

Defining happiness: a pragmatic introduction

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Abstract

Can one define happiness in a useful way? This report looks at the main meanings of happiness as a concept and what they entail, inspired by interest in finding ways

of enhancing it. We arrive as a pragmatic definition of happiness as a multidimensional state of positive emotion, subjective well-being, and actual well-being. This wide-sense definition regards the phenomenon as a spectrum of interlinked modules ranging over many time scales, levels of processing, and types of individual and social activities.

Introduction

Happiness is a “suitcase word”, to borrow Marvin Minsky’s phrase about consciousness: a word where we pack multiple meanings, not so much denoting one concept but several different yet somehow related concepts. Unpacking the suitcase requires some work since so much has been stuffed into it.

Daniel M. Haybron, in *Happiness: a very short introduction* begins by stating^[3]

Instead of saying, unequivocally, that ‘happiness is x’, we should instead say that ‘happiness is usefully thought of as x’.

The meanings that matter are those that we can properly care about, and have some bearing on practical concerns. There are many subtle points of deep importance to philosophy and psychology that may be outside this scope.

The goal here is to map out the key concepts and then attempt at finding a useful set of definitions that can guide further investigation. In particular, we are interested in finding ways of enhancing happiness (when appropriate) individually and on a large scale.

This is complicated by the fact that we care about some further suitcases. A key distinction is between happiness as a mental state, feeling well, and happiness as well-being, a life that is going well. These are separate concepts but clearly intertwined^[4]. Further concepts that matter are meaning, mental health, absence of suffering, life satisfaction, and so on. A practical program to enhance happiness on a large scale needs to be aware of such concepts and be open to considerations of which parts of this domain are amenable to enhancement and worth enhancing.

Definitions of happiness in circulation

There are several types of definitions of happiness in circulation, and together they hint at a broader structure of happiness.

Happiness as a state (“I am happy”)

The most common way of speaking about happiness is as a state one is in.

This is often an emotional state, and usually regarded as one of the basic emotions[5]. However, even this has potentially different elements in the form of feelings of contentment, joy, gratification, satisfaction, and well-being. It has positive hedonic valence (and may even be defined by this) and is often described in terms of pleasure. However, happiness can vary in arousal and motivational state from passive bliss to driven, joyful action[6]. In models of emotions happiness often covers a region of more finely divided states.

It is worth noting that while the basic emotion may be nearly contentless (e.g. you can feel undirected joy or serenity), usually it will be directed to objects or be responses (e.g. gratitude due to a gift) and have further cognitive, sensory, and emotional content (e.g. imagined scenarios, smells, affiliations to others).

The other key distinction, the root of significant theoretical and practical work, is between hedonic and eudaimonic happiness. Hedonic happiness are states of pleasure and enjoyment, eudaimonic happiness are states of meaning and purpose. While eudaimonic happiness is often described as more active, achieved by doing meaningful actions and achieving excellence, there can clearly be passive states of experiencing meaning (and active hedonic enjoyment).

It is entirely possible to have discordant mixes of eudaimonia and hedonia. Lack of both is the empty life without pleasure or meaning, while plenty of hedonia but little eudaimonia would be the sweet life: enjoyable but meaningless. Eudaimonia but little hedonia would be a striving life: meaningful, but sour since there are no rewards for this excellence. The best combination may simply be hedonia and eudaimonia, a flourishing full life[7].

States of happiness are often seen as fleeting, affected by circumstances and our own thoughts. This transience also makes generating happy feelings relatively

straightforward in most cases. Friendly social interactions, jokes, aesthetic impressions, positive surprises - normally they trigger happy states. There is also a competitive aspect with negative emotions: many happy-making experiences and activities distract from more negative states, but conversely being unhappy can often make normally delightful interventions less effective. Interventions that reduce the negative states have the double effect of increasing the overall valence and making other happy-making interventions effective.

Happiness as a trait or disposition (“A happy person”)

Happiness is also described as a trait of a person, often linked to their personality (which is their stable, characteristic set of behavior, cognitions and emotional patterns). A happy person is someone who experiences frequent positive emotions and infrequent negative emotions.

This may be due to a biologically caused hedonic setpoint, but can also be due to other personality traits (e.g. extroverts tend to be more happy than introverts) [8], outlook, and learned behaviors (e.g. coping). The result is a palette of emotional states and responses that can be more or less conducive to experience happiness. Since personality is relatively stable and these inner causes often are consistent across external situations this produces a somewhat consistent result. Furthermore, frequent positive affect also helps achieve many desirable life outcomes [9], creating a feedback process maintaining the state.

Dispositional happiness is not necessarily unchangeable [10]. Life events affect subjective well-being, and outlooks and mental behaviors can change. This is typically a slow process, but research has found various apparently effective pathways e.g. environmental interventions, building positive relationships, cultivating gratitude, optimistic habits, living-in-the-moment mindfulness, developing a sense of purpose etc.

Contentment

While accounts of happiness often stress the positive aspects, absence of negative feelings or situations also clearly play a role. Hedonic accounts involve lack of suffering, eudaimonic accounts lack meaninglessness. Too much negative affect is seen as hindering happiness (small amounts, or the right kind, can enhance it:

achievement is often thrown into relief by the struggle preceding it). States of serenity and contentment may be deeply enjoyable despite not containing positive valence, since they avoid the negative states.

Many believe that there is a tension between being content and wanting to improve. However, being free from having to avoid negatives can allow (gentle) pursuit of the better. Typically enhancement of contentment focuses on learning to reduce negative emotions, stress, and unhappiness—increasing internal drivers, whether via meditation, CBT, or learning useful outlooks.

Subjective well-being and life satisfaction (“My life is going well”)

Various accounts try to combine multiple threads in how people experience the overall quality of their lives. Typically subjective well-being (SWB) is said to involve having frequent positive affect, infrequent negative affect, and cognitive evaluations such as life satisfaction [11]. Exactly how these components link varies somewhat between different accounts (e.g. are they three separate components, due to a core SWB factor, causing/influencing each other, or something else?) [12].

SWB combines emotional states (affective balance) with evaluations of how well life is going in general or in specific areas (life satisfaction). Both are typically measured using self-reporting, often using questionnaires but sometimes using experience sampling. SWB is well studied since it is intended as a measure, and hence the foundation for much investigation into happiness.

Philosophical well-being (“A life well lived”)

Well-being in philosophy deals with what is non-instrumentally or ultimately good for a person [13]. This is related to but not the same as health (well-being of the organism) or subjective well-being (feeling good): well-being is that which we ought to strive for because it actually is good for us. This is more of a normative concept than happiness – the ‘should’ is of the same kind as when we say we should be just. It is possible in this account to be mistaken about one’s level of well-being, and it might even be that we have not yet discovered what it is (if it even exists).

The main theories about well-being are hedonism, preference/desire satisfaction, and objective list theories. The hedonist account regards well-being as the highest balance of pleasure over pain. Accounts vary over how to characterize the pleasure

or pain/suffering. The satisfaction account measures well-being by how much our desires or preferences are fulfilled. Here the difficulty lies in expressing what desires count - not all desires lead to happiness even if they are perfectly fulfilled. Objective list theories regard well-being as constituted by a list of goods (e.g. knowledge, friendship, freedom) that are needed for a good life. Which goods should be on the list and why differs between different thinkers [14].

