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Happiness and Subjective Desire Satisfaction: Wayne Davis's Theory of Happiness*

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ABSTRACT: There is a lively debate about the descriptive concept of happiness. What do we mean when we say (using the word to express this descriptive concept) that a person is “happy”? One prominent answer is *subjective local desire satisfactionism*. On this view, to be happy at a time is to believe, with respect to the things that you want to be true at that time, that they are true. Wayne Davis developed and defended an interesting and sophisticated version of this view in a series of papers. I present, explain, and attempt to refute his version of the theory. I then sketch what I take to be a better theory of happiness -- a form of *intrinsic attitudinal hedonism*.

1. The Descriptive Concept of Happiness

Sometimes, when philosophers talk about happiness, or “the happy life”, they are using the word ‘happy’ more or less as a synonym of ‘good’. To say that someone had a happy life, in this sense, is pretty much equivalent to saying that he had a good life, or a life high in welfare, or “prudential value”. When so used, ‘happy’ is clearly a term of *evaluation*. If we use the word in this way, then the statement that the happy life is the good life is a tautology, meaning merely that the good life is the good life.

On other occasions, the word ‘happy’ is used descriptively. To say that a person is happy in this sense is not to *evaluate* the person but simply to *describe* him. To say that a person is happy is to say something about his mood, or his emotional state, or his state of mind. If we use the word in this descriptive way, then the statement that the happy life is the good life is a controversial thesis (sometimes called “eudaimonism”) affirming the unique value of a certain psychological state. To say that the happy life is the good life is to say in effect that your life will

go best for you if you can manage to get yourself into this psychological¹ state as deeply and as frequently as possible. That's a substantive claim (if 'happier' is being used in the descriptive sense) and no mere tautology.

There is a lively debate about the nature of the state we attribute to a person when we say that he is happy, using the word 'happy' in its descriptive sense. What do we mean when we say that a person is happy?

Some have held that happiness is fundamentally a matter of *pleasure and pain*. In a familiar passage, Mill² seems to define happiness in this way:

By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure. (emphasis added, FF)

Any such view would be a form of hedonism about happiness.

Perhaps the most popular approach to the descriptive concept of happiness focuses attention on the extent to which a person is satisfied with his life as a whole.³ To say that a person is satisfied with his life as a whole is sometimes taken to mean (roughly) that he wants his life to go a certain way, and he thinks it is going that way. Perhaps the person forms a judgment that could be expressed by saying something like 'The life I am living is the life I want to be living. I am satisfied with this life.' If we understand the view in this way, it is a form of "global preferentism" about happiness. It is a form of preferentism because it says that happiness essentially involves the satisfaction of desires; it is "global" because it involves the idea that the only relevant desires are desires concerning one's own life as a whole. To be happy is to get the *whole life* that you want.

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¹ I say 'psychological' here primarily because so many of the theories about this state imply that it is purely, or largely, a matter of psychology. But I don't mean to beg any questions. I mean just to distinguish between claims about a person's level of welfare (a matter of evaluation) and claims about some "factual" state called 'happiness'. It might not be purely psychological. Perhaps it is partly neurophysiological. My point is that it is some sort of matter of empirical fact.

² Mill (1863), Ch. 2.

³ Versions of this view have been defended by Wayne Sumner, Richard Brandt, Robert Nozick, Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz, Elizabeth Telfer and others. I present a critical evaluation of this approach in my "Whole Life Satisfaction Theories of Happiness" (currently unpublished).

Another kind of preferentist theory incorporates no restriction to desires concerning life as a whole. On such theories every desire counts. If right now the only things Bob wants are a hot dog, a bun, and some mustard, and he thinks he is getting these things, then he is declared to be pretty happy. Any such theory may be said to be a form of “local preferentism” about happiness. It should be obvious that the implications of a form of local preferentism could be different from the implications of a form of global preferentism, since a person could be satisfied with a bunch of local things without forming any global judgment about his life as a whole.

Local preferentism about happiness can be developed in a variety of different ways. In some forms, the theory claims that a person is happy if his actual desires are *in fact* satisfied – whether he knows it or not. In other forms, the theory claims that a person is happy if he *believes* that his desires are satisfied – whether they actually are satisfied or not. So-called “full information” versions of the theory constitute another variation. According to these theories, to determine how happy a person is, consider the desires he would have if he were fully informed and thinking clearly. His level of happiness is proportional to the extent to which these hypothetical desires are satisfied. Yet other forms of the theory claim that a person is happy if he wants his present experiences to continue. In his influential work on happiness,⁴ Daniel Kahneman seems to defend several different theories, but many of them seem to be variants of this last approach. According to these theories, only a subset of local desires are relevant to happiness. These are all desires concerning the continuation of present experiences.

Wayne Davis presented an especially interesting form of local preferentism about happiness in a series of papers. Perhaps the central paper in this collection is his 1981 paper “A Theory of Happiness”.⁵ Davis’s paper is rich, insightful, creative, wide-ranging, and carefully written. It is in some ways one of the most impressive philosophical essays in the happiness literature. I am dismayed when I consider the fact that many writers who should know better seem to be unaware of Davis’s paper.⁶

⁴ Kahneman (1999).

