some who pursue this project write in such a way as to suggest that they are seeking to discover the *nature* of happiness, or that they are talking about *what happiness is*, when in fact they are talking about what is likely to cause it. Thus, for example, when Charles Shultz (or one of his cartoon characters) tells us that "happiness is a warm puppy", he (or she) may mislead us. It sounds as if he is telling us what happiness is, when in fact he is really suggesting (I assume) that if you want to be happy, your best bet involves getting a warm puppy. Surely he means no more than that having such a puppy will likely make you happy.

My project here is purely philosophical. I am interested in the nature of happiness, not in the likely sources of happiness. If successful, my project would involve the discovery of a fundamental conceptual truth about happiness. Perhaps it would appear in the form of a definition. In any case, it would be a statement of necessary and sufficient conditions for a person's being happy.¹ If true at all, such a statement would presumably be necessarily true.

WLS and Sensory Hedonism about Happiness

Philosophical theories about the nature of happiness fall into a couple of main families. Some are forms of preferentism, and these make happiness fundamentally a matter of the satisfaction of desires.² Whole life satisfactionism is an especially popular form of preferentism about happiness.³ According to theories of this sort, to be happy is to be satisfied with your life as a whole. Other theories seem to make happiness turn on flourishing, or virtue.⁴ There are yet other categories.⁵ One of the most frequently mentioned theories of happiness is hedonism. Let's take a minute to consider two of the most popular theories – whole life satisfactionism and hedonism.

According to Whole Life Satisfactionism, to be happy is to be satisfied with your life as a whole. This sort of view has been defended by a number of distinguished philosophers including Richard Brandt, Wayne Sumner, Robert Nozick, John Kekes, Elizabeth Telfer, and the Polish philosopher Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz.

¹ In addition, I would like to be able to say what makes a person happy *at a time*, and *during an interval*, and *in a life*. Furthermore, if possible, I would like to have an account of *degrees of happiness* – some account of what is involved in being happy *to some specified degree*. Some also have sought accounts of what it means to say that someone is *happy in some domain of life* such as, for example, his work or his marriage.

² The views of Wayne Davis and Daniel Kahneman fall into this category.

³ The views of Richard Brandt, Wayne Sumner, Robert Nozick, Elizabeth Telfer, and Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz fall into this category.

⁴ This sort of view is found by some in the writings of Aristotle.

⁵ Haybron's "mood theory" for example. See Haybron (2006)

Perhaps the simplest and most forceful statement of the theory is the one endorsed by Tatarikiewicz. He forthrightly says that happiness is ‘satisfaction with one’s life as a whole.’(Tatarikiewicz, 1966: 1) He apparently means to defend the view that if a person is happy then he must not only be fully satisfied with the current segment of his life, he must be satisfied with the past segment of his life and the segment of his life that is yet to come: “... the feeling of happiness includes not only an agreeable present state, but also a favorable assessment of the past, and good prospects for the future.”

Elizabeth Telfer (Telfer, 1980) formulates the theory in a slightly different way. She says:

My suggestion for a definition of happiness, then is that it is a state of being pleased with one’s life as a whole...(Telfer, 8-9)

Telfer expands upon this by saying that ‘a happy man does not want anything major in his life to be otherwise; he is pleased with, that is wants (to keep), what he has got; there is nothing major which he has not got and which he wants (to get).’(Telfer, 8)

Richard Brandt (Brandt 1967) presents a straightforward version of the “whole life satisfaction” theory of happiness. Brandt states two conditions for happiness. The first condition requires that the person’s life should be, in the relevant sense, “wholly satisfactory”. Brandt’s additional condition is a matter of “feelings or emotions”. Brandt says:

....the following proposal for a definition of “happy” may be suggested. ... in order to be happy it is necessary that one like ... those parts of one’s total life pattern and circumstances that one thinks are important. To say that one likes them is in part to say that one is “satisfied” with them – that one does not wish them to be substantially different, and that they measure up, at least roughly, to the life ideal one had hoped to attain; ... [We] would not call a man happy if he did not frequently feel joy or enthusiasm or enjoy what he was doing or experiencing.(Brandt, 1967: 413-4)

Brandt's idea seems to be that in order to be a happy person, one must meet two conditions. First, one must be satisfied with the life one in fact has lived – that life must measure up (or must be believed to measure up) sufficiently to the “life ideal” one had hoped to attain. Secondly, one must have felt joy or enthusiasm frequently during that life.

These statements are open to a variety of interpretations. For purposes of discussion, let me formulate something that is strongly suggested by several of the quoted remarks:

WLS1: A person, S, is happy to a degree, n, at a time, t, iff at t, S actually judges that S's life as a whole (from birth to death) measures up to degree n with S's life ideal.

WLS1 is a form of “actualism” about whole life satisfaction. It says that in order to be happy at a time, a person must *actually* judge that his life measures up to his life ideal. But this actualism renders the theory totally implausible. Consider the case of Timmy. Imagine that Timmy never thinks about his life as a whole. Timmy never gets around to formulating any “life ideal”. Suppose instead that he constantly lives “in the moment”. He is engaged in various exciting activities; he has lots of friends; he goes to parties; travels; enjoys good health and a vibrant, energetic, carefree life. Suppose this goes on until, having reached old age, Timmy dies peacefully in his sleep. It seems to me that Timmy's life is a clear counterexample to the Socratic maxim about the unexamined life. This life is unexamined but seems well worth living. Indeed, I suspect that many poverty-stricken, sick, or oppressed people who have thought carefully about their lives would gladly trade their reflective but unhappy lives for Timmy's unreflective but happy life.

My main point here, however, is not to attack the Socratic maxim.⁶ I mention Timmy in order to bring out an apparent defect in WLS(a). Timmy never formulates any

⁶ To be honest, I must admit that I have no clear view about what the maxim actually means.

“life ideal”. He never contemplates his life as a whole. He never reflects on the question whether his life measures up to his ideal (which question is moot in any case, since he has no such ideal). As a result, Timmy gets a score of zero on the “whole life satisfaction” criterion for every moment during his life. It implies that he is never happy. But this is clearly wrong. Timmy enjoyed a wide variety of activities during just about every waking moment of his life. He always had a smile on his face. If you could look inside his brain, you would see the “happy” neurotransmitters flowing in abundance. It seems to me that he should be counted as a very happy person – a person who led a very happy life. So I think WLS(a) gives the wrong results in this case.

