

What Is This Thing Called Happiness?

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Abstract of Whole Book

This book is a philosophical study of the nature and value of happiness. Part One is devoted to critical discussion of the most important theories about the nature of happiness, understood as some sort of psychological state. Views discussed include sensory hedonism, local preferentism, Kahneman's theory, and Whole Life Satisfactionism. Part Two of the book contains the exposition and defense of a novel theory about the nature and value of happiness. It is a form of attitudinal hedonism. The idea that a person's welfare, or well-being, depends essentially on happiness is explained and (with reservations) defended, provided that happiness is understood according to the theory presented here. Part Three of the book extends the discussion into some areas that bear on interactions between empirical research concerning happiness and philosophical inquiry into the same phenomenon. Current methods of measuring happiness are criticized and a new method is proposed. Philosophical implications of empirical research concerning happiness are evaluated.

KEYWORDS FOR BOOK AS A WHOLE: Happiness, eudaimonism, welfare, well-being, hedonism, utility, preference, Kahneman, satisfaction, whole life satisfaction, subjective well-being, Tatarikiewicz, pleasure, Sen, Sumner, Diener, measurement, Layard, MRI.

CHAPTER ONE – SOME PUZZLES ABOUT HAPPINESS

Popular reports indicate that some empirical researchers have discovered that the curve of lifetime happiness is U-shaped; others have discovered that it is inverted U-shaped; and others have found that it is a straight line. Perhaps the researchers were focusing on

distinct phenomena. But then which of them was actually studying *happiness*? We need to determine the nature of happiness before we set out to plot its curve. The attempt to determine the nature of happiness is a philosophical project, not to be confused with the empirical project of trying to determine the typical causes of happiness. There is a further philosophical question: Does individual human welfare track happiness? If we can determine what happiness is, and if we come to think that welfare tracks happiness, then we will want to determine whether philosophical reflection can help to shed light on the conceptual foundations of empirical research into happiness.

KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER ONE: Happiness, lifetime happiness, hedonic psychology, positive psychology, eudaimonism, welfare, well-being,

CHAPTER TWO – SENSORY HEDONISM ABOUT HAPPINESS

Bentham, Mill, and Sidgwick say things that strongly suggest sensory hedonism about happiness. This is the view that a person's level of happiness equal to the total amount of sensory pleasure he is feeling at that moment, minus the total amount of sensory pain he is feeling at that moment. Daniel Haybron presented a series of arguments against sensory hedonism about happiness. These arguments are explained and criticized. More successful arguments against sensory hedonism are then presented. One of these is based on the case of the New Mother. At the moment when she gives birth the New Mother (a) is experiencing very severe sensory pain (and no sensory pleasure) but at the same time (b) is profoundly happy. Thus, a person's level of happiness at a time cannot be identified with the net amount of sensory pleasure she is feeling at that time.

KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER TWO: Hedonism, pleasure, hedon, dolor, hedonodoloric balance, Bentham, Mill, Sidgwick, Haybron, Wendell, Dolores, the New Mother.

CHAPTER THREE – KAHNEMAN’S “OBJECTIVE HAPPINESS”

In ‘Objective Happiness’, Daniel Kahneman apparently means to offer an account of the nature of happiness. A person’s objective happiness level at a moment (or “instant utility”) is defined as the extent to which he wants the experience he is having at that moment to continue. Objective happiness during an interval is the temporal integral of instant utilities for all the moments during the interval. Kahneman suggests that objective happiness is worth recording because it indicates happiness; and the welfare levels of citizens track their happiness so understood. However, arguments are presented that show it is doubtful that “objective happiness” is tightly related to anything we would ordinarily call happiness. It is also doubtful that it is related in any interesting way to welfare. A person can be very happy and doing well at a time even though she does not want her experience to continue.

KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER THREE: Objective happiness, instant utility, Kahneman, preferentism, hedonism, the New Mother, Brett the drag racer.

CHAPTER FOUR – SUBJECTIVE LOCAL PREFERENTISM ABOUT HAPPINESS

Preferentism is the view that the concept of happiness can be explicated by appeal to the concepts of *desire* and *satisfaction*. There are subjective as well as objective forms.

According to a typical objective form of preferentism, a person's level of happiness is equal to the extent to which his desires are satisfied. In this chapter a form of subjective preferentism due to Wayne Davis is explained. Arguments are presented to show that this form of preferentism goes wrong in certain types of case. Happiness involves more than just the belief that things are going as you want them to be going. Preferentism confronts a near-paradox. This involves a person who has one desire: the desire to be unhappy. Davis's theory seems to imply (given certain natural assumptions) that this person believes he is happy if and only if he believes he is unhappy.

KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER FOUR: Preferentism, desire, satisfaction, Wayne Davis, Lois and the Dinosaurs, paradox for preferentism.

CHAPTER FIVE – WHOLE LIFE SATISFACTION CONCEPTS OF HAPPINESS

The most popular concepts of happiness among psychologists are ones according to which happiness is "satisfaction with life as a whole". There are hundreds of non-equivalent forms of whole life satisfactionism. However, every precise conception either requires *actual* satisfaction with life or requires *hypothetical* satisfaction with life.