⁵ Wayne Davis, “A Theory of Happiness” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 18,2 (April, 1981): 111-120. Parenthetical page references that follow are all to Davis’s 1981 APQ paper. Other works by Davis are cited in the bibliography.

⁶ This is especially troubling in the case of Kahneman. In Kahneman (1999) Kahneman defends a view that is in many ways remarkably similar to the view that Davis presented almost twenty years earlier. Davis’s work was published in several leading professional journals, yet Kahneman does not acknowledge Davis’s work. Indeed, Kahneman does not even list any of Davis’s papers in his bibliography.

In this paper I focus exclusively on Davis's 1981 theory of happiness. In Section 2, I lay out and briefly comment upon some of the essential conceptual background. In Section 3, I present the theory together with some friendly amendments. I present a series of objections and difficulties in Section 4. In Section 5, I very briefly sketch an alternative theory of happiness that seems to me to be somewhat more promising than Davis's.

2. Conceptual background

Davis's theory makes use of three main undefined, or "primitive", concepts. He explicitly claims to define happiness by appeal to these concepts. Thus, Davis's theory is a form of reductivism with respect to happiness. He tries to reduce the concept of happiness to a certain combination of these three concepts.

Let's start with the concept of *belief*. Davis does not define *belief*, but he says a few things that serve to clarify his understanding of the concept. He takes belief to be a propositional attitude relating a person to a proposition at a time. He imagines a ratio scale from -1 to 0 to +1. For any person, S, proposition, P, and time, t, there is a number on this scale that represents how much S believes P at t. If S is absolutely certain of P at t, then S believes P to degree +1 at t. It's important to note that 'certain' here is not an epistemic concept; it is a doxastic concept. You can be certain of something even if you have no evidence for it and are not at all justified in believing it. It's just a maximal degree of belief. You couldn't be more sure of anything than you are of it. If S is absolutely certain that P is false, then S believes P to degree -1. If S is neutral or agnostic about p at t, then he believes it to degree 0.

As Davis uses the term, it would be correct to say that S believes P at t even if S is completely unaware of P at t, or is sleeping or in a coma. As he says (113mid a), he himself has believed that $2+2=4$ for decades, even though he has not thought about it for long stretches during that time. So belief, for Davis, is *dispositional belief*. To get occurrent belief, as Davis sees it, you need to add *thought*.

Thought – the second of the three primitive concepts used in the theory -- is also a propositional attitude relating a person to a proposition at a time. Davis does not introduce any degrees of thought. If you are thinking P, and at the same time thinking Q, then it would make no

sense to say that you are at that moment thinking P *more* than you are thinking Q. Furthermore, thought apparently does not have any “negative” counterpart. This is another respect in which thought is unlike belief, for belief does have a negative counterpart, disbelief. There is no such thing as “dis-thought”. If a certain proposition “occurs to someone”, or if it “enters his mind”, then he is thinking that proposition.(113)

Davis defines (113) occurrent belief as dispositional belief plus thought:

D1: S occurrently believes P at t =df. S dispositionally believes P at t & S thinks P at t.⁷

The third primitive concept in the theory is the concept of *desire*.(See 112 b) It is also a propositional attitude relating a person to a proposition at a time. To desire a proposition is simply to want it to be true. There is a ratio scale on which we can locate every instance in which a person desires a proposition at a time. This scale is like the belief scale in that it has a positive side (desire) and a negative side (aversion) and a zero point. It is unlike the belief scale in that it has neither upper nor lower limit. No matter how much you want something, you could always want something more than that.

Davis’s project, then, is to define happiness by appeal to belief, thought, and desire. But before presenting the analysis, Davis takes a moment to help focus attention on his target -- the concept he wants to analyze. He distinguishes between occurrent and dispositional happiness (111 a-b). His fundamental aim is to analyze the concept of occurrent happiness. Once he has done that, he will be able to explain dispositional happiness in terms of occurrent. Roughly, and preliminarily, we can say that you have occurrent happiness if you are enjoying yourself, being in good spirits, in a good mood, having a happy moment.

Dispositional happiness is explained in terms of occurrent happiness. Davis says (top 111b) that to be dispositionally happy is to be predominantly occurrently happy; and he also says that dispositional happiness depends upon what happens over a long period of time; and he also

⁷ It’s not clear to me that this is true. Consider the proposition that $2+2=4$. While you are considering it, or reflecting on it, you might not be particularly engaged in actively “endorsing” it. You might just be contemplating it. Yet if you, like Davis, have dispositionally believed this for many decades and still do, then his definition implies that you were occurrently believing it then. Yet maybe you were not. Maybe you were just considering it.

says that it can end if, for example, you are paralyzed in an accident. After the accident you may no longer be dispositionally happy.