The fundamental problem here is that WLS(a) makes happiness depend upon the *actual* formation of a life ideal, and the *actual* occurrence of a certain judgment concerning the extent to which one’s life measures up to that ideal. In order to be happy, a person must actually have a life ideal, and must actually judge that his life as a whole measures up to his ideal. The example of Timmy shows that this is wrong on both counts. A person can be happy without formulating a life ideal and without making any such judgment.⁷

In an attempt to solve this problem, let us make use of the concept of a “would-be” judgment and a “would be” life ideal. We can say that a person’s happiness level at a time is determined not by the judgment he *actually* makes at that time about the life ideal he *actually* has at that time, but by the judgment he *would have made* at that time if he had made one, and the life ideal he *would have had* if he had formulated one at that time.

More formally, the idea is this:

WLS(h): As of a time, t , a person, x , is happy to degree n iff at t , x is such that if he were to reflect on his life as a whole at t , and if he were to have a life ideal at t , he would judge that his life measures up to degree n to that ideal.

⁷ Daniel Haybron makes a similar point in his “Happiness and the Importance of Life Satisfaction”, p. ??.

It seems to me that asking a person to reflect upon his life and his ideals and to consider the extent to which the life measures up to the ideals very well might affect his happiness level. Just asking the question might make a person happier; it might make him less happy. Consider the case of Timmy again. He is a happy-go-lucky guy who never reflects on his life as a whole and hasn't formulated a life ideal. Perhaps if he were required to think about these things, he would become depressed. His glow of happiness might fade. He might judge that his life as a whole has been a pointless waste.

We can readily imagine that many moments of Timmy's adult life are like this: he is happy at that moment, but also such that if he were to reflect at that moment on his life as a whole, he would form some life ideal, and promptly become despondent, judging his life as a whole to have been worthless. In this case, the would-be judgments would not reflect his actual situation. For every moment in his adult life, Timmy's would-be judgment gives a number that is lower than his actual happiness level for that moment. As a result, WLS(h) implies that he is never happy. But this is wrong. He is frequently very happy.

These reflections help us to see that there is simply no connection between a person's level of happiness at a time and the judgments he makes, or would make, concerning the extent to which his life measures up to his life ideal. Let us consider another popular approach to happiness -- hedonism. Though often mentioned, hedonism is rarely endorsed. It is generally mentioned only so that it can quickly be dismissed as an obviously false theory. But a few philosophers seem to have been advocates.

In a very widely quoted passage near the beginning of Chapter 2 of *Utilitarianism*, Mill seems to be defining happiness when he says:

The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong

as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. *By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure.*⁸

At first glance, it may appear that Mill is offering an answer to our question about the nature of happiness.⁹ And it may also appear that the answer he is offering is this:

H1: x is happy at t =df. x is experiencing pleasure and the absence of pain at t .

If taken as an account of the nature of happiness H1 is clearly unacceptable. It should be obvious that the stated condition for happiness is not necessary. A person can be happy at a time even though he is not experiencing pleasure and the absence of pain at that time.¹⁰ Take me, for example. I have been happy at many times during the past few years, but there never has been a time at which I experienced “pleasure and the absence of pain”. As a result of chronic (fortunately also very mild) arthritis, I *always* feel at least a slight amount of pain in my joints.

It may appear that this problem is due largely to Mill’s careless formulation. Perhaps the fundamental hedonistic insight can be salvaged if greater care is taken in stating it clearly.

Let’s suppose that whenever a person experiences some sensory pleasure, the pleasure has some phenomenally given sensory intensity. Let’s assume that this intensity can be measured in terms of “hedons”. Let’s also assume that sensory pain is subject to a similar system of measurement, but that the standard units are “dolors”. Let’s also assume that one dolor of pain is equal in absolute magnitude though opposite in “sign” to one hedon of pleasure. Now we can say that a person’s “hedono-doloric balance” at a

⁸ Mill (1863: Chapter 2). Emphasis added, FF.

⁹ On the other hand, the quoted remark might be nothing more than the introduction of a stipulative abbreviation. Perhaps Mill was not intending to give an account of the nature of happiness. Perhaps he just wanted to save some ink on later pages. Furthermore, we know that later in the book he says a lot of very strange things about happiness, and some of them suggest that upon reflection he would not want to endorse the idea seemingly present here.

¹⁰ I assume that when we say that a person is experiencing “the absence of pain” at a time, what we mean is that he is not experiencing any pain; or perhaps that he is noticing that he is not experiencing any pain at that time.

time is equal to the number of hedons of pleasure he is then experiencing, minus the number of dolors of pain he is experiencing. Perhaps if Mill had been more persnickety about his formulation, he would have said:

H2: x is happy to degree n at t =df. x 's hedono-doloric balance at $t = n$.

He could have gone on to say that a person is happy at a time if and only if he is happy to some positive degree; and unhappy if and only if happy to a negative degree. In other words, you are happy at a time if and only if you feel more sensory pleasure than pain at that time.¹¹

This hedonistic theory is clearly false. A person could be unhappy at a time even though he is feeling more sensory hedons than dolors at that time. Suppose that after being endlessly bombarded by email advertisements, Wendell has purchased a highly touted orgasm enhancer. Suppose he has paid for, and is expecting a monster 400 hedon orgasm. Suppose when the orgasm comes, it is pathetic little 12 hedon orgasm. Wendell is disappointed. He thinks he has wasted his money. He is also somewhat embarrassed, since he had been warned that the email advertisements were just scams. However, at the moment of orgasm, his hedono-doloric balance is definitely positive. He feels 12 hedons of sensory pleasure, and no dolors of sensory pain. Yet he is not happy.

H2 goes wrong in the opposite direction, too. Suppose Dolores has been suffering from serious chronic pain for a long time. Suppose her doctor informs her of a new pain management drug, which Dolores then takes. Suppose it works. The pain is dramatically reduced. Instead of suffering with constant 400 dolor pain, Dolores is now suffering with pain somewhere in the 12 dolor range. She might be very happy about this reduction in pain. If asked, she might say that she is surprised, delighted, and in general fairly happy

¹¹ After acknowledging that 'happiness' is used in a variety of vague senses in ordinary English, Sidgwick proposes a clear and precise account of its meaning for use in "scientific discussion". He says "...by 'greatest possible Happiness' we understand the greatest attainable surplus of pleasure over pain; the two terms being used, with equally comprehensive meanings, to include respectively all kinds of agreeable and disagreeable feelings." Sidgwick (1962): 120-121.

today. Yet she still has a negative hedono-doloric balance. She still feels more dolors of sensory pain than hedons of sensory pleasure.¹²

These examples remind us that a person can be unhappy at a time even though he is feeling more sensory pleasure than pain at that time; and that a person can be happy at a time even though she is feeling more sensory pain than pleasure at that time. Thus, hedonism of the Bentham-Mill-Sidgwick variety is false.