How to enhance well-being varies between different theories but in most everyday cases it coincides with what the more psychological theories suggest. However, philosophical accounts often go beyond the individual and discuss how collective or universal well-being can be improved.

Luck (“A happy coincidence...”)

The English word happy is derived from the medieval word hap, meaning chance, a person’s luck, fortune or fate: when it emerged in the late 14th century happy meant "lucky, favored by fortune, being in advantageous circumstances, prosperous". [15] In this account happiness is something lucky, an enjoyable bonus rather than a key part of life or goal.

While luck may appear impossible to affect, there is a growing literature suggesting that we can make our own luck by being open for positive opportunities and taking them when they occur. This is a trainable skill or habit.

Instrumental causes (“Happiness is a...”)

It is common to list what causes happiness, either because they trigger happiness in the person or because they are proper reasons to be happy. Such causes are obvious means for enhancing happiness, although they may be both individual and situation-dependent.

Meaning

Meaning is not the same as happiness, but a major contributor or complement. As noted by Roy Baumeister et al. [16], happiness tends to be present oriented, while meaning integrates past, present and future. They also put it as “Happiness was linked to being a taker rather than a giver, whereas meaningfulness went with being

a giver rather than a taker.”: meaningful activity is often other-directed or other-caring. On the other hand, what constitutes a meaningful act or experience may be culturally defined in ways happiness often isn't. Finding meaning requires a different kind of examination of one's life and emotions than finding happiness.

Social nature of happiness

Much happiness is shared – it emerges from meaningful or warm social relations, interactions with family and friends, or in group activities. These are social causes of happiness that also (usually) make all involved happier.

But it may also spread socially: we tend to pick up on moods around us and reflect them back, producing a feedback effect. Group happiness might be an emergent phenomenon where individual feelings or habits of happiness are amplified or even generated through social and technological mediation. Clearly social media can have an important role in enabling or preventing this from happening.

Striving for happiness

Happiness is intrinsically attractive, often instrumentally good, but also maybe something good in itself.

Why does happiness exist? An evolutionary account would be that motivational systems evolved to make organisms select actions that help them survive better and hence have more descendants. Aversive systems such as pain and fear signal conditions where action must be taken to avoid risk, while positive emotions signal conditions that should be sought out. In our evolutionary lineage this produces pleasure signals when goals are met, we anticipate them being met imminently or find something valuable by surprise: the deep neural basis for the emotion of happiness. This is purely instrumental for evolutionary fitness. Yet we humans can create new goals we find rewarding (since the capacity to learn or shift to new goals is very adaptive), and we can abstract our experiences into the abstract concept “happiness”. This leads to us striving for it for its own sake, in a sense short-circuiting what evolution aimed at. Yet from a human perspective, discarding the

ruthless fitness maximization of nature in favor of our own relatively freely choosable aims increases our happiness and dignity[17].


If happiness is intrinsically attractive, why do we need help to enhance it? One reason is that people *often do not recognize what makes them happier, and even then they may not choose it*. The reasons vary, from cognitive biases to competing goals such as self-definition[18]. We are also often ignorant of our options, especially in the complex, changing modern world. Getting better information about options, recognizing which ones fit our happiness, and getting support to use them would enhance happiness.

In many situations we experience happy states or live a happy life when we have done well. There are actual reasons to be happy, and happiness a signal that these reasons are present[19]. One issue with enhancing happiness is that we might improve the signal rather than the reasons. Feeling accomplishment when nothing has been accomplished is a mistake, no matter how enjoyable. Hence any enhancement of happiness beyond hedonism needs to be sensitive to what we regard as actual sources of value, either by making us respond to them more, by pursuing them more successfully, or finding new sources of value.

The happiness spectrum

One useful way of considering happiness is along a time spectrum. At the brief end we have instant pleasures and emotional state. General feelings and enjoyable activities extend over longer time spans. Beyond that we have happiness as a trait, affecting the overall emotional tenor of days, months, and years. On the long timescale we also have life projects, well-being and eudaimonic happiness: a life well lived. While these components are different things they often strongly link to each other.





As we move from the brief pleasures to full well-being the dimensionality increases. Pleasure is in itself not about something, but a fulfilling relationship involves deep cognitive, emotional and social components - we love a particular person for various conscious and unconscious reasons, in a particular way, framed by mutual interactions and the surrounding society. Well-being may have a few fundamental components[20], but each of these encompass highly individual understandings and goals that differ from person to person.

Along this spectrum interventions to help things along can take different forms. They can also act in different ways: by heightening a form of happiness, protecting it from unhappiness factors, giving coping mechanisms that internalize the protection, acting as prioritization or selection mechanisms that help choosing one's happiness types, and training in achieving more complex forms of well-being.

Do we need a diverse "happiness diet"? We may conjecture from the above accounts that while the long-term high-dimensional pursuits may provide deep rewards tending towards the eudaimonic, they do not necessarily produce the hedonic rewards. Since long-term goals and habits need reinforcement by our often short-term emotions and thoughts, ensuring that there are enough pleasant experiences to motivate and relax us for the large projects (without distracting from

them) appears necessary for long-term success. Conversely, forms of emotional and hedonic happiness often habituate, and an easy way of avoiding this is to shift between a variety of positive states.

Cultural differences

It is also worthwhile to note that there are a fair bit of cultural differences in how people understand happiness and what it is linked with in life. Lay definitions often stress the psychological dimension (with harmony, satisfaction and positive emotions as the most common elements), but also include family, relations, health, etc. These definitions are to some degree predicted by demographics (e.g. older people more often stress spiritual elements than younger) and, to a smaller degree, cultural values. Positive emotion definitions in the more individualistic West tend towards exciting high-arousal emotions while emotion definitions in more collectivistic eastern societies have tended towards emphasizing low arousal positive emotions.[\[21\]](#)

Perhaps even more importantly for projects aiming to enhance happiness is that there are individual and cultural differences in whether happiness is seen as a positive thing that should be enhanced. Happiness may lead to optimism bias, risk-taking, and setting excessive expectations, but many also think it might cause restorative bad events (bad luck, envy, evil eye etc.), suffering, or distraction from spiritual/religious goals. Happiness may be seen as something that should be taken with moderation or intrinsically problematic[\[22\]](#). Also, perceived pressure to be happy can itself be a source of unhappiness[\[23\]](#).

Another consideration is under what material conditions people seek happiness. While there is evidence that the positive impact of wealth on happiness declines with increasing wealth, it is still a factor - especially when there are perceived or absolute scarcities causing unhappiness, or when resources can be used to buy experiences, training or time. Strategies of contentment via lowered expectations and focus on inner states do not require much material goods, but are not automatically optimal.

What would a working definition of happiness be for us?

So, how is happiness usefully thought of for this project?

We aim to improve on happiness, so aspects of the concept that we cannot improve are outside the scope - except for aspects of happiness that interventions can impair, which we need to give due consideration of.

We do not just want to improve the momentary emotional state, however delightful that might be, but the mid- to long-range happiness and wellbeing of large groups of people. They are going to be diverse, individually and culturally, and have multidimensional forms.

Hence, we arrive at a placeholder definition:

Happiness (in our sense) is a multidimensional state of positive emotion, subjective well-being, and actual well-being.

Doubtless some readers will feel slightly cheated by the broad and apparently all-encompassing definition. However, it was selected in the light of the above background with the aim of being the focus of actual attempts of enhancement.