I think Davis's account of dispositional happiness is confused, or perhaps it would have been better to use a different name for the concept upon which he was focusing. The phenomenon that deserves the name 'dispositional happiness' is distinct from the phenomenon that deserves the name 'predominant happiness'.

In conformity with a more standard terminology, we should say that a person is *dispositionally* happy iff he is disposed to be happy; if he would become occurrently happy if he woke up, or if he thought about things, or if some other factor suggested in context were to occur and thereby to "trigger" occurrent happiness. Dispositional happiness (properly so-called) does not depend upon what happens over a long period of time. A person can be dispositionally happy at a moment. The things that Davis says about "dispositional" happiness are thus in fact not true of the phenomenon we would more naturally call 'dispositional happiness'.

On the other hand, these things do seem to be true about a different phenomenon – a phenomenon that we would more naturally call 'predominant happiness'. To say that a person is predominantly happy during a period of time is to say (approximately) that he has been occurrently happy more often than not during that time. Thus, judgments of predominant happiness are summaries of facts about occurrent happiness during intervals. It makes no sense to say that a person is *predominantly* happy *at a moment*.⁸ It makes sense only as a summary about a period of time. Furthermore, suppose a person has been predominantly happy during a period of time but then has a serious accident. This period of predominant happiness may then end and it may be followed by a period in which unhappiness predominates. Thus, predominant happiness is probably the phenomenon that "depends upon what happens over a long period of time". I think it was a mistake to use the term 'dispositional happiness' to refer to this phenomenon.⁹

⁸ That is, provided we use the word in this "temporal summary" sense. If we thought that a person could be happy about several different things at a time, and also unhappy about several other things, then we might say that he is predominantly happy at a moment if we meant that he was happy about more things than he was unhappy about. Even in this sense, predominant happiness represents a kind of summary of information about specific episodes of happiness. It is still not a disposition.

⁹ Davis has informed me (recent personal correspondence) that at least some philosophers use the terminology in the way he describes.

But the concept of dispositional happiness (or predominant happiness) is not the central focus of Davis's efforts in any case. His main goal in the paper is to provide a reductive analysis of the concept of occurrent happiness. He intends to do this by appeal to the concepts of belief, desire, and thinking. But the analysis has several components.

3. Davis's Theory of Happiness

The central defined concept in Davis's theory is his concept of *momentary (occurrent) happiness*.¹⁰ A person's level of momentary happiness is intended to be a measure of how occurrently happy he is at that moment. Information about a person's momentary happiness for all the moments during an interval will later be used to define happiness during an interval and in life as a whole. It can also be used in the construction of the concepts of dispositional and predominant happiness. So the analysis of the concept of *momentary happiness* stands at the very heart of Davis's theory.

Davis says: "Take every proposition A is thinking at the moment, multiply the degree to which it is believed [by A then] by the degree to which it is desired [by A then], add up all the products, and the sum is A's degree of happiness [at that moment]." (113) Using 'h' to indicate A's momentary *happiness* level, 'b(P1)' to indicate that A believes P1, and 'd(P1)' to indicate that A desires P1, Davis states this as a formal definition:

D2: $h = \sum_{i=1}^n b(P_i)d(P_i)$, where P_1, \dots, P_n is an enumeration of all thoughts A is thinking,¹¹

I believe the following formulation is equivalent to Davis's:

D2': A's momentary happiness level at t = the sum, for all propositions P that A is thinking at t, of the products of the degree to which A believes P at t and the degree to which A desires P at t.

Clearly this is intended to be an account of occurrent happiness at a moment, and just as clearly it represents an interesting and attractive idea: to be happy is to be thinking with respect to a bunch of things, that they are turning out as you want them to turn out. Suppose you want P

¹⁰ From now on, 'momentary happiness' should be understood to mean momentary *occurrent* happiness.

¹¹ Davis's actual definition contains some subscripts ('i=1') and superscripts ('n') above and below the 'S'. I haven't figured out how to enter them in this document correctly. I hope the reader will understand the intent.

and Q and R to be the case and you think they are. Then, other things being equal, the more you want these things to be the case, the happier you are; and the more convinced you are that they are the case, the happier you are. These are immediate implications of D2.

Consider the case of Bob, who wants to be healthy, wealthy, and wise. Suppose that at a certain moment he strongly desires each of them (more exactly, he desires each to degree +10). Suppose at the same time he also very firmly believes that he is healthy, and that he is wealthy, and that he is wise (more exactly, he believes each to degree +1). Suppose in addition that at this selected moment Bob does not care about anything else. There is nothing else he wants. He just wants to be healthy, wealthy, and wise, and he thinks he is healthy, wealthy, and wise. Davis's theory implies that Bob is very happy at this moment. More exactly, it implies that his momentary happiness level = +30. (Let us assume that if a person is happy to degree +30 at a moment, then he is *very happy* then.)