Arguments are presented to demonstrate that a person can be "happy" even though he is not actually making any judgment about the extent to which he is satisfied with his life.

Other arguments show that a person can be "unhappy" even though it is not correct to say

that if he were to think about his life, he would be dissatisfied with it. This shows that happiness cannot be identified with whole life satisfaction. Appendix A contains discussion of problems concerning interactions between temporal considerations and WLS theories of happiness. Appendix B discusses the idea that happiness can be defined as the score that a person achieves on a suitable happiness test.

KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER FIVE: Whole life satisfaction, Bernard van Praag, Wayne Sumner, Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, Elizabeth Telfer, lability problem, instability problem, absolutism, hypotheticalism, Timmy, Tammy, Valerie Tiberius.

CHAPTER SIX – WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED HAPPINESS?

Chapter Two contained criticism of sensory hedonism. Chapter Six contains a defense of attitudinal hedonism about happiness. According to this theory, the atoms of happiness are episodes in which a person takes attitudinal pleasure in some state of affairs.

Principles about attitudinal pleasure are presented, emphasizing how it differs from sensory pleasure. Attitudinal Hedonism about Happiness is explained and defended.

Many writers seem to assume that ‘happy’ in ordinary English is multiply ambiguous. In Appendix C some typical claims of ambiguity are reviewed. In fact, there is not much evidence to support the claim that ‘happy’ is ambiguous. It appears that in its central uses in ordinary English, ‘happy’ is vague, but fundamentally univocal. To say that a person is happy means – roughly – that he takes on balance more attitudinal pleasure than displeasure in things.

KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER SIX: Sensory pleasure, attitudinal pleasure, Wendell, Dolores, the New Mother, Bob, occurrent pleasure, intrinsic pleasure, momentary happiness level, Attitudinal Hedonism about Happiness, AHH, Solon's Maxim.

CHAPTER SEVEN – ATTITUDINAL HEDONISM ABOUT HAPPINESS

According to Attitudinal Hedonism about Happiness (AHH), to be happy at a time is to have a positive net balance of intrinsic occurrent attitudinal pleasure at that time.

Happiness in an interval is the integral of happiness at moments within the interval.

Happiness in a domain of life is happiness taken in objects suitably associated with the domain. Happiness in life as a whole is happiness in the interval that is your whole life.

Chapter Seven contains discussion of some objections to AHH. One of these objections involves the claim that AHH goes wrong in the case of “objectless moods”. The second is based on the idea that AHH ignores the “cheery feelings” that some think are a crucial element in happiness. Cases that were introduced earlier in connection with competing theories of happiness are revisited. The aim is to clarify AHH as well as to show that it is an attractive theory of happiness.

KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER SEVEN: AHH, Attitudinal Hedonism about Happiness, objectless moods, Haybron, Ira, cheery feelings, attitudinal feelings, shallow happiness, Brett, Susan, Lois, Tammy, Bruce, Aristotle.

CHAPTER EIGHT – EUDAIMONISM

Eudaimonism is the doctrine that welfare tracks happiness. 8.2 contains critical discussion of several proposed tests designed to help us to focus on the concept of welfare. The Crib Test and the Sympathy Test are not entirely decisive. Alternatively, we may be able to identify welfare by noting how it fits into a web including such concepts as benefit, harm, self-interest, prudence, selflessness, altruism, and quality of life.

Amartya Sen suggested that when a person's happiness depends upon "desperate survival strategies", his welfare may be lower than his happiness level. In 8.3 the objection is critically examined. Another problem for eudaimonism arises in the case of a person whose happiness is "fragmented". The extent to which the fragmented happiness of such a person constitutes a difficulty for eudaimonism is discussed in 8.4.

Appendix D distinguishes among several different theories that may go by the name 'eudaimonism'.

KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER EIGHT: Eudaimonism, welfare, well-being, sympathy test, crib test, triangulation, survival strategies, Sen, fragmentation, Sacks.

CHAPTER NINE – THE PROBLEM OF INAUTHENTIC HAPPINESS

Amartya Sen mentioned the case of a "demeaned and demoralized housewife" who has been brainwashed into thinking that a constricted life such as hers is appropriate for a woman. Thus, she is satisfied with that life. A simple form of Whole Life

Satisfactionism implies that this housewife ('Bertha') is happy. A typical form of eudaimonism then implies that Bertha is enjoying positive welfare. This may seem implausible.

Wayne Sumner responded by claiming that for a person's happiness to contribute to her welfare, that happiness must be "authentic". Chapter Nine contains discussion of a series of cases intended to show that the restriction to authentic satisfaction yields problematic evaluations in certain types of cases. The relevance of these cases for Attitudinal Hedonic Eudaimonism is then assessed. It is claimed that theory yields defensible (though possibly surprising) accounts of the welfare of people like Bertha. Perhaps it's better to be non-autonomously happy than not to be happy at all.

KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER NINE: Amartya Sen, Bertha, demeaned housewife, inauthentic happiness, eudaimonism, whole life satisfaction, Wayne Sumner, attitudinal hedonic eudaimonism.

CHAPTER TEN – DISGUSTING HAPPINESS

An ancient objection to eudaimonism is based on the idea of "disgusting happiness". Steven Cahn developed an interesting version of this objection based on a fictional character – Judah Rosenthal, from the Woody Allen film 'Crimes and Misdemeanors'. Judah passes all popular tests for happiness but is utterly morally corrupt. His case casts

doubt on the naïve identification of happiness with welfare. It's not clear that the case is decisive.

Nevertheless, a form of eudaimonism that is intended to circumvent this problem can be developed. According to this novel form of the theory, the welfare value of each episode of happiness must be adjusted so as to reflect the extent to which the object of that happiness deserves to be enjoyed. It is left to the interested reader to determine whether the modification is really needed.

KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER TEN: Steven Cahn, Woody Allen, Judah Rosenthal, disgusting happiness, eudaimonism, welfare goodness, moral goodness, Richard Taylor, swap test, desert, desert adjusted attitudinal hedonic eudaimonism.

CHAPTER ELEVEN – OUR AUTHORITY OVER OUR OWN HAPPINESS

Writers on happiness often discuss a question about our authority with respect to our own happiness. Some maintain that we do have authority; others deny it. This is a vexed topic, in part because talk of 'authority' is ambiguous. To say that a person "has authority" over his own happiness might be to say that he has *knowledge* about his own happiness. In another sense it might be to say that she has some sort of *control* over how happy she will be.

11.1 contains discussion of several different principles about epistemic authority. Arguments are presented to show that all these principles about epistemic authority are false. 11.2 contains discussion of several different principles about controlling authority. Each of these principles is false. A strategy for increasing one's own level of happiness is proposed. If Attitudinal Hedonic Eudaimonism is true, then there is a procedure that we can use to make ourselves happier.

KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER ELEVEN: Epistemic authority, Elizabeth Telfer, Wayne Sumner, Timmy, Richard Taylor, controlling authority, liberal tradition, voluntary happifying objects.

CHAPTER TWELVE – MEASURING HAPPINESS

Empirical scientists often engage in research designed to reveal the relationship between happiness and such things as age, wealth, or nationality. Some of the tests used to measure happiness are based on the notion that a person's level of happiness is equal to his level of satisfaction with his own standing in several domains of life such as marriage, work, finances, health, leisure time activities, and housing. There are reasons to doubt that the scores generated by this "domains of life" approach correspond to anything worthy of the name 'happiness'. If it is a mistake to identify happiness with life satisfaction, then even if a test accurately measured life satisfaction, it still would not be measuring happiness.

A better test is sketched. The proposed test would give more accurate assessments of the levels of happiness of the subjects in a variety of cases. Criteria for the evaluation of happiness measuring tests are presented and applied.

KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER TWELVE: Measurement, single-item test, domains of life, satisfaction, whole life satisfaction, Ed Diener, test-retest reliability, attitudinal pleasure, centrality, attitudinal hedonism about happiness.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN – EMPIRICAL RESEARCH; PHILOSOPHICAL CONCLUSIONS

Philosophers and others have alleged that empirical research on happiness has important implications for some long-standing philosophical questions about happiness. The distinguished British economist Richard Layard seems to claim that the empirical research such as that done by the psychologist Richard Davidson has philosophical implications. Layard apparently thinks that this empirical research supports the conclusion that “there is such a thing as happiness”. He also suggests that it demonstrates that interpersonal comparisons of levels of happiness are feasible. Finally, there is a suggestion that this research might help to show that happiness is a natural kind rather than a mere figment of “folk psychology”

In this chapter, the relevant empirical research is described. There is an attempt to reconstruct the arguments that purport to show that the empirical research supports the

philosophical conclusions. In each case it turns out that the research does not have any relevance to philosophy.

KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER THIRTEEN: Richard Layard, Richard Davidson, MRI, brain scans, positive emotions, objective reality, interpersonal comparisons of utility, natural kinds, folk psychology.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN – CENTRAL POINTS OF THE PROJECT AS A WHOLE

Chapter Fourteen summarizes the main points of the book. The reader is reminded that Part One focused on the descriptive concept of happiness. This is not itself an evaluative concept; it is probably a matter of psychology. The main philosophical theories about the nature of happiness so construed were critically examined. Attitudinal Hedonism about Happiness was then offered as a more plausible alternative. Part Two started with a discussion of the relevant concept of welfare, or well-being. It was suggested that welfare tracks happiness – the happier you are, the better your life is going for you. Part Three contained discussion of some questions concerning interactions between the philosophical theory of happiness and empirical research. An approach to the measurement of happiness was sketched. This approach emerges from the theory of happiness defended in Part One. Questions were raised about the philosophical relevance of empirical research on happiness.

KEYWORDS FOR CHAPTER FOURTEEN: Happiness, Attitudinal Hedonism about Happiness, AHH, welfare, well-being, Attitudinal Hedonic Eudaimonism, empirical research, measurement, interactions.