- It has components, but the key thing is how they hang together to generate the overall state.
- There can be different levels of intervention, aiming at different parts of the happiness spectrum, different contributing factors, or ways they interlink.
- It is not static: we respond to events, we learn how to be happier, we become happy with new things. Happiness research will doubtlessly also progress.
- Multimodal measures are harder to game. A narrow measure easily falls for Goodhart's law, where optimizing for it loses sight of the actual good we are seeking: carefully defined, diverse measures have better chances of leading us towards the desired outcomes [\[24\]](#).
- For maximally safe enhancement of happiness one can focus on achieving the preconditions for happiness or safeguard against happiness-reducers.

This is also ethically important: interventions that carry risk are far harder to research and apply in an ethical manner.

This paper has unpacked the suitcase of happiness, and tried to outline what the general contents are and how they are packed together. The next step is to use this understanding to provide practical means of achieving the multidimensional but attractive value of these contents.

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some of the reasons to be happy as more important than the happiness.

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Appendix A: links to existing aggregate happiness indices

There is a large literature on measuring and indexing happiness, far too wide to review in this introductory paper. The above discussion of subjective well-being shows a fairly common approach. A future paper will hopefully give a map of how different indices touch on different parts of our definition, and what aspects have not yet been measured or indexed that may be worth exploring.

Generally indices either measure individual happiness or collective aggregates: there appear to be a dearth of intermediate measures for group happiness. The collective aggregates are of interest for the development of “happiness GDP” and

similar concepts for setting societal objectives promoting well-being. Below is an overview of aggregate measures.

Happiness measure	Features	What is missing?
<p>World Happiness Report</p>	<p>assesses subjective well-being through 3 measures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · life evaluations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Measurement: Cantril ladder ○ 1-10 rating the quality of life from the best possible to the worst possible ○ this can be compared to other measures to assess correlations · positive emotions (affect) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ whether they smiled or laughed a lot yesterday and whether they experienced enjoyment during a lot of yesterday · negative emotions (affect) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ whether they experienced specific negative emotions during a lot of the day yesterday (worry, sadness or anger) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · life evaluations can be subject to biases (e.g. Robinson & Ryff, 1999, self-deception affecting past, present and future happiness) · even though life evaluation is supposed to reflect well-being over longer timescales, its assessment happens over one timestep ● current mood/mental state and consequent self-deception/cognitive biases can affect life evaluation in a similar fashion to affect, therefore, not reflecting a true timely difference between the two (this limitation is also discussed extensively by the Better Life Index) <p>correcting for these individual biases is not part of the data handling in the World Happiness Report, therefore, the multi-timescale feature of this measurement can be brought into question</p> <p>this setup is not well-suited to assess the causes of happiness, as using the regression measured between life evaluations and other, external factors does not show the complex interaction between factors and hence, what impacted happiness data the most</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · this measure provides no useful way of actually interacting with the data and using it for policy or well-being
<p>Comments, notes: the World Happiness report is unique amongst happiness measures in the multiple timescale view (this overlaps with HF), but its methodology leaves room for biases and diminished timely differences between affect and life evaluation</p> <p><i>When setting up the Happiness Wheel, it might be worth looking into how pervasive are current attributional and cognitive biases in happiness measures and how repeated sampling/different designs can help in assessing happiness and well-being in a more bias-free way</i></p>		

<p>OECD Better Life Index</p>	<p>defining well-being as a combination of 11 factors (material living conditions + quality of life)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • housing • income • jobs • community • education • environment • civic engagement • health • life satisfaction • safety • work-life balance <p>this allows for a community-level measurements that can be used to compare overall wellbeing across countries</p> <hr/> <p>the OECD works on improving policy-making, advising organisations and governments by incorporating wellbeing into the policies</p> <p>the factors and the questions assessing them were chosen based on their relevance to policy and how well they reflect wellbeing overall</p>	<p>this index highlights the disparity between perceived and actual happiness (serious limitation in the World Happiness Report), and measures perceived happiness</p> <p>however, the relative importance of these factors across cultures and communities differs, and some might actually benefit from using different factors (spirituality)</p> <hr/> <p>the advantages of HF also translates into advantages in usefulness for policy-making</p> <p>in order to be useful for policy-making this scale should reflect the relative importance of factors across the community</p> <p>again, this only reflects current states and is not possible to assess over time (no way of assessing the effects of policies, even though OECD was devised to give advice on making better policies), <i>however, the OECD How's Life Index can assess sustainable happiness too</i></p>
	<p>Comments, notes: <u>While the OECD itself has a similar goal to HF, the relationship between the happiness measures and policies are less well-defined.</u> HF can not only assess aspects of happiness more flexibly but it can also link policy to technology and healthcare, providing a more complex picture of society and systems at large</p>	
<p>OECD How's Life Index</p>	<p>based on the Better Life Index, however, it assesses the data longitudinally</p>	<p>suffers from similar limitations then the Better Life Index of the OECD (except for the multiple timescales problem)</p>
	<p>Comments, notes: <u>Assessing the same happiness measure across multiple timesteps (OECD) does not equal measuring sustainable happiness (HF).</u> In order to target sustainable happiness, one should focus on the interconnectedness of wellbeing and policy (e.g. looking at how policies impact different aspects of wellbeing, but also how these then transform work and different aspects of life in individuals)</p>	
<p>Gross National</p>	<p>proposes that governments should promote</p>	<p>this is a subjective measurement that completely</p>

<p>Well-being</p>	<p>happiness</p> <hr/> <p>happiness as a socioeconomic development metric: trying to overcome the difficulties in defining happiness and in measuring how policies can affect the happiness and wellbeing of the citizens</p> <p>measures 7 key areas through rating overall satisfaction with them 1-10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental & Emotional Wellbeing (over the past year) • Physical & Health Wellbeing • Work & Income Wellbeing • Social Relations Wellbeing • Economic & Retirement Wellbeing • Political & Government Wellbeing • Living Environment Wellbeing <p>there are also extra qualitative questions assessing what can account for these measures (e.g. what makes people happy, what causes them stress)</p>	<p>discounts underlying psychological factors and biases and fails to account for the interconnectedness in the data (many aspects of wellbeing also influence each other)</p> <p>HF offers a more detailed picture regarding metrics, with a combination of subjective and objective measures that also assess the underlying factors for different aspects of wellbeing</p>
	<p>Comments, notes: Similarly to the World Happiness Report, the GNW uses happiness as an outcome measure for policies and societal changes, however, it again, fails to account for the interconnectedness of happiness, wellbeing and policy. Moreover, while it is important to use an outcome metric to assess the effect of changes (in technology, policy, economics), it might be even more important to first assess the factors in these happiness metrics that could be key targets of subsequent changes, so that happiness and wellbeing is more adequately targeted and their interconnectedness with policy is taken into account.</p>	
<p>Gross National Happiness</p>	<p>similar setup to GNW but country-specific (Bhutan)</p> <p>9 domains of happiness</p> <p>psychological well-being, health, time use, education, cultural diversity and resilience, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and resilience, and living standards</p> <p>these are measured through both subjective and objective metrics (surveys and economic metrics)</p>	<p>this contains country- and culture-specific focuses and measures (e.g. cultural conservation in the Buddhist society), which makes this metric unable to be used globally</p>
<p>Social Progress Index</p>	<p>aims to describe the quality of life independent of economic indicators: through social and environmental indicators of progress</p> <p>3 key dimensions: Basic Human Needs, Foundations of Wellbeing, Opportunity</p> <p>4 key components in all of these dimensions, they</p>	<p>while it is important to point out that economic indicators are not enough to fully capture the progress and wellbeing of a community, it is not an appropriate response to fully exclude these metrics from assessing progress either.</p> <p>The approach of the Social progress index does leave a larger space for assessing factors outside of</p>