A Crucial Distinction

Nevertheless, I want to defend a form of hedonism about happiness. How can this be done?

I think there is a crucial distinction between two different sorts of pleasure. One is the familiar sort of *sensory pleasure*, where pleasure is taken to be a feeling, or sensation, perhaps relevantly like the feeling of warmth, or the feeling of pressure, or a tickle or an itch. But there is in addition a different sort of pleasure – *attitudinal pleasure*. This sort of pleasure is a propositional attitude rather than a feeling, or sensation. We attribute this sort of pleasure to a person when we say that he is pleased about something, or (more ponderously) when we say that he “takes pleasure in” some state of affairs. Consider for example the statement that Bob is pleased *to be living in Massachusetts*. In this latter case, there is explicit mention of the *object* of Bob’s pleasure. In this sort of expression, pleasure is taken to be a relation between a person and an intentional object, which I take to be a state of affairs.¹³ The pleasure attributed to Bob in this case is attitudinal pleasure, not sensory.¹⁴

¹² For an extended attack on hedonism about happiness, see Haybron (2001b).

¹³ Of course, we also may say that Bob is pleased about *the weather*, and the object in this case may seem not to be a state of affairs. However, as I see it, there is a state of affairs in the vicinity. There is some way that the weather is – cloudy, rainy, sunny, warm, or cold – and the statement means that Bob is pleased about the state of affairs of the weather’s being that way. So even in this case there is a propositional object available. Careful questioning would reveal the exact object. We just ask Bob what it is about the weather that he is pleased about.

¹⁴ I discussed the distinction between attitudinal pleasure and sensory pleasure first in “Two Questions about Pleasure” (1988) which was reprinted in Feldman (1997). I returned to that theme in Feldman (2004).

I am going to try to explain happiness by appeal to attitudinal pleasure.¹⁵ I am doubtful about the prospects for defining attitudinal pleasure, and so I propose to take it as my starting point. I will not offer an analysis of attitudinal pleasure, but will try to explain it in other ways.¹⁶

On the view I want to defend, the amount of happiness that a person enjoys at a time depends upon the occurrence at that time of certain “atoms” of happiness. The atoms of happiness are states of affairs in which a person is attitudinally pleased to some determinate degree about some specified propositional object at some specified moment. So, for example, if at a certain moment Bob is very pleased to be living in Massachusetts, then this might be an atom of his happiness:

1. Bob is pleased at 9:00pm on July 5, 2006 to degree 9 that he is living in Massachusetts.

Of course, in ordinary English we don’t often talk in quite that way. Bob might say that he is glad that he is living in Massachusetts; he might say that he is delighted to be living in Massachusetts; he might even say that he is enjoying living in Massachusetts.¹⁷

In an effort to clarify the nature of the undefined concept of attitudinal pleasure that figures in these atoms, I want to state a series of theses about attitudinal pleasure.

¹⁵ Wayne Sumner says “... there is no algorithm for computing your level of happiness from the intensity or duration of your particular enjoyments or sufferings.” (Sumner, 1996, 148) One of my main aims in this paper is to formulate an algorithm of precisely the sort that Sumner seems to be saying does not exist. Of course, when I say this, I assume that Sumner meant to be talking about *particular attitudinal enjoyments and sufferings*, not merely sensory ones.

¹⁶ Others have tried to analyze attitudinal pleasure. In a later section of this paper I discuss some of their proposals.

¹⁷ A somewhat misleading and possibly confusing expression employs “because”. He might say that he is pleased because he is living in Massachusetts. This could express the relevant thought, but very well might not. It might express a causal claim not about the object of Bob’s attitudinal pleasure, but about the cause of his sensory pleasure, which would be a completely different topic.

i. Attitudinal pleasure is a “pro attitude”. If Bob is pleased in this way about living in Massachusetts, then he is in some sense “in favor of it” or “for it” rather than “against it”. Of course, there are a lot of different pro attitudes (liking, wanting, preferring, being amused by, hoping for, etc.) and so merely saying that it is a pro attitude does not serve to identify the relevant positive propositional attitude. We need to say more.

ii. Sometimes when we say, using the term in the relevant way, that a person is pleased about some state of affairs at some time, we mean to indicate that *at that very time* he is thinking about, and taking pleasure in, that state of affairs. His attitudinal pleasure is then consciously focused on the state of affairs. So, for example, suppose an old friend comes to visit Bob. Suppose they are sitting on Bob’s deck, overlooking his wife’s flower garden. Suppose the friend asks Bob how he feels about living in Massachusetts. Bob might stop to think for a second about the fact that he lives in Massachusetts. Maybe this has not been on his mind lately. Then he might say that he is very pleased to be living here. He might then express *occurrent* attitudinal pleasure; he might mean to say that *right now* he is actively pleased about this state of affairs. Perhaps his heart beats a bit more quickly. Perhaps he gets some sort of “cheery feeling”.¹⁸ He thinks about living here in Massachusetts; he is occurrently pleased about it. This could not happen at a time when he is asleep; or at a time when he is totally engrossed in some other activity.