In a footnote¹², Davis mentions a possible complication. This turns on the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic desires. We can distinguish between the case in which you want something, x, but only because you want something else, y, and you think x is a means to y. Were it not for its connection to y, you wouldn't care a fig about x. Opposed to this is the case in which there is no such other more "ultimate" desire. You want x but there is no other thing y such that you want x because you think it is a means to y. Call the first "desire purely as a means" and the second "desire purely as an end". Note that nothing in D2 makes any use of any such distinction. Perhaps it would have been better if this distinction had been employed.

Consider this case: Suppose Bob understands how the starting system on the car works; Phyllis does not. As Bob turns the key in the ignition, he and Phyllis both want their trip to begin. Bob is thinking these things:

1. The starter relay is working.
2. The starter motor is working.
3. The choke is working.
4. The ignition system is working.
5. We will soon be on our way.

¹²fn. 9, p. 113.

Assume that Bob wants all of these things to occur, but wants the first four of them only because he wants to be on his way. If these things would not help to get them on their way, none of them would be of any interest to him. Assume that he wants (5) intrinsically.

On the other hand, assume that Phyllis does not know or care about 1 – 4. She is not thinking them. She just wants to be on her way. Suppose now the car starts and Bob and Phyllis are on their way. They are both happy about it. Each has a big grin. Each has an increased heartbeat. Each feels a rush of warmth and satisfaction. Let us assume that Bob's grin, heartbeat, and feelings of satisfaction are equal to Phyllis's. If we make some innocent assumptions about degrees of belief and desire, we get the result on Davis's theory that Bob is five times happier than Phyllis. This seems unmotivated.

Suppose in addition that Bob has been taking a logic class. He has been thinking about conjunction. He thinks about these things, which he also wants to be true:

1 & 2

1 & 3

1 & 4

1 & 5

1 & 2 & 3

1 & 2 & 4

1 & 2 & 5

etc. for about 20 other propositions concerning the starting system in his car. He wants every one of them to be true, is thinking every one of them, and believes every one of them. (Bob has a remarkable capacity for multi-tasking; he can think 30 things at a time.) Phyllis does not bother with all of this nonsense. She just wants to be on her way and believes that she is about to be on her way. Now Davis's theory implies that Bob is about 30 times happier than Phyllis. This also seems unmotivated. Davis hints that maybe we should restrict D2 to propositions that are *intrinsically* desired.¹³ In other words:

¹³ Davis has indicated (in recent personal correspondence) that in fact he would now probably want to sort out this difficulty in a different way.

D2m: A's momentary happiness level at t = the sum, for all propositions P that A is thinking at t, of the products of the degree to which A believes P at t and the degree to which A *intrinsically* desires P at t.

If we were to make this modification, the resulting theory would imply that Bob and Phyllis are equally happy in the example just cited. That's because each of them is described as having only one intrinsic desire. Each of them intrinsically wants to be on their way. Bob has a bunch of other desires that he takes to be satisfied, but each of them is purely extrinsic. He wants those other things only because he wants to be on his way.

Because of its implications for cases such as this, I am inclined to think that the revised version of the definition is preferable.¹⁴ In what follows I will assume that D2m is the official definition of momentary happiness.¹⁵

So far we have only an account of happiness at a moment. We need an account of happiness during an interval and in a life as a whole. Davis gives a sketch of an account of happiness during an interval. He says: "Happiness can be defined for *intervals* (I was happier in 1978 than I was in 1977) as the *arithmetic mean* of [momentary happiness], the integral of [momentary happiness] divided by the length of the interval." (113, fn 10). The idea is this: your happiness during an interval is your average momentary happiness during that interval. Take the integral of momentary happiness during the interval, divide by the length of the interval. That's your happiness during the interval. Your happiness in life as a whole, presumably, would be your happiness during the interval beginning with birth (or conception, or whatever counts as the beginning of life) and ending with death (or whatever counts as the end of life).

¹⁴ It should be noted that the introduction of the concept of intrinsic desire carries some costs, too. One can be illustrated by appeal to the example concerning Bob and the starting system. Suppose that Bob does indeed want to be on his way but that there is a further explanation: although he is not currently thinking about all the fun he will have at Lake Winnepesaukee, it is nevertheless true that this fact about fun at Lake Winnepesaukee somehow explains why he wants to be on his way. The problem is this: he is not thinking about fun at the lake. Therefore, it plays no role in his happiness according to Davis's theory. The desire to be on his way is the most "ultimate" desire that he is actually thinking about. It seems, then, that this desire must count as intrinsic even though there are other (currently not being thought about) desires that would turn up if Bob were questioned.

¹⁵ Davis goes on to give account of a variety of interesting related concepts such as, for example, the concept of relational happiness, or "happiness about p"; the concept of a "happy thought"; and the concepts of optimism and pessimism. All of this is interesting and would reward careful scrutiny. However, it seems to me that we can profitably discuss Davis's conception of happiness without scrutinizing all of this associated material.