	are weighted equally	<p>economic metrics, yet, it fails to capture the significant interactions both these factors and wellbeing have with the economic factors</p> <p>Moreover, the Social Progress Index does not include psychological factors and infers this aspect of wellbeing purely from objective metrics</p> <p>This lacking of psychological and economic factors shows the most from the biases that the equal weighting of components within each factor provides. In individuals, their mental and financial state would change the weight different aspects of the 3 dimensions have and also the weight that each of the 3 dimensions in themselves have</p> <p>HF on the other hand takes all of these variations into account and aims to capture that interconnectedness and relative weighting</p>
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Appendix B: approaches towards happiness

Main area	Article	Abstract
<p>The philosophy of happiness, well-being and meaning</p>	<p>Haybron (2008), Happiness, the Self and Human Flourishing</p> <p>N.b. Dan Haybron's 2013 book, Happiness: A very short introduction is also a very influential overview of the topic (citations: 271)</p> <p>Citations: 118</p>	<p>The psychological condition of happiness is normally considered a paradigm subjective good, and is closely associated with subjectivist accounts of well-being. This article argues that the value of happiness is best accounted for by a non-subjectivist approach to welfare: a eudaimonistic account that grounds well-being in the fulfillment of our natures, specifically in self-fulfillment. And self-fulfillment consists partly in authentic happiness. A major reason for this is that happiness, conceived in terms of emotional state, bears a special relationship to the self. These arguments also point to a more sentimentalist approach to well-being than one finds in most contemporary accounts, particularly among Aristotelian forms of eudaimonism.</p>
	<p>Wolf (2009): Happiness and Meaning: Two Aspects of the Good Life</p>	<p>The topic of self-interest raises large and intractable philosophical questions—most obviously, the question “In what does self-interest consist?” The concept, as opposed to the content of self-interest, however, seems clear enough. Self-</p>

Citations: 258

interest is interest in one's own good. To act self-interestedly is to act on the motive of advancing one's own good. Whether what one does actually is in one's self-interest depends on whether it actually does advance, or at least, minimize the decline of, one's own good. Though it may be difficult to tell whether a person is motivated by self-interest in a particular instance, and difficult also to determine whether a given act or decision really is in one's self-interest, the meaning of the claims in question seems unproblematic.

My main concern in this essay is to make a point about the content of self-interest. Specifically I shall put forward the view that meaningfulness, in a sense I shall elaborate, is an important element of a good life. It follows, then, that it is part of an enlightened self-interest that one wants to secure meaning in one's life, or, at any rate, to allow and promote meaningful activity within it. Accepting this substantial conception of self-interest, however, carries with it a curious consequence: the concept of self-interest which formerly seemed so clear begins to grow fuzzy. Fortunately, it comes to seem less important as well.

In *Reasons and Persons*, Derek Parfit distinguishes three sorts of theories about self-interest—hedonistic theories, preference theories, and what he calls "objective-list theories." *Hedonistic theories* hold that one's good is a matter of the felt quality of one's experiences.

[Russel \(2012\): Happiness for Humans](#)

Citations: 141

This book takes a fresh look at happiness from a practical perspective: the perspective of someone trying to solve the wonderful problem of how to give himself a good life. From this perspective, "happiness" is the name of a solution to that problem for practical deliberation. The book's approach to happiness falls within a tradition going back to ancient Greek and Roman philosophers, a tradition now called "eudaimonism." Beginning with Aristotle's seminal discussion of the role of happiness in practical reasoning, the book asks what sort of good happiness would have to be in order to play the role

		<p>in our practical economies that it actually does play. Looking at happiness from this perspective, this book argues that happiness is a life of activity, with three main features: it is acting for the sake of ends we can live for, and living for them wisely; it is fulfilling for us, both as humans and as unique individuals; and it is inextricable from our connections with the particular persons, pursuits, and places that make us who we are. By returning to this ancient perspective on happiness, the book finds new directions for contemporary thought about the good lives we want for ourselves.</p>
	<p>Kashdan, TB, Biswas-Diener, R and King, LA. 2008. Reconsidering happiness: The costs of distinguishing between hedonics and eudaimonia. <i>Journal of Positive Psychology</i>, 3: 219–233. [Taylor & Francis Online], [Google Scholar]</p> <p>Citations: 1089</p>	<p>In recent years, well-being researchers have distinguished between eudaimonic happiness (e.g., meaning and purpose; taking part in activities that allow for the actualization of one's skills, talents, and potential) and hedonic happiness (e.g., high frequencies of positive affect, low frequencies of negative affect, and evaluating life as satisfying). Unfortunately, this distinction (rooted in philosophy) does not necessarily translate well to science. Among the problems of drawing too sharp a line between 'types of happiness' is the fact that eudaimonia is not well-defined and lacks consistent measurement. Moreover, empirical evidence currently suggests that hedonic and eudaimonic well-being overlap conceptually, and may represent psychological mechanisms that operate together. In this article, we outline the problems and costs of distinguishing between two types of happiness, and provide detailed recommendations for a research program on well-being with greater scientific precision.</p>
	<p>Biswas-Diener & Kashdan (2009): Two traditions of happiness research, not two distinct types of happiness</p> <p>Citations: 276</p>	<p>In an earlier paper (Kashdan, Biswas-Diener, & King, 2008), we outlined a critique of the distinction being made between eudaimonic and hedonic forms of happiness. That paper seems to have had the desired effect in stimulating discourse on this important subject as evidenced by a number of responses from our colleagues. In this paper, we address these responses collectively. In particular, we outline common intellectual ground with the responding authors as</p>

		well as points of difference.
	<p data-bbox="620 181 963 320">Disabato et al. (2016), Different types of well-being? A cross-cultural examination of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being.</p> <p data-bbox="620 353 783 383">Citations: 360</p>	<p data-bbox="1023 159 1426 1196">A large international sample was used to test whether hedonia (the experience of positive emotional states and satisfaction of desires) and eudaimonia (the presence of meaning and development of one's potentials) represent 1 overarching well-being construct or 2 related dimensions. A latent correlation of .96 presents negligible evidence for the discriminant validity between Diener's (1984) subjective well-being model of hedonia and Ryff's (1989) psychological well-being model of eudaimonia. When compared with known correlates of well-being (e.g., curiosity, gratitude), eudaimonia and hedonia showed very similar relationships, save goal-directed will and ways (i.e., hope), a meaning orientation to happiness, and grit. Identical analyses in subsamples of 7 geographical world regions revealed similar results around the globe. A single overarching construct more accurately reflects hedonia and eudaimonia when measured as self-reported subjective and psychological well-being. Nevertheless, measures of eudaimonia may contain aspects of meaningful goal-directedness unique from hedonia.</p>
	<p data-bbox="620 1265 995 1404">Ryff & Singer (2008): Know thyself and become what you are: A eudaimonic approach to psychological well-being</p> <p data-bbox="620 1438 796 1467">Citations: 3110</p>	<p data-bbox="1023 1243 1422 2101">In an effort to strengthen conceptual foundations of eudaimonic well-being, key messages from Aristotle's Nichomachean Ethics are revisited. Also examined are ideas about positive human functioning from existential and utilitarian philosophy as well as clinical, developmental, and humanistic psychology. How these perspectives were integrated to create a multidimensional model of psychological well-being [Ryff, C.D.: 1989a, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 57(6), pp. 1069–1081] is described, and empirical evidence supporting the factorial validity of the model is briefly noted. Life course and socioeconomic correlates of well-being are examined to underscore the point that opportunities for eudaimonic well-being are not equally distributed. Biological correlates (cardiovascular, neuroendocrine, immune) of psychological well-being are also briefly noted as they suggest</p>