On another occasion, someone might say that throughout the time Bob lived in Massachusetts, he was always pleased to live here. He might intend to express the idea that Bob never had any complaints about living in Massachusetts and that, whenever he thought about it, he was occurrently pleased about it. When these things are true, Bob may be said to be *dispositionally pleased* about living in Massachusetts. If we are talking about dispositional pleasure, it would be acceptable to say that Bob is pleased to be living in Massachusetts throughout a certain interval of time even if Bob happens to be asleep at

¹⁸ I do not mean to suggest that Bob’s attitudinal pleasure is to be identified with any of the feelings that I mention. I think it’s obvious that Bob could be pleased even if he didn’t feel any of those cheery feelings.

many moments during that time, or if he is not thinking about the fact that he lives in Massachusetts during some of those moments. Perhaps he just got another speeding ticket and is not pleased at all. Still, he is dispositionally pleased about living in Massachusetts. If he were able to calm down; if he could direct his attention to his living arrangements, he would be occurrently pleased about them.¹⁹

Every atom of happiness attributes occurrent attitudinal pleasure to a person (or other suitable creature). It says that he or she (or it) is occurrently pleased about some state of affairs. It also indicates the specific time at which the person is occurrently pleased about the state of affairs. If S is occurrently pleased about p throughout a stretch of time, then S is occurrently pleased about p at every instant within that stretch. From the fact that a person is dispositionally pleased about something during a stretch of time, it does not follow that that person is occurrently pleased about that thing at any moments during that time.

iii. One important fact about occurrent attitudinal pleasure is that it comes in degrees. Surely it makes sense to say that a person is pleased about p, and pleased about q, but more pleased about p than he is about q. Thus, for example, Bob might be pleased about the fact that he is the world champion (in his age group) in indoor rowing, and also pleased about the fact that he lives in Massachusetts, but he might take far more pleasure in the former fact than he does in the latter.

iv. Although I would not want to take the numbers very seriously, I want to say that these different amounts of attitudinal pleasure can be represented numerically. So I will say that whenever a person, S, is attitudinally pleased about a state of affairs, p, there is a number, n, such that S is pleased to degree n about p. When a person is pleased about something, the relevant number is positive. Higher numbers represent greater degrees of attitudinal pleasure. I see no reason to suppose that there is any upper limit to

¹⁹ I am grateful to Brad Skow for impressing upon me the fact that we cannot *define* dispositional pleasure by the unexplained use of the subjunctive conditional “if he were to think about it, he would be occurrently pleased”. The conditional is not sufficiently sensitive to unusual circumstances. So it’s better just to leave the concept of disposition unanalyzed, hoping that the idea will be sufficiently familiar.

possible degrees of attitudinal pleasure. No matter how pleased you are about something, you (or someone else) might be more pleased about something else. I assume that the numbers can be assigned in such a way that if S is twice as pleased about p as he is about q, then the number representing his degree of pleasure concerning p will be twice the number representing his degree of pleasure concerning q.²⁰

v. Attitudinal pleasure has an opposite – attitudinal displeasure. While Bob may be pleased to be living in Massachusetts, he may be displeased about his receipt of another speeding ticket. We can understand displeasure to be “negative pleasure”; in other words, to be displeased about a thing is to be pleased about it to some negative degree. Let us assume that degrees of displeasure are equal in absolute magnitude but opposite in “sign” to degrees of pleasure. Whereas attitudinal pleasure is a “pro” attitude, attitudinal displeasure is the corresponding “con” attitude.

vi. There is also the case in which a person contemplates a proposition and is neither pleased nor displeased about it. It just leaves him cold. This gives us a non-arbitrary zero point in our scale of measurement for occurrent attitudinal pleasure – the point that represents the case in which a person is neither pleased nor displeased about some state of affairs. I have assumed that each unit increment is equal in absolute size to each other unit increment. As a result of these assumptions, we may now say that there is a ratio scale on which we can locate every atom of happiness. In each instance in which a person is attitudinally pleased or displeased about a proposition at a time, there is some number on this scale that indicates precisely how pleased he is then about that proposition.

vii. What things are suitable objects of attitudinal pleasure? About what can a person be pleased? As I see it, there is no conceptual limit to the things about which a person might be pleased. Any state of affairs is something about which someone might be pleased. I grant, of course, that there might be some contingent barriers to attitudinal

²⁰ I certainly do not mean to suggest that there is any easy way for observers to determine the amount of pleasure that a person experiences at a time. Indeed, as I will say in my comments in item (??) below, even the person experiencing the pleasure may be unable to specify its magnitude correctly.

pleasure. Perhaps there are some things about which no one could (psychologically) be pleased. Still, such barriers would not be conceptual, or “logical”. My point here is that there are no such logical barriers to pleasure.

viii. One implication of this is that, on my view, a person might be pleased about things that are in the past or future, as well as about things that are in the present.²¹ Bob might be pleased about temporally present things (as in example (1)) or about past things. Thus, he might now be pleased *that he spent his childhood – many years ago – in Massachusetts*. He might now be pleased about future things; for example, *that he will someday enjoy his Golden Years in Massachusetts*. He might even be pleased about things whose temporal location is somewhat obscure – such as the fact *that 1937 ends long before 2037 begins*. It is not clear that we can assign any particular date to such a fact as that.²²

ix. A person might be pleased about huge “global” facts about his life, and he might be pleased about minor, trivial, and “local” facts about the immediate present.²³

x. A person might be pleased about things that are happening, or did happen, or will happen, to others; he is pleased *that his daughter will be coming home again to live in Massachusetts*. He might be pleased about things that don’t happen to anyone, such as the fact about 1937 mentioned above.

xi. In my view, if a person is occurrently pleased about some state of affairs at some time, then he is thinking about it at that time.²⁴ I do not mean to suggest that every

²¹ In saying this, I believe I am denying Wayne Sumner’s claim (“Something In Between”, p.13) that pleasure must always be directed toward temporally present states of affairs.

²² This marks an interesting difference between attitudinal pleasure and enjoyment. I think enjoyment is also a propositional attitude, but its objects are restricted to the present. If Bob enjoys living in Massachusetts, then he must think he is living in Massachusetts *now*. We don’t say that he now enjoys the fact that he lived here in his childhood, or that he now enjoys the fact that he will live here in the future. Of course, we can say that he now enjoys *thinking about the fact that he lived here in his childhood*, but that object is in the present.

²³ Although many philosophers appeal to the alleged distinction between local and global facts, I am not entirely clear on it. I cannot recall ever having seen it drawn precisely.

²⁴ Davis seems to maintain a very similar view about happiness. See Davis (1981): 113.

such state of affairs must be at the very forefront of consciousness. But if it is correct to say that right now Bob is occurrently pleased to be living in Massachusetts, then he must, at least to some extent, be aware of the fact that he is living in Massachusetts. If right now he's giving no thought at all to the idea that he lives in Massachusetts, then at best he could now be dispositionally pleased about it.