There are other procedures that Davis could have used for calculating the amount of happiness enjoyed by an individual during an interval. One example is provided by Kahneman. He lets the integral of momentary happiness during an interval count as happiness during the interval.¹⁶ Davis lets your happiness be the *average* momentary happiness during the interval. Clearly, these are different numbers. Consider these cases: Suppose that in March, Helen is steadily at a happiness level of +10. Suppose that on March 6, Bob was steadily at a happiness level of +11. Then Kahneman would say that Helen was happier in March than Bob was on March 6, while Davis would say the reverse.

This may seem to be a serious difference of opinion on an important topic, but I am inclined to think otherwise. I am inclined to think that Davis has focused on what we might better think of as *average happiness during an interval* and Kahneman has focused on what we might better think of as *total happiness during an interval*. The fact that the numbers are different does not demonstrate any serious difference of theory; it just shows that if you set out to measure different things, you shouldn't be surprised if you end up with different measurements.

However, it's important to keep in mind that these are genuinely different measurements. This comes out especially clearly in the case of life comparisons. Suppose Bob lives for fifty years, while Helen lives for a hundred years. Suppose the numbers are as before. Then Kahneman would say that Helen had the happier life; but Davis would say that Bob had the happier life. We need to be clear about what is being said here. Kahneman's remark concerns the total amount of happiness that Helen enjoyed in her long life as a whole; Davis's remark concerns the average level of happiness that Bob enjoyed in his (much shorter) life. Each measurement is of some interest.

4. Problems for Davis's form of Local Preferentism

I am convinced that every form of preferentism about happiness is false. Of course I recognize that we are often caused to be happy when we want something to be true and believe it is true. What I find implausible is the notion that happiness *just is* the combination of believing something and wanting it to be true. I think we can be happy even though we do not believe true

¹⁶ Kahneman (1999), p. 5

the things we want, and I think we can fail to be happy even though we believe true the things that we want. This can happen in a variety of different ways and for a variety of different reasons. I want to describe some ways in which happiness can diverge from desire satisfaction.

Imagine a philosophy graduate student, Susan, who is somewhat pessimistic and despondent.¹⁷ She thinks things will not go her way. Today, she wants to complete a really brilliant dissertation, but she is confident that she won't; she wants to get a job at Stanford, but she is pretty confident she won't. She wants some of her papers to be published in major philosophy journals but is pretty skeptical about that, too. Suppose that Susan's current psychological state is typical for her. She has always been pretty pessimistic. Even as a child, she was inclined to anticipate that things would not go her way. Furthermore, for a long time she has been unhappy. She has had negative subjective desire satisfaction and has been unhappy. So far, Susan's case is consistent with Davis's view: Susan has negative subjective desire satisfaction and is unhappy, just as the theory says she should be.

But now suppose that Susan begins seeing a new psychological counselor.¹⁸ The counselor first interviews Susan in an effort to determine why she is so unhappy. He suspects that she is unhappy in part because she is so pessimistic. The counselor is interested in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, and so he first tries to get her to have a more optimistic view of things. He tries to get her to start thinking that her papers will be published in major journals and that she will land a job at Stanford.

Unfortunately, the counselor's first efforts fail. In fact, Susan's pessimistic beliefs are solidly entrenched. She cannot give them up. (Perhaps this is due to the fact that she has excellent evidence for these beliefs. They are entirely reasonable, given her modest philosophical abilities.) Susan remains pessimistic and unhappy.

Then the counselor tries a slightly different approach. Instead of trying to alter Susan's beliefs, he tries to alter her desires. He tries to get her to stop wanting to get her papers published in major journals, and to stop wanting to have a job in an excellent department. But these efforts fail as well. In fact Susan deeply wants these things, and she finds that she cannot give up these desires. They are deeply and permanently entrenched.

¹⁷ My thanks to Meghan Masto for introducing this example. I have developed it a bit further.

¹⁸ I am grateful to Alex Sarch for constructing the example in this illuminating way.

Finally, the counselor concludes that CBT is not going to work in Susan's case. He decides to try a completely different approach. Instead of attempting to change Susan's beliefs or desires, he decides to prescribe a drug that is alleged to have a direct impact on mood. According to the manufacturer, this drug will simply brighten Susan's mood. It will make her more cheerful. So he prescribes the mood altering drug and it works as advertised. Although her beliefs and desires persist, Susan becomes much happier.

So here we have a comparison: before she took the drug, Susan had a certain set of beliefs and desires and she was very unhappy. This is all consistent with Davis's theory, since she wanted certain things and believed that she was not going to get them. After she took the drug, Susan had the same set of beliefs and desires but she was no longer so unhappy. In fact, at various moments after taking the drug, she was actually fairly chipper.