		<p>possible health benefits associated with living a life rich in purpose and meaning, continued growth, and quality ties to others. We conclude with future challenges in carrying the eudaimonic vision forward.</p>
<p>The psychology of happiness, well-being and meaning</p>	<p>Argyle (2001): The Psychology of Happiness</p> <p>Citations: 4854</p>	<p>What is happiness? Why are some people happier than others?</p> <p>This new edition of <i>The Psychology of Happiness</i> provides a comprehensive and up-to-date account of research into the nature of happiness. Major research developments have occurred since publication of the first edition in 1987 – here they are brought together for the first time, often with surprising conclusions.</p> <p>Drawing on research from the disciplines of sociology, physiology and economics as well as psychology, Michael Argyle explores the nature of positive and negative emotions, and the psychological and cognitive processes involved in their generation. Accessible and wide-ranging coverage is provided on key issues such as: the measurements and study of happiness, mental and physical health; the effect of friendship, marriage and other relationships on positive moods; happiness, mental and physical health; the effects of work, employment and leisure; and the effects of money, class and education. The importance of individual personality traits such as optimism, purpose in life, internal control and having the right kind of goals is also analysed. New to this edition is additional material on national differences, the role of humour, and the effect of religion. Are some countries happier than others? This is just one of the controversial issues addressed by the author along the way.</p> <p>Finally the book discusses the practical application of research in this area, such as how happiness can be enhanced, and the effects of happiness on health, altruism and sociability. This definitive and thought-provoking work will be compulsive reading for students, researchers and the interested general reader</p>
	<p>Ryan & Deci (2014): On Happiness</p>	<p>Well-being is a complex construct that</p>

[and Human Potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing](#)

Citations: 12167

concerns optimal experience and functioning. Current research on well-being has been derived from two general perspectives: the hedonic approach, which focuses on happiness and defines well-being in terms of pleasure attainment and pain avoidance; and the eudaimonic approach, which focuses on meaning and self-realization and defines well-being in terms of the degree to which a person is fully functioning. These two views have given rise to different research foci and a body of knowledge that is in some areas divergent and in others complementary. New methodological developments concerning multilevel modeling and construct comparisons are also allowing researchers to formulate new questions for the field. This review considers research from both perspectives concerning the nature of well-being, its antecedents, and its stability across time and culture.

[Donaldson et al. \(2015\): Happiness, excellence, and optimal human functioning revisited: Examining the peer-reviewed literature linked to positive psychology](#)

Citations: 321

Since the original call by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) for a new science of happiness, excellence, and optimal human functioning, there has been an explosion of activity in, acclaim for, and criticism of positive psychology. The purpose of this study was to identify and examine the peer-reviewed literature linked to the positive psychology movement. An extensive systematic review identified 1336 articles published between 1999 and 2013. More than 750 of these articles included empirical tests of positive psychology theories, principles, and interventions. The results show a fairly consistent increase in the rate of publication, and that the number of empirical studies has grown steadily over the time period. The findings demonstrate that positive psychology is a growing and vibrant sub-area within the broader discipline of psychology, committed to using the same rigorous scientific methods as other sub-areas, in pursuit of understanding well-being, excellence, and optimal human functioning.

[Khaw & Kern \(2014\): A cross-cultural comparison of the PERMA model of Well-being](#)

Citations: 91

Seligman's (2011) PERMA theory of well-being describes a multi-dimensional approach in order to define what it means to flourish in life. The PERMA constructs include Positive emotion (P), Engagement (E), Relationships (R), Meaning (M), and Accomplishment (A). Butler and Kern (2014) developed the PERMA-Profiler, a brief measure of PERMA. In this study, we extend the PERMA-Profiler to a Malaysian sample, in order to examine how well the measure works in another culture. Participants (N = 322) completed the PERMA-profiler, and subset of participants (n = 268) also answered two qualitative questions about their perspectives on well-being. We compared the sample means to data previously collected from participants in the United States (N = 5,456). The Malaysian sample was significantly lower than the US sample on all of the PERMA domains. Next, we used factor analysis to examine the proposed five-factor structure. A three-factor model (positive emotion/ relationships, meaning/accomplishment, and engagement) fit the data better than the proposed five factors. We then coded and examined the qualitative questions on perceptions of well-being. While the PERMA constructs were generally represented, there were also other constructs that went beyond the PERMA model, such as religion, health, and security. Examining the PERMA-Profiler in Malaysia provides the opportunity to understand well-being more comprehensively in different cultures and evaluate how individuals in specific cultures flourish.

[Diener & Suh \(2000\): Measuring subjective well-being to compare the quality of life of cultures](#)

In Diener & Suh (2000): Culture and Subjective Well-being

Citations: 226

NB. the authors have a multitude of other papers looking at measuring subjective wellbeing, all of them highly cited (most of them with more than a 1000)

Diener (2009): Assessing Subjective Well-Being: Progress and Opportunities

Citations: 3671

Subjective well-being (SWB) comprises people's longer-term levels of pleasant affect, lack of unpleasant affect, and life satisfaction. It displays moderately high levels of cross-situational consistency and temporal stability. Self-report measures of SWB show adequate validity, reliability, factor invariance, and sensitivity to change. Despite the success of the measures to date, more sophisticated approaches to defining and measuring SWB are now possible. Affect includes facial, physiological, motivational, behavioral, and cognitive components. Self-reports assess primarily the cognitive component of affect, and thus are unlikely to yield a complete picture of respondents' emotional lives. For example, denial may influence self-reports of SWB more than other components. Additionally, emotions are responses which vary on a number of dimensions such as intensity, suggesting that mean levels of affect as captured by existing measures do not give a complete account of SWB. Advances in cognitive psychology indicate that differences in memory retrieval, mood as information, and scaling processes can influence self-reports of SWB. Finally, theories of communication alert us to the types of information that are likely to be given in self-reports of SWB. These advances from psychology suggest that a multimethod approach to assessing SWB will create a more comprehensive depiction of the phenomenon. Not only will a multifaceted test battery yield more credible data, but inconsistencies between various measurement methods and between the various components of well-being. Knowledge of cognition, personality, and emotion will also aid in the development of sophisticated theoretical definitions of subjective well-being. For example, life satisfaction is theorized to be a judgment that respondents construct based on currently salient information. Finally, it is concluded that measuring negative reactions such as depression or anxiety give an incomplete picture of people's well-being, and that it is imperative to measure life satisfaction and positive emotions as well.