This indicates at least one class of objects about which no one could be pleased. Consider the class of things that no one can grasp. If you can't grasp, or entertain, a certain proposition, you can't believe it or be pleased about it. So there is this limitation on your attitudinal pleasure: if you can't think of something, you can't be pleased about it.²⁵

xii. In my view, occurrent attitudinal pleasure entails belief.²⁶ If Bob is pleased to be living in Massachusetts, then he must think that he is living in Massachusetts. If he thinks he does not live in Massachusetts, or if he is not sure where he lives, then he cannot be pleased about living here. At best he might be pleased about some related thought – perhaps he is pleased about the fact that he *might* be living in Massachusetts. But in that case he must believe that he might be living in Massachusetts.

xiii. I doubt that attitudinal pleasure entails knowledge. I think the phenomenon of “false pleasure” is possible. A person can be pleased about something that turns out to have been false. ‘Whoopie!’ says Bob, ‘We are moving to Massachusetts!’ He’s pleased that he is going to live in Massachusetts. Later it turns out to be a mistake. Bob misunderstood what Phyllis said. She said that they are moving to Mississippi. But Bob was pleased for a while; and he was pleased about something. I think he was pleased about moving to Massachusetts even though it was not true that he was moving to Massachusetts. He had a false belief. It was not knowledge but he was pleased about it

²⁵ Of course, there is an indirect way in which a person can be pleased about a proposition he cannot grasp. Suppose there is some mathematical proposition that is too complicated for Bob to grasp. He knows it only by the description “the theorem that Wile has recently proven”. Bob cannot be pleased about the theorem itself, but he can be pleased *that the theorem that Wile has recently proven is true*.

²⁶ Davis accepts something relevantly like this, too. See Davis (1981): 113. Davis goes further and says that happiness about p entails *absolute certainty* about p. This seems to me to go a bit too far.

anyway. This example also shows that occurrent attitudinal pleasure does not entail truth.

xiv. There is another way in which attitudinal pleasure might be thought to be connected to knowledge. Someone might think that if you are pleased about something, then you must know that you are pleased about it. This seems not true. At least, it is not true as a matter of conceptual necessity. I think it is possible for there to be a person who is confused or self-deceived about his own mental states. Consider the case of Stan, the overly competitive indoor rower. He finds that one of his rivals has just been diagnosed with a serious illness. Perhaps Stan is pleased about this, but is too ashamed of himself to acknowledge that that he is pleased about it; perhaps he finds it difficult to admit to himself that he is the kind of person who could be pleased about a rival's illness. In such a case, Stan is pleased about something but seems not to know that he is pleased about it.

xv. Although occurrent attitudinal pleasure and desire are both "pro" attitudes, no one supposes that they are the same attitude, or even equivalent. Suppose Bob knows he's in Vermont, but wishes he were in Massachusetts. In this case, he wants to be in Massachusetts, but it would be wrong to say that he's pleased to be in Massachusetts. The main problem, obviously, is that he does not believe that he is in Massachusetts.

xvi. A more plausible view is that attitudinal pleasure can be identified with the combination of belief and desire. Assuming that belief and desire are propositional attitudes that come in suitable amounts, we might say that a person, S, is pleased about a state of affairs, p if and only if S desires p and S believes that p is true.²⁷ Loosely, to be pleased about something is to want it and to believe that it is happening.

It seems to me that the combination of belief and desire is not sufficient for attitudinal pleasure. It is possible to want a thing and to think that you're getting it without having a favorable emotional outlook on that thing. To see this in a clear example, consider a case in which a person has a desire that he thinks is shameful and

²⁷ Compare Davis (1981, p. 113)

hurtful. He wishes he did not have that desire. Suppose, for example, that Nicko is addicted to cigarettes but has been trying to quit. He knows that if he succumbs to his desire to light up on some occasion, his eventual quitting will be delayed even longer. He now wants to light up, and thinks he is lighting up; but he takes no pleasure in the fact that he is lighting up.

The examples could be multiplied.²⁸ The point is clear: getting what you want is one thing; being pleased about it is another. Though they often come together, they can come apart.

xvii. Surely it is possible for a person to be pleased about several things at once. Bob might be pleased to be living in Massachusetts, pleased to be sitting on his deck, and pleased to be smelling the roses, all at one time. And equally surely, a person can be pleased about several things at a time, and simultaneously displeased about several other things. Bob is still displeased about his latest speeding ticket.

xvii. It seems to me that there is an important distinction between *intrinsic attitudinal pleasure* and *extrinsic attitudinal pleasure*. In some cases a person is pleased about a certain fact, but only because he takes this fact to be a sign of another fact that he is pleased about. For example, Bob might be pleased to see the beads of sweat breaking

²⁸ Consider the case of a rigidly Kantian moralist, Otto. Otto might be a “duty for duty’s sake” sort of guy. He does what he takes to be his moral duty, but he does not enjoy it. He is in general an unhappy fellow. On some occasion, we may suppose, Otto takes himself to have an onerous duty – he is called upon to visit a boring elderly neighbor in the hospital. As Otto sits there listening to the boring kvetching of his elderly neighbor, he thinks he is doing his duty, he wants to be doing his duty, but he is not pleased about doing his duty. He certainly does not have any “cheery feelings”.

A different sort of case involves curiosity and changed tastes. Suppose that long ago Nicko had smoked a certain unusual Turkish cigarette. At the time, he found the taste exquisite. He really enjoyed it. Years have now passed. He has been looking, without success, for more cigarettes of this unusual sort. He has wanted to taste that taste again. Finally he locates a pack of these cigarettes. He lights up. As he lights up, he wants to be tasting that remembered taste; he thinks he is tasting that taste. The cigarette tastes just as he thought it would. Alas, it no longer seems exquisite. It is hard for Nicko to understand how he could have enjoyed it years ago. Nicko is sad when he thinks of the years he has spent travelling through the Middle East looking for these cigarettes. What a waste! The experience is overwhelmingly disappointing. In spite of the fact that he wants to be tasting this taste, and believes himself to be tasting it, he is not pleased to be tasting this taste.

out on his rival's forehead. Bob might be pleased about this, but only because it suggests that his rival is tiring fast, and he's pleased about that. And he's pleased that his rival is tiring fast only because it suggests that Bob is going to be able to defeat him.