I think this example illustrates the fact that the linkage between happiness and subjective desire satisfaction is merely contingent. Before treatment, Susan had negative subjective desire satisfaction (she desired certain things and thought she was not going to get them) and she was unhappy. After treatment she still had negative subjective desire satisfaction, but she was no longer quite so unhappy. Although her beliefs and her desires remained constant, her mood had improved. Of course, for most of us, most of the time, there is a connection between the extent to which we think we are getting what we want and our happiness. Typically, we are happier if we think things are going our way. But this example suggests that the connection is loose and contingent. Unhappiness can disappear (or at least decrease significantly) while beliefs and desires remain fairly constant.¹⁹

Another case is the emotional mirror image of Susan's. Imagine another graduate student – call him 'Glum' – who is disappointed and unhappy. Although he strongly wants all of these things, he thinks he won't produce a good dissertation, won't get any papers published, and won't get a good job. In addition, he is suffering from depression. He a pretty unhappy guy. He also visits the psychological counselor mentioned above. In his case, however, the counselor's

¹⁹ Davis discusses a case like Susan's on p. 117. He suggests that when Susan is in a good mood, she will see things "in a rosy light". She will more or less automatically want some things to be the way she takes them to be – for example, the weather, or the flowers she sees. If this is so, Susan's increased happiness is consistent with Davis's theory. But it's not clear to me that Susan would necessarily have occurrent thoughts about such things. As I see it, she might be in a happier mood even though she is not thinking any new and happier thoughts.

application of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is somewhat more successful. The counselor gets Glum to take a much more realistic view of his considerable talents. As a result, Glum starts believing that he will get some papers published and that he will get a good job. But even when he thinks about these things in this new light, Glum is no happier. His depression remains just as deep as ever.

This example is intended to show in another way that the link between subjective desire satisfaction and happiness is merely contingent. Glum's level of subjective desire satisfaction changed, but his level of happiness remained constant. This suggests that happiness involves something more than, or something different from, merely believing things that you want to be true. As I see it, the missing element is more emotional or affective. In order to be happy, as I see it, one must take some pleasure in the good things that are happening.

A third example²⁰ illustrates a slightly different way in which subjective desire satisfaction can fail to have any impact on happiness. Suppose Lois is emotionally neutral – neither happy nor unhappy. Suppose she is taking some children through a museum where they see a dinosaur exhibit. Lois is looking at the skeleton of an apparently ferocious dinosaur in the museum. She hears some other visitors talking. One remarks on how horrible it would be to be eaten by one of those things. Lois thinks about how horrible it would be to be eaten by a dinosaur. Of course she wants not to be eaten by a dinosaur. At the same time, she knows that dinosaurs are extinct and have not eaten anyone in hundreds of years, so she is quite confident that she will not be eaten by a dinosaur. Davis's theory implies that this should make her happy, but it doesn't. Her neutral emotional state persists. She gains no joy from the realization that she is not going to be eaten by a dinosaur. She never felt that she was in danger of being eaten by a dinosaur, and so the recognition that it is not going to happen does not bring any relief.

This example suggests that when you recognize that a certain thing is certainly not going to happen – you take it to be (in some sense) impossible – then your happiness level may not be affected by the fact that you want it to be that way. Many of us believe and want there to be oxygen, and gravity, and sunlight. Yet only some of us gain any joy from these things. Most of us simply take them for granted, just as Lois in the example takes it for granted that she is not going to be eaten by a dinosaur. If you never thought P was possible anyway, knowing that it won't happen doesn't make you happier even if you like it that way. Again, the problem seems to

²⁰ Thanks to Scott Hill for suggesting this example.

be that Lois does not take any pleasure in the fact that she will not be eaten by dinosaurs. That seems to explain why her subjective desire satisfaction yields no happiness.

A fourth case illustrates another way in which it is possible to believe that your desires are being satisfied without getting any happiness as a result. This may be the sort of case that Sidgwick had in mind when he spoke of the “Dead Sea Apple” – which he described as mere “dust and ashes in the eating.”²¹ Here is an illustration: A beer-lover once had some beer in a strange bar. It had a weird and wonderful taste. He really enjoyed it. For many years he wanted to find that beer again, but never found it. He kept looking. He wanted to taste that weird and wonderful taste. After many years of searching, he wandered into a bar in a foreign country. Lo and behold, they had the beer. He wanted to taste that strange taste again and so he ordered a glass. He drank. It tasted the same, but he no longer enjoyed it. It was a disappointment. In fact, he was pretty unhappy about the whole thing. Anyway, he was not happy. But he wanted to taste that old taste, and was certain that he was tasting it. That’s all he was thinking about. Davis’s theory implies that he was happy; but he was not.

Another problem for Davis’s theory arises from the fact that he places no restrictions on the objects of happiness. Provided that you want something to happen and believe that it is happening, you are supposedly made happier. But some possible objects of belief and desire intrinsically involve *unhappiness*. Something approaching a paradox arises if a person wants and believes in one of these.

To see this in a particularly stark example, suppose that a certain person, S, is neither happy nor unhappy. Maybe he is sound asleep and has no occurrent beliefs. Now suppose we change S at t by adding exactly one desire. Let this be a desire to be unhappy. More exactly, what S wants is:

U: S is unhappy at t.

Let’s assume that S desires U at t with a strength of 5.