[Diener & Suh \(1997\): Measuring quality of life: Economic, social, and subjective indicators](#)

Citations: 3125

Thinkers have discussed the “good life” and the desirable society for millennia. In the last decades, scientists offered several alternative approaches to defining and measuring quality of life: social indicators such as health and levels of crime, subjective well-being measures (assessing people's evaluative reactions to their lives and societies), and economic indices. These alternative indicators assess three philosophical approaches to well-being that are based, respectively, on normative ideals, subjective experiences, and the ability to select goods and services that one desires. The strengths and weaknesses of the various approaches are reviewed. It is argued that social indicators and subjective well-being measures are necessary to evaluate a society, and add substantially to the regnant economic indicators that are now favored by policy makers. Each approach to measuring the quality of life contains information that is not contained in the other measures.

[Zhang & Norvilitis \(2010\): Measuring Chinese Psychological Well-Being With Western Developed Instruments](#)

Citations: 218

We explored the possibility of applying 4 psychological scales developed and commonly used in the West to Chinese culture. The participants, 273 Chinese and 302 Americans, completed measures of self-esteem (Self-Esteem Scale; Rosenberg, 1965), depression (Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression Scale; Radloff, 1977), social support (Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support; Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988), and suicidal ideation (Scale for Suicide Ideation; Beck, Kovacs, & Weissman, 1979). All scales were found to be reliable and valid cross culturally. Comparative analyses suggest that gender differences on all 4 scales are smaller among the Chinese than the Americans. Americans were more likely to score higher on the socially desirable scales (self-esteem and social support) and lower on the socially undesirable

		<p>scale (suicidal ideation). However, no cultural differences were found in this study on the measure of depression. Results suggest that, with a few considerations or potential modifications, the current measures could be used in Chinese culture.</p>
	<p>Frawley (2015): Happiness Research: A review of critiques</p> <p>Citations: 68</p>	<p>In the short decades since the introduction of positive psychology instigated broader interdisciplinary research, interest in happiness has been growing in academia, the media and public policy. Numerous critiques of these developments have been forwarded from a variety of theoretical and disciplinary traditions. This article discusses three such criticisms: the culture-bound and normative character of happiness, 'bad science' and scientism, and diminished subjectivity and individualisation. It is argued that criticism, particularly internal criticism, evidences the maturity of the field. However, the depth of some critiques may also indicate that interest in happiness is bound with broader cultural preoccupations and is likely to be superseded.</p>
<p>Neuroscience</p>	<p>Kringelbach & Berridge (2009): Towards a functional neuroanatomy of pleasure and happiness</p> <p>Citations: 577</p>	<p>The pursuit of happiness is a preoccupation for many people. Yet only the pursuit can be promised, not happiness itself. Can science help? We focus on the most tractable ingredient, hedonia or positive affect. A step toward happiness might be gained by improving the pleasures and positive moods in daily life. The neuroscience of pleasure and reward provides relevant insights, and we discuss how specific hedonic mechanisms might relate to happiness or the lack thereof. Although the neuroscience of happiness is still in its infancy, further advances might be made through mapping overlap between brain networks of hedonic pleasure with others, such as the brain's default network, potentially involved in the other happiness ingredient, eudaimonia or life meaning and engagement.</p>
	<p>Davidson & Schuyler (2015): Neuroscience of Happiness In the World Happiness report</p>	<p>This review will emphasize recent developments in affective and social neuroscience that showcase four</p>

Citations: 58

constituents of well-being: sustained positive emotion; recovery from negative emotion; pro-social behavior and generosity; and mindwandering, mindfulness and “affective stickiness” or emotion-captured attention. The first two constituents have been studied within the framework of affective chronometry, the time course of emotional responding. In several early publications we argued that the ability to recover quickly from adversity was a key constituent of well-being and can be measured objectively. More recently, we have extended these studies by directly measuring the time course of brain activity in specific circuits underlying both negative and positive emotion. Moreover, some of these new findings suggest that these patterns of brain function are related not just to reports of emotion and life satisfaction, but also to systemic biological measures that are associated with physical health. These studies help to provide an understanding of the mechanisms connecting psychological well-being and physical health. The third constituent—pro-social behavior and generosity—has recently been shown to play a very important role in promoting well-being, and the neural bases of these social behaviors are now the subject of more intensive study.

[Kringelbach & Berridge \(2011\): Building a neuroscience of pleasure and wellbeing](#)

Citations: 269

How is happiness generated via brain function in lucky individuals who have the good fortune to be happy? Conceptually, well-being or happiness has long been viewed as requiring at least two crucial ingredients: positive affect or pleasure (hedonia) and a sense of meaningfulness or engagement in life (eudaimonia). Science has recently made progress in relating hedonic pleasure to brain function, and so here we survey new insights into how brains generate the hedonic ingredient of sustained or frequent pleasure. We also briefly discuss how brains might connect hedonia states of pleasure to eudaimonia assessments of meaningfulness, and so create balanced states of positive well-being.

[Huppert et al. \(2004\): Well-being: towards an integration of](#)

The study of well-being is a rapidly evolving field, and an exquisite example of a truly multidisciplinary endeavour.

	<p>psychology, neurobiology and social science</p> <p>Citations: 73</p>	<p>Two of the strongest strands have emerged from recent research on positive psychology and on social capital, but the field reaches well beyond these domains. We summarize some of the major themes that unite these different approaches and disciplines, highlighting both commonalities and controversies. The five themes on which we focus are: (i) evolution and development; (ii) the nature of wellbeing; (iii) well-being and capabilities; (iv) the relationship between health and well-being; and (v) the implications of the findings of the research for intervention strategies and public policies.</p>
	<p>Kong et al. (2020): Positive Neuroscience: the Neuroscience of Human Flourishing</p> <p>Citations:</p>	<p>The burgeoning subfield of neuroscience focused on salubrious attributes of the human condition has begun to illuminate the complex biological basis of human functioning and flourishing. This has been referred to as positive neuroscience. Instead of focusing on pathology, research on positive neuroscience directs its attention on the neural mechanisms supporting flourishing, psychological well-being, resilience, and promotion of health. Previous studies have investigated the structural and functional neural basis underlying positive human functioning such as well-being (e.g., Van Reekum et al., 2007; Heller et al., 2013; Kong et al., 2015a; Sato et al., 2015), meditation (e.g., Cahn and Polich, 2006; Sperduti et al., 2012), optimism (e.g., De Pascalis et al., 2013), resilience (e.g., Kong et al., 2015b, 2018), and creativity (e.g., Fink et al., 2009), based on experimental and self-reported measures. However, this emerging literature is just the tip of the iceberg on the quest to identify the complex mechanisms of brain structure and function supporting human behavior. The Research Topic “Positive neuroscience: the neuroscience of human flourishing” provides an outlet for novel work in this domain and to advance our understanding of the underlying mechanisms of aspects of human flourishing.</p>
<p>Sociology</p>	<p>McKenzie (2016): Deconstructing Happiness Critical Sociology and the Good</p>	<p>This book offers an original account of the good life in late modernity through a uniquely sociological lens. It considers the various ways</p>