I will say that a person is *intrinsically attitudinally pleased* to some degree about some state of affairs, p, if and only if he is pleased about p to that degree for its own sake, and not because there is some other state of affairs, q, such that he is pleased about p only because he takes p to be suitably related to q, and he is pleased about q. I will say that a person is merely *extrinsically attitudinally pleased* about some state of affairs if and only if he is pleased about it, but not intrinsically.²⁹ Every atom of happiness is an attribution of occurrent intrinsic attitudinal pleasure or displeasure to a person, at a time, to a degree, in a specific propositional object.

This concludes my discussion of attitudinal pleasure and the atoms of happiness. I now turn to questions about aggregation.

Happiness at a Time, During an Interval, in a Domain, and in a Life

Suppose Bob and Phyllis are having a romantic dinner. Suppose that as they sip their champagne, Phyllis asks Bob if he is happy: 'Are you happy right now, dear?' she asks. 'And furthermore, if you are happy, precisely *how happy* are you?' Bob may be nonplussed. This is not the sort of question he expects from Phyllis. He may not know the answer. But in my view, there is an answer.

The answer is this: consider all the states of affairs that Bob is occurrently intrinsically attitudinally pleased (or displeased) about, at the moment. For each,

²⁹ There are further complexities here. A person might be *partially* intrinsically pleased about some state of affairs. Suppose, for example, that Bob is pleased to degree 10 to be living in Massachusetts. Suppose that he is, in part, pleased about this because it enables him to live near his children, who also live in Massachusetts. Suppose that he would still be pleased, though only to degree five, to live in Massachusetts even if his children didn't live there. Suppose that this other component of his pleasure is not dependent upon anything else that he is pleased about. Then half of his pleasure is intrinsic, and half is not. In such a case, we can say that Bob gets five units of intrinsic attitudinal pleasure out of living in Massachusetts.

consider the extent to which he is intrinsically pleased (or displeased) about it. Add up these numbers, making sure to make use of *negative* numbers for all the things Bob is intrinsically displeased about at the time. This sum represents how happy Bob is at the moment.

Kahneman uses the term ‘instant utility’ to refer to something like this number. (Kahneman 1999: 4) Davis uses the expression ‘degree of occurrent happiness’. (Davis 1981: 113) I will instead speak of a person’s *momentary happiness*. It is defined in this way:

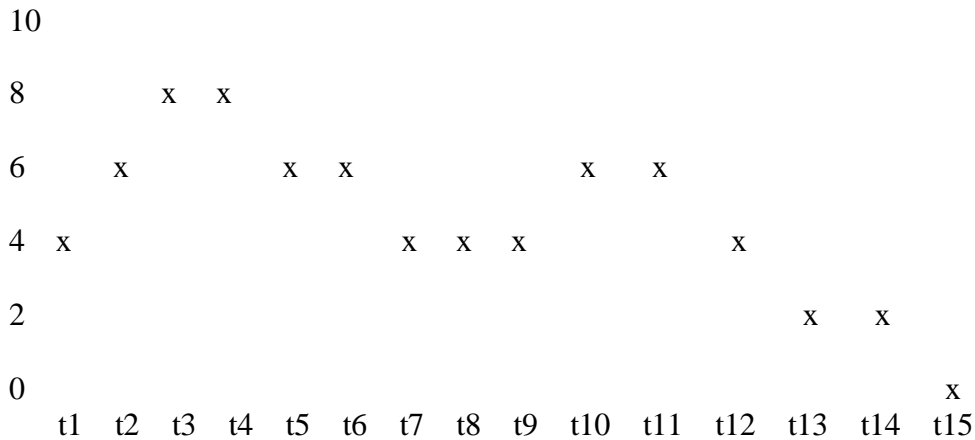
D1: S’s momentary happiness at t = the sum, for all propositions, p, such that S is occurrently intrinsically (dis)pleased about p at t, of the degree to which S is occurrently intrinsically (dis)pleased about p at t.³⁰

I have introduced and described the items that I take to be the atoms of happiness. These involve *attitudinal pleasure and displeasure*. They are states of affairs in which a person is intrinsically (dis)pleased to some determinate degree at some moment about some specified object. D1 purports to define a person’s momentary happiness level as a function of the set of all the atoms of happiness that the person is experiencing at that moment. But this is hardly a complete theory of happiness. I have not said anything about a person’s happiness during an interval, or in a life, or in a domain of life. I now turn to these questions.

Suppose Bob drives down the Mass Pike during a period of time starting at t1 and ending at t15. Suppose that, for each of 15 instants during this period, Bob’s momentary happiness level has been calculated. At t1, Bob’s happiness level is +4; at t2 it is +6; etc.

³⁰ The reader may wonder whether there might be a problem in cases in which a person is pleased about infinitely many things at the same time. The sum will not be properly defined in such cases. I think this problem will not arise, since attitudinal pleasure entails “thinking about” and belief. Since human beings cannot think of infinitely many things at one time, they cannot be occurrently pleased about infinitely many things at one time. The sum, then, will always be the sum of finitely many addends.

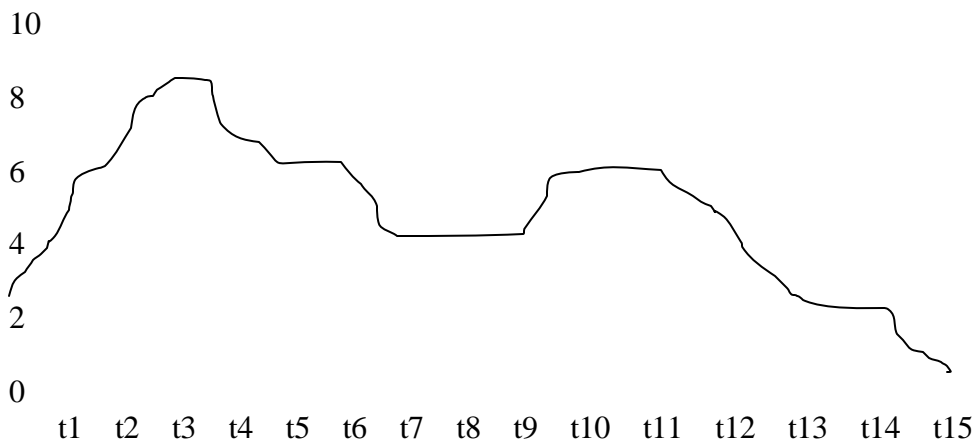
These 15 momentary happiness levels could easily be plotted on a simple graph. It would look like this:



Graph 1

On the graph, numbers on the up-and-down axis indicate momentary happiness levels; numbers across represent times; each 'x' represents Bob's momentary happiness at the indicated moment.