Suppose S would fully believe U if he believed it at all and would fully disbelieve it if he didn’t believe it. That is, he would believe with strength 1 if he believed it, and he would believe it with

²¹ Sidgwick (1962), p. 110.

strength -1 if he didn't believe it.²² Then it seems that there are two main possibilities that we can consider: Either (a) S fully believes that he is unhappy – in other words, S fully thinks U is true, or (b) S fully believes that he is not unhappy – in other words, S fully thinks that U is not true.

Suppose he occurrently believes he is unhappy. Then he is happy to degree +5 according to Davis's theory. (He believes U to degree 1 and wants it to degree 5; $1 \times 5 = +5$. He is not thinking anything else. Therefore the sum of the relevant products is +5.)

Suppose he occurrently believes he is not unhappy. Then he will be unhappy to degree -5 according to Davis's theory. (He believes U to degree -1 and wants it to degree 5; $-1 \times 5 = -5$. He is not thinking anything else. The sum of the products is -5.) Therefore, if he believes he is happy, he is unhappy; and if he believes he is unhappy, then he is happy. This is not exactly a paradox, but it is strange.

Davis has suggested (in personal correspondence) that the notion that someone could desire to be unhappy is "implausible". He says, 'It is not easy to imagine subjects who actually want to be unhappy.' I disagree. I am inclined to think that I can easily imagine people who want to be unhappy; in fact, I think I know some people who want to be unhappy.²³

A more complex case arises if we add further stipulations. First, let's assume that the subject is aware of his own mental states in this sense: when he believes something, he recognizes that he believes it.²⁴ When he desires something, he recognizes that he desires it. Let's also assume that the subject accepts Davis's theory. Assume finally that this subject is smart enough to be able to work out the implications of Davis's theory for simple cases involving his own current beliefs and desires.

Now the situation becomes even more troubling. Suppose as before that S wants to be unhappy. Then suppose he believes that he is not unhappy. Then (since he is aware of his belief and his desire; and he believes in Davis's theory; and can see what follows from this) he will

²² I introduce this assumption merely to simplify the arithmetic. I believe that the main points I intend to make would hold true even for levels of belief between 0 and 1.

²³ Perhaps it is hard to imagine people who want to have their desires frustrated. That may be right. But it is not so hard to imagine people who want to be unhappy. This consideration by itself may be sufficient to show that happiness cannot be identified with desire satisfaction.

²⁴ To avoid regress, this stipulation should be restricted to "first order" beliefs – thus excluding beliefs about beliefs about beliefs.....

believe that he is unhappy. (Because he will think that he has one main desire and that it is being frustrated and he will see that Davis's theory implies in this case that he is unhappy.) Suppose he believes that he is unhappy. Then (since he is aware of his belief and his desire; and he believes Davis's theory and can quickly see its implications for his own case) he will believe he is happy. (Because he will think he has one main desire and that it is being satisfied.)

Therefore, this self-aware, Davis-theory-believing person who wants to be unhappy is in an odd situation: if he believes that he is happy, then he believes that he is unhappy. If he believes that he is unhappy, then he believes that he is happy. This is not precisely a paradox, but it is a strange doxastic situation.²⁵

It might take a fraction of a second for this person to work out the implications of Davis's theory for his own case. If so, there might never be a single instant at which he both believes he is happy and believes he is unhappy. Rather, if at one moment he believes he is happy, then a fraction of a second later he will believe that he is unhappy. Then, another fraction of a second later he will believe that he is happy. This game of emotional ping-pong will go on until something breaks in to interrupt the cycle. One way to interrupt the cycle would be to give up on Davis's theory.²⁶

5. A Different Approach

I think certain elements of Davis's theory are valuable and worth preserving. One of these is the idea that the theory of happiness should start with certain "atoms of happiness". Davis takes these to be states of affairs in which a person desires something and occurrently believes it. Another valuable idea is the idea that a person's happiness level at a time is (roughly) the sum of the happiness-values of the atoms of happiness involving that person and occurring at that time. And yet another is the idea that a person's happiness through an interval is determined by aggregating information about the person's happiness levels at moments during the interval.

²⁵ Thanks to Chris Heathwood and Brad Skow for helping me to understand the implications of this case more clearly. Thanks also to Wayne Davis for challenging me to get these arguments into a more coherent form.

²⁶ Thanks to Brad Skow for suggesting this possibility.

The cases I have described point out one main feature of Davis's view that I would want to reject: and that is his preferentist conception of the atoms of happiness. For him, each of these atoms is an instance of subjective desire satisfaction -- a state of affairs in which someone wants something to be the case and believes that it is the case. I have a different view about the atoms of happiness.

My philosophy is this: "*It doesn't matter if you get what you want; what matters is that you enjoy what you get.*" In other words, my view is that preferentism about happiness is false, but that a certain form of hedonism about happiness is true. I will briefly sketch the outlines of the approach I favor.