<p>Life</p> <p>Citations: 23</p>	<p>that social and cultural factors can encourage or impede genuine efforts to live a good life by deconstructing the concepts of happiness and contentment within cultural narratives of the good life. Although empirical studies have dominated the discourse on happiness in recent decades, the emphasis on finding causal and correlational relationships has led to a field of research that arguably lacks a reliable theoretical foundation. Deconstructing Happiness offers a step toward developing that foundation by offering characteristically sociological perspectives on the contemporary fascination with happiness and well-being. In doing so, it seeks to understand the good life as a socially mediated experience rather than a purely personal or individually defined way of living. The outcome is a book on happiness, contentment and the good life that considers the influence of democracy, capitalism and progress while also focusing on the more theoretical challenges of self-knowledge, reason and interaction.</p>
<p>Cieslk (2014): 'Not Smiling but Frowning': Sociology and the 'Problem of Happiness'</p> <p>Citations: 60</p>	<p>Mainstream British sociology has curiously neglected happiness studies despite growing interest in wellbeing in recent years. Sociologists often view happiness as a problematic, subjective phenomenon, linked to problems of modernity such as consumerism, alienation and anomie. This construction of 'happiness as a problem' has a long history from Marx and Durkheim to contemporary writers such as Ahmed and Furedi. Using qualitative interview data, I illustrate how lay accounts of happiness suggest it is experienced in far more 'social' ways than these traditional subjective constructions. We should therefore be wary of using crude representations of happiness as vehicles for our traditional depictions of modernity. Such 'thin' accounts of happiness have inhibited a serious sociological engagement with the things that really matter to ordinary people, such as our efforts to balance suffering and flourishing in our daily lives.</p>
<p>Bartram (2012): Elements of a Sociological Contribution to Happiness Studies</p> <p>Citations: 80</p>	<p>A significant body of social-science research on happiness has accrued in recent decades, produced mainly by economists and psychologists. Sociologists, however, have made more limited contributions to "happiness studies". This paper provides an</p>

		<p>overview of concepts, methods and findings and suggests some questions about happiness that ought to be of substantial interest to sociology. Many sociologists are clearly interested in the well-being of the people they study (sometimes suggesting “policy implications” emerging from their empirical findings); happiness is a presumptively important form of well-being, and an engagement with happiness studies might constitute a way to develop more systematic connections between well-being and academic research. Building on existing findings, sociologists would be well-placed to consider the social context of happiness (as against an individualist orientation more common in other disciplines) as well as the unintended consequences of policy initiatives and happiness discourses.</p>
	<p>Veenhoven (2012): Does happiness differ across cultures?</p> <p>In Selin & Davey (2012): Happiness across cultures: Views of Happiness and Quality of Life in non-Western cultures</p> <p>NB: the book is also very insightful on the cross-cultural perspective on happiness</p> <p>Citations: 33</p>	<p>There is a longstanding discussion on whether happiness is culturally relative or not. The available data suggest that all humans tend to assess how much they like their lives. The evaluation draws both on affective experience, which is linked to gratification of universal human needs and on cognitive comparison, which is framed by cultural standards of the good life. The overall appraisal seems to depend more on the former than on the latter source of information. Conditions for happiness appear to be quite similar across the world and so are the consequences of enjoying life or not. There is more cultural variation in the valuation of happiness and in beliefs about conditions for happiness. The greatest variation is found in how happy people are.</p>
	<p>Veenhoven (2010): How universal is happiness?</p> <p>In Diener, Helliwell & Kahneman (2010): International differences in wellbeing</p> <p>Citations: 183</p>	<p>There is a longstanding discussion on whether happiness is culturally relative or not. The following questions are addressed in that context: 1) Do we all assess how much we like our life? 2) Do we appraise our life on the same grounds? 3) Are the conditions for happiness similar for all of us? 4) Are the consequences of happiness similar in all cultures? 5) Do we all seek happiness? 6) Do we seek happiness in similar</p>

		<p>ways? 7) Do we enjoy life about equally much? The available data suggest that all humans tend to assess how much they like their life. The evaluation draws on affective experience, which is linked to gratification of universal human needs and on cognitive comparison which is framed by cultural standards of the good life. The overall appraisal seems to depend more on the former, than on the latter source of information. Conditions for happiness appear to be quite similar across the world and so are the consequences of enjoying life or not. There is more cultural variation in the valuation of happiness and in beliefs about conditions for happiness. The greatest variation is found in how happy people are.</p>
	<p>Lu et al. (2001): Cultural values and Happiness: An East-West dialogue</p> <p>Citations: 305</p>	<p>Happiness as a state of mind may be universal, but its meaning is complex and ambiguous. The authors directly examined the relationships between cultural values and experiences of happiness in 2 samples, by using a measurement of values derived from Chinese culture and a measurement of subjective well-being balanced for sources of happiness salient in both the East and the West. The participants were university students—439 from an Eastern culture (Taiwan) and 344 from a Western culture (the United Kingdom). Although general patterns were similar in the 2 samples, the relationships between values and happiness were stronger in the Taiwanese sample than in the British sample. The values social integration and human-heartedness had culture-dependent effects on happiness, whereas the value Confucian work dynamism had a culture-general effect on happiness.</p>
	<p>Matthews (2012): Happiness, culture and context</p> <p>Citations: 88</p>	<p>The first part of this paper discusses why statistical comparisons of happiness and wellbeing are insufficient. It considers criticisms of these statistical comparisons, and discusses how, while they are useful for some purposes, they do not enable fully adequate cross-cultural comparison. The paper then discusses the problem of surveys both in</p>

terms of language, given the subtly different terms in different languages for happiness, and in terms of culture, arguing that difference in cultures can cause the findings of surveys to be less than transparent. It then turns to a consideration of culture itself, which has become increasingly problematic in anthropology in recent decades. 'Culture' is a term that has been shifting in its meanings. Culture no longer refers simply to 'the way of life of a people,' but also to the array of choices individuals make from 'the global cultural supermarket'; culture in both these senses needs to be analyzed in terms of how it develops in the individual, as recent anthropological theories have been exploring. This new-found complexity of culture does not mean that researchers on subjective wellbeing should abandon culture as a variable; rather, they should augment statistical surveys of wellbeing, which are based on the older, conventional conception of culture, with ethnographic interviewing conducted by researchers who understand the language and culture in a given society. Only on this basis can the cross-cultural study of wellbeing reach its full potential, the paper argues, a potential uniting of different academic disciplines in a common endeavor, that of fully understanding what happiness means and how it can best be attained in the world.