But, of course, the interval contains more moments – presumably infinitely many. If we plot the position of Bob's happiness level for *all* of these moments during the interval t1-t15, we will get a line instead of a disconnected collection of x's. Perhaps it will look like this:

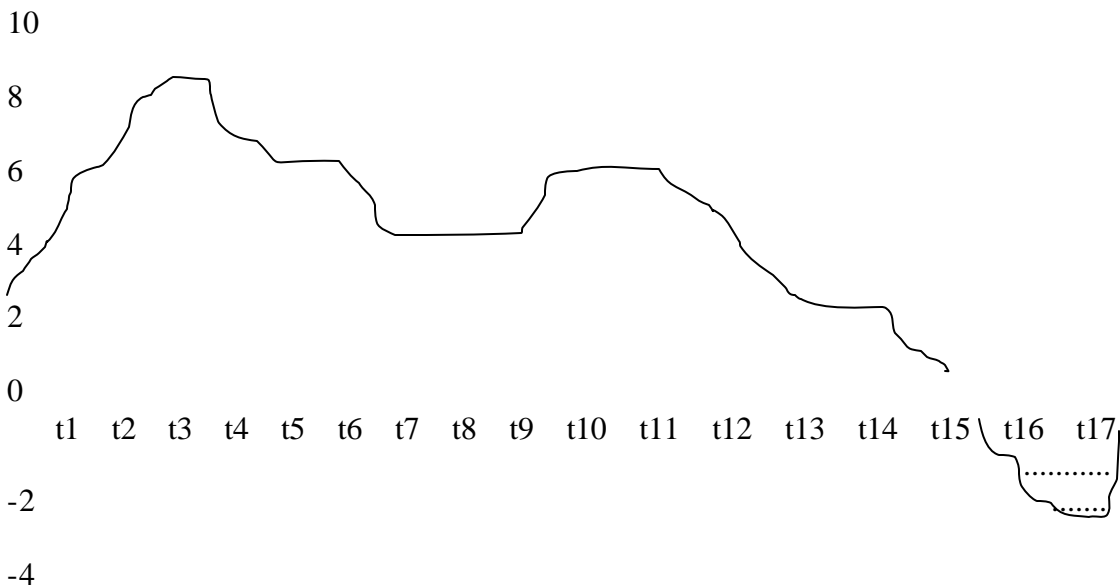


Graph 2

We can call this line “Bob’s happiness curve for t1-t15”. It shows, for every instant in the specified interval, Bob’s momentary happiness level for that instant.

The area under the happiness curve (down to the zero line) represents the total amount of happiness that Bob experiences during the whole period of time. Thus, Bob’s happiness during the period t1-15 is represented by the shaded area of Graph 2.³¹

Suppose that during the period t15-t17, Bob is engaged in some discussion with a Massachusetts State Trooper. Perhaps the conversation includes such remarks as “May I see your license and registration, please?” and “Do you have any idea how fast you were going?” Suppose Bob was intrinsically displeased about a number of things during this period of time. In that case, his happiness curve would go below the zero line. In that case, the graph might look more like this:



Graph 3

Bob’s total unhappiness during t15-t17 is represented by the dotted area between the “unhappiness curve” and the zero line above it. To find Bob’s total net happiness during the period t1-t17, subtract the unhappiness area from the happiness area.

³¹ Note to reader: I have not been able to insert the shading. I am working on that. Please bear with me.

The principles illustrated in this simple example can be applied to any person, and any period of time. It will give answers to such questions as ‘how happy were you in your childhood?’, ‘were you happy during your years in Providence?’, and ‘how happy was Helen during March?’ It also provides a clear sense for such familiar remarks as ‘have a happy birthday’, ‘have a happy new year’, and ‘happy days are here again’.

We need next to say a few words about happiness in various domains of life. What might be meant by saying that a person is happy in his marriage, but not happy in his work? Surely this is not to be explained by appeal to happiness during different intervals of time – it’s not as if certain periods of time are “work intervals” and others are “marriage intervals”. A married person is still married when he goes to work.

Suppose Bob tells us that he takes pleasure in his work. If we are nosey, we may ask him to expand upon his comment. We may ask him to be more specific: “precisely what about your work do you take pleasure in?” Suppose Bob says that in particular he is pleased about the fact that has friendly colleagues, and the fact that he gets to think about Leibniz all the time, and the fact that he can take off to go rowing any time he feels like doing so. That’s what he enjoys about his work. Let us say that these are the happifying features of his work. I assume that there are some unhappifying features of his work, too.

Now we need only to do a tiny bit of simple arithmetic to find out how happy Bob is in his work during a period of time. Select a time, t , during the period. Take the sum, for all the happifying and unhappifying features, p , of his work, of the degree to which Bob is occurrently intrinsically (dis)pleased about p at t . That sum represents the extent of Bob’s (un)happiness with his work at t . Do the same for all other times in the period. Plot the points representing Bob’s happiness with respect to his work at all those times. Draw the curves as before. Do the subtraction if necessary. The result is Bob’s happiness with his work during the period of time you have selected. The same could be done for any domain of life and any period of time.

Now let us turn to the question about the happy life. Aristotle seems to endorse the maxim attributed to Solon: “Count no man happy till he’s dead.”(*NE* Bk. 1, Ch. 10) The present approach provides a convenient way to make sense of Solon’s maxim. When we say that someone is a happy person, we may mean that he has led a happy life; in other words, we may mean that his net happiness for the whole interval during which he lives is positive. According the view presented here, a person’s net lifetime happiness is determined by the magnitudes of two areas – the area below his lifetime happiness curve and the area above his lifetime unhappiness curve. The person is said to have had a happy life if the difference between these areas is positive. The person’s net lifetime happiness is the magnitude of the difference.