In my view, the atoms of happiness are states of affairs in which some person is intrinsically attitudinally pleased about something at a moment. Suppose, for example, that at a certain moment, *t*, Bob is pleased that he will soon be at the shores of Lake Winnepesaukee. Suppose he is pleased about this not because he thinks it will lead to something else that he would be pleased about, but just for its own sake. He's just taking pleasure in the fact that he will soon be at the lake. Then he is *intrinsically attitudinally pleased* about it. Suppose there is a ratio scale on which we can measure degrees of this sort of intrinsic attitudinal pleasure, and suppose that on this scale Bob's pleasure rates a score of +8. Call this the *intensity* of Bob's pleasure. Then this is an atom of momentary happiness:

TP1: Bob is intrinsically attitudinally pleased at *t* to degree +8 at *t* that he will soon be at Lake Winnepesaukee.

I assume that if a person is displeased about something at a time, then he is pleased about it to a negative degree. Thus, this might be another atom we need to consider:

TP2: Bob is intrinsically attitudinally pleased at *t* to degree -23 at *t* that it's motorcycle week at Laconia.

My view is thus a form of hedonism about happiness. I think that every atom of happiness is a state of affairs in which someone takes pleasure in something. Yet my view is not a form of *sensory hedonism* about happiness. I am not saying that to be happy one must experience "feelings of pleasure". Instead, my view is a form of *attitudinal hedonism* about

happiness. The relevant sort of pleasure is a propositional attitude. It is pleasure *taken in propositional objects*. As I see it, one can experience this sort of pleasure even if one is not feeling any pleasurable sensations. One just has to be pleased about something, or delighted by it, or enjoy it, or be glad about it. And, of course, one can do any of these things without feeling pleasurable sensations.

In this example concerning Bob, it may appear that there is no difference between my view and Davis's. But the views diverge in other cases. Consider the case in which Lois wanted to avoid being eaten by a dinosaur and believed that she would avoid being eaten by a dinosaur. On Davis's view this combination of belief and desire constitutes an atom of Lois's happiness; on my view, however, it does not. On my view, we would have an atom of happiness only if Lois were *intrinsically attitudinally pleased* that she was going to avoid being eaten by a dinosaur. In the example this is precisely what's lacking. Lois takes it for granted that she will not be eaten by a dinosaur. This belief gives her no pleasure. It's not something that delights her, or pleases her, or otherwise engages her emotionally. She wants it to be true; she thinks it is true; but she is not moved. On my view, if something is to increase Lois's happiness, it must in some such way *move her*.

A similar thing happens in the case of the fellow who wants to experience the taste of a certain beer and then does so. On Davis's theory we have to say that his combination of belief and desire constitute an atom of happiness. On my view, on the other hand, we would have an atom of happiness only if the fellow took intrinsic attitudinal pleasure in the fact that he was tasting the beer. In the example, the fellow was disappointed in the taste. He did not enjoy it. As a result, my view seems to get the case right while Davis's view seems to get it wrong.

My view concerning momentary happiness is otherwise similar to Davis's. To find out how happy Bob is at t , just find the sum of the intensities of all the atoms of intrinsic attitudinal pleasure and displeasure involving Bob at t . In other words, on my view, Bob's momentary happiness level at t is the sum of the intensities, for all his atoms of intrinsic attitudinal pleasure and displeasure at t . Clearly this sum could be positive or negative and it can vary dramatically through time.²⁷ The difference between my view and Davis's thus concerns the atoms themselves, not the method of aggregating to find momentary happiness.

²⁷ Someone might worry about the possibility that someone is pleased about infinitely many things at once. In that case the sum is not well defined. I do not think this is a problem for my view. If a person is pleased

Another slight difference between my view and Davis's concerns the calculation of happiness during an interval. Davis takes this to be the average of momentary happiness levels during the interval. I prefer to take it to be the integral of momentary happiness levels for the interval. Accordingly, I say that a person had a happy life iff he has positive happiness for the interval that is his whole life.

Finally, let us consider what we mean when we say that a person has a happy birthday. Davis would say that this means that the person had (on average) positive subjective desire satisfaction during the interval that is his birthday. As I have shown, however, a person could have positive desire satisfaction without actually enjoying anything. Maybe he is like Glum in the example given in Section 4. He believes, with respect to many things, that they will turn out as he wants them to turn out, but he is too depressed to enjoy any of them. On my view, to say that a person has a happy birthday is to say that he takes pleasure in lots of things during the interval that is his birthday. It's harder to see how this condition would be satisfied in the case of a depressed person like Glum. So when I say that I hope that Wlodek has a happy birthday, what I mean is that I hope he actually enjoys lots of things that happen to him on his birthday – that he has positive balance of intrinsic attitudinal pleasure over intrinsic attitudinal pain. That seems right to me, and in fact I do hope that Wlodek has a happy birthday.

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about something at a time, then he must be thinking of it at that time. Attitudinal pleasure, after all, is a "mode of consciousness". If you have a finite mind, you cannot be occurrently thinking of infinitely many things at once. Of course, you can be happy that every number has a successor, and you may know that there are infinitely many numbers. But this is still just *one* object of thought. No human being can be such that, for every possible number, he is happy that it has a successor.

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