A pessimist will be sure to point out that even if a person has been pretty happy throughout his life so far, and even if he is very happy right now, if he’s still alive, there is still time for him to experience enormous unhappiness, and in this way ruin what otherwise might have been a happy life. As the pessimist sees it, there is always time for things to go bad. But on the other hand, an optimist will be sure to point out that, even if a person has been pretty unhappy, there is always the chance that his final hours will bring such great happiness that, in the end, his life will turn out to have been a happy one. There is always time for things to improve. “Count no man *unhappy* till he’s dead” will be the optimist’s motto. So we take a certain risk if we say, while a person is still alive, either that his is a happy life or that his is an unhappy life.

This reveals an ambiguity in the statement that a certain person “is a happy person”. For the statement might mean (a) that the person is happy *at the moment of utterance*. In that case the statement would be true if the person had a positive momentary happiness level at the moment of utterance. Since (under this interpretation) the statement has no implications about future happiness levels, impending good or bad fortune could not affect such a claim. It’s merely a statement about the person’s present happiness level. We don’t need to wait for the person to die to determine that the statement is true. The statement that a certain person is happy might mean (b) that the person is generally, or typically, happy. In that case the statement would be true if the

person generally, or typically, has a positive momentary happiness level. We don't need to wait for the person to die to say this, either. But finally, the statement that a certain person is a happy person might mean (c) that the person has (or *will end up having had*) a "happy life". In that case, the statement is true only if the person's net lifetime happiness is positive. If the person is still alive, this statement is much riskier. Its truth depends on things that have happened in the past and other things that will happen in the future. Since things can always take a turn for the worse, perhaps it's best to wait until the person is dead before making such a bold claim. If this is what Solon meant, his motto is a judicious piece of very ancient philosophical wisdom.

Timmy, Wendell and Dolores

Earlier I mentioned a case that casts doubt on Whole Life Satisfactionism and two cases that cast doubt on sensory hedonism as theories of happiness. Let us now briefly reconsider those cases to see what attitudinal hedonism says about them.

I described Timmy as a living counterexample to the Socratic maxim about the unexamined life. He was a guy who was unreflectively happy all the time. He was a fun-loving, party-going fellow who always had a smile on his face but who didn't formulate any life ideal and never contemplated his life as a whole. Furthermore, I stipulated that if he had given any thought to such deep matters, he would have been dismayed. The smile would have disappeared from his face. Whole life satisfaction in either the actualist or the hypotheticalist form says he is unhappy, but we can see that this is wrong. Timmy is a happy guy.

My attitudinal hedonism about happiness gets Timmy's case right. Select a moment when he is at a party, enjoying the food and drink, the music, and the companionship of his party-loving friends. Clearly, there are many hedonic atoms of happiness involving Timmy at that time. Here are a few:

2. Timmy is attitudinally pleased at tn to degree 10 about the fact that the music sounds like *this*.
3. Timmy is attitudinally pleased at tn to degree 10 about the fact that the beer is cold and the peanuts are salty.
4. Timmy is attitudinally pleased at tn to degree 10 about the fact that Tammy is such a fun-loving party animal.

If these are all the atoms of happiness involving Timmy at this moment, then my theory implies (correctly) that Timmy is pretty happy at tn . His hedono-doloric balance at this time is +30. This is all true even though Timmy has no life ideal and is not thinking about his life as a whole at tn . We may also assume that if Timmy had thought about his life at tn , he would have left the party in a glum mood. So whereas WLS in either form gets this case wrong, my theory gets it right.

Now let us consider the cases that I mentioned in connection with sensory hedonism. One of these involved Wendell, who had a positive hedono-doloric balance at a certain moment, but who was not happy at that moment. The other case involved Dolores, who had a negative hedono-doloric balance at a certain moment, but who was happy then anyway. Since the cases are structurally similar, we can focus on just one of them. Let's look at the case of Dolores.

Dolores's situation was described as follows: she had been suffering with unrelenting pain in the 400 dolor range for some time. She was feeling somewhat hopeless. But then her doctor prescribed a new drug which promptly reduced her level of pain to something like 12 dolors. Since she was feeling no other sensory pleasures or pains at the moment in question, her hedono-doloric balance was -12. Sensory hedonism implies that she was unhappy; but I said that she was thrilled and delighted and filled with new hope. She was very happy, though still in pain. This case refutes sensory

hedonism about happiness. What does my attitudinal hedonism about happiness imply about this case?

Attitudinal hedonism says that Dolores's momentary happiness level is the sum of the happiness levels of all the atoms of happiness that Dolores is experiencing at the moment. (Let's call the moment '*tn*'.) What are Dolores's atoms of pleasure and displeasure at the relevant moment? Earlier I specified that Dolores was thrilled about the dramatic reduction in pain, and that she was hopeful about future. Consider these possible atoms of happiness

5. Dolores is attitudinally pleased at *tn* to degree 10 about the fact that Dolores is feeling 386 fewer dolors than she had been feeling recently.
6. Dolores is attitudinally pleased at *tn* to degree 10 about the fact that there is reason to hope that her pain will soon be removed entirely.
7. Dolores is attitudinally pleased at *tn* to degree 10 about the fact that she likely will not have to suffer any pangs of 400 dolor pain anytime in the near future.

Of course, it's not all good news for Dolores. She is still feeling 14 dolors of sensory pain. Let us grant that she takes attitudinal displeasure in various sensations that she is having. It will indicate the relevant sensations merely by saying that Dolores feels "like *this*":

8. Dolores is attitudinally displeased at *tn* to degree 14 about the fact that she feels like *this* at *tn*.

For ease of calculation, let us assume that these are the only atoms of happiness involving Dolores at *tn*. In that case, her momentary happiness level is +16. The moment counts according to attitudinal hedonism – correctly, as I see it -- as a happy

time for Dolores. Thus, whereas sensory hedonism yields the wrong result in the case of Dolores, my theory yields the right result. She's happy though in pain.

Since the example involving Wendell is structurally identical to the case involving Dolores, there is no need to discuss it in detail. Attitudinal hedonism declares that Wendell is unhappy, even though his hedono-doloric balance is positive.

This completes my presentation of my view about happiness. It is a form of hedonism about happiness, but it is not a form of sensory hedonism. It is instead a form of attitudinal hedonism. I am claiming, roughly, that to be happy is to take pleasure in things; the greater the extent to which you take pleasure in things, the happier you are (minus, of course, the extent to which you take displeasure in things). This seems to me to be an adequate account of the nature of happiness. If time permitted, I would like to discuss the question whether happiness – so construed – is the good. And again, if time permitted, I would try to defend a positive answer to that question. But time does not permit.

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