[Tamir et al. \(2017\): The secret to happiness: Feeling good or feeling right?](#)

Citations: 86

Which emotional experiences should people pursue to optimize happiness? According to traditional subjective wellbeing research, the more pleasant emotions we experience, the happier we are. According to Aristotle, the more we experience the emotions we want to experience, the happier we are. We tested both predictions in a cross-cultural sample of 2,324 participants from 8 countries around the world. We assessed experienced emotions, desired emotions, and indices of well-being and depressive symptoms. Across cultures, happier people were those who more often experienced emotions they wanted to experience, whether these were pleasant (e.g., love) or unpleasant (e.g., hatred). This pattern applied

		<p>even to people who wanted to feel less pleasant or more unpleasant emotions than they actually felt. Controlling for differences in experienced and desired emotions left the pattern unchanged. These findings suggest that happiness involves experiencing emotions that feel right, whether they feel good or not.</p>
	<p>Galati et al. (2006): The subjective components of happiness and their attainment: a cross-cultural comparison between Italy and Cuba</p> <p>Citations: 68</p>	<p>This study aims to identify the subjective components of happiness and to analyze their degree of attainment in two countries, Italy and Cuba, characterized by very different cultural and socio-economic structures. Two hundred and sixty-five subjects participated in a questionnaire study: 133 from Italy and 132 from Cuba. Respondents were asked to think of happiness and to write down at least 5 components that made them feel happy. A measure of overall happiness was also obtained by asking subjects to rate to what extent they had attained each component in their life. The analysis of responses provided by the two samples yielded the identification of 21 cross-culturally shared happiness components, which referred to individual interests, relational interests and values. The most relevant components in each group were health, family, love and money. Italian and Cuban subjects differed in the frequency of citation of some happiness components (e.g. money, work, partner) and in the degree of attainment of them. Overall, Cubans perceived themselves as happier than Italians. Findings are discussed in relation to the socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the Italian and Cuban contexts.</p>
	<p>Gundelch & Kreiner (2004): Happiness and Life Satisfaction in Advanced European Countries</p> <p>Citations: 169</p>	<p>Based on the European Value Survey 1999, this article analyzes happiness and life satisfaction in nine rich, industrialized countries with different levels of perceived</p>

		<p>happiness. Using graphical modeling, the statistical analysis showed that happiness and life satisfaction are related but are different concepts and that contextual as well as individual variables are important in explaining their variations. One of the most important results is that happiness depends on whether the respondent lives in a stable relationship and on country characteristics. Life satisfaction was related to the respondent's feeling of control and his or her country of residence. In an aggregated analysis, the country-specific variables were analyzed, showing that social capital was the most important predictor of happiness.</p>
<p>Happiness economics</p>	<p>Layard (2006): Happiness and Public Policy: A Challenge to the Profession</p> <p>Citations: 717</p>	<p>The theory behind public economics needs radical reform. It fails to explain the recent history of human welfare and it ignores some of the key findings of modern psychology. Indeed these two failings are intimately linked: it is because the theory ignores psychology that it is unable to explain the facts.</p> <p>The fact is that, despite massive increases in purchasing power, people in the West are no happier than they were fifty years ago. We know this from population surveys and other supporting evidence which I shall review.</p> <p>The most obvious explanations come from three standard findings of the new psychology of happiness.¹ First, a person's happiness is negatively affected by the incomes of others (a negative externality). Second, a person's happiness adapts quite rapidly to higher levels of income (a phenomenon of addiction). And third, our tastes are not given – the happiness we get from what we have is largely culturally determined.</p> <p>These findings provide a challenge to the theory and conclusions of public economics, as set out for example in Atkinson and Stiglitz (1980). The challenge to public economics is to incorporate the findings of modern</p>

		<p>psychology while retaining the rigour of the cost–benefit framework which is the strength and glory of our subject.² In what follows I shall first review the measurement of happiness. Then I shall take the three findings that I discussed one by one, and pursue the policy implications of each of them. I shall end with some overall reflections.</p>
<p>Kahneman et al. (2006): Would You Be Happier If You Were Richer? A Focusing Illusion</p> <p>Citations: 1536</p>		<p>The belief that high income is associated with good mood is widespread but mostly illusory. People with above-average income are relatively satisfied with their lives but are barely happier than others in moment-to-moment experience, tend to be more tense, and do not spend more time in particularly enjoyable activities. Moreover, the effect of income on life satisfaction seems to be transient. We argue that people exaggerate the contribution of income to happiness because they focus, in part, on conventional achievements when evaluating their life or the lives of others.</p>
<p>Crespo & Mesurdo (2015): Happiness Economics, Eudaimonia and Positive Psychology: From Happiness Economics to Flourishing Economics</p> <p>Citations: 67</p>		<p>A remarkable current development, happiness economics focuses on the relevance of people’s happiness in economic analyses. As this theory has been criticised for relying on an incomplete notion of happiness, this paper intends to support it with richer philosophical and psychological foundations. Specifically, it suggests that happiness economics should be based on Aristotle’s philosophical <i>eudaimonia</i> concept and on a modified version of ‘positive psychology’ that stresses human beings’ relational nature. First, this analysis describes happiness economics and its shortcomings. Next, it introduces Aristotle’s <i>eudaimonia</i> and takes a look at positive psychology with this lens, elaborating on the need to develop a new approach that goes beyond the economics of happiness: the <i>economics of flourishing</i>. Finally, the paper specifies some possible socio-economic objectives of a <i>eudaimonic</i> economics of happiness.</p>
<p>Layard et al. (2010): Does relative income matter? Are the critics right?</p>		<p>Do other peoples’ incomes reduce the happiness which people in advanced countries experience from any given income? And does this help to explain why in the U.S., Germany and some other</p>

In Diener, Helliwell & Kahneman (2010): International differences in Well-being

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advanced countries, happiness has been constant for many decades? The answer to both questions is 'Yes'. We provide 4 main pieces of evidence. 1) In the U.S. General Survey (repeated samples since 1972) comparator income has a negative effect on happiness equal in magnitude to the positive effect of own income. 2) In the West German Socio-Economic Panel since 1984 the same is true but with lifesatisfaction as the dependant variable. We also use the Panel to compare the effect of income comparisons and of adaptation as factors explaining the stable level of life-satisfaction: income comparisons emerge as much the more important. 3) When in our U.S. analysis we introduce "perceived" relative income as a potential explanatory variable, its effect is as large as the effect of actual relative income – further supporting the view that comparisons matter. 4) Finally, for a panel of European countries since 1973 we estimate the effect of average income upon average lifesatisfaction, splitting income into two components: trend and cycle. The effect of trend income is small and ill-defined. Our conclusions relate to time series and to advanced countries only. They differ from those drawn in recent studies by Deaton and Stevenson/Wolfers, but those studies are largely cross-sectional and mostly include non-advanced as well as advanced countries.

[Di Tella & MacCulloch \(2010\): Happiness adaptation to income beyond 'basic needs'](#)

In Diener, Helliwell & Kahneman (2010): International differences in Well-being

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We test for whether, once "basic needs" are satisfied, there is happiness adaptation to further gains in income using three data sets. Individual German Panel Data from 1985-2000, and data on the well-being of over 600,000 people in a panel of European countries from 1975-2002, shows different patterns of adaptation to income across the rich and poor. We find evidence that for wealthy Germans, and for the rich half of European nations, higher levels of per capita income don't buy greater happiness. The reason appears to be adaptation. However even for the rich half of European nations such habituation may take over 5 years so the happiness gains that they experience, whilst not permanent, can still be relatively long-lasting. Finally we study a

		<p>cross section of nations in 2005 from the World Gallup Poll and find that the past 45 years of economic growth (from 1960-2005) in the rich half of nations has not brought happiness gains above those that were already in place once the 1960s standard of living had been achieved. However in the poorest half of nations we cannot reject the null hypothesis that the happiness gains they have experienced from the past 45 years of growth have been the same as the gains that they experienced from growth prior to the 1960s.</p>
<p>Meditation and religious studies of achieving happiness</p>	<p>Malinowski, P. (2013). Flourishing through meditation and mindfulness. In S. A. David, I. Boniwell, & A. Conley Ayers (Eds.), <i>The Oxford handbook of happiness</i> (pp. 384–396).</p> <p>Citations: 37</p>	<p>In recent years psychological research and practice have been enriched by two exciting developments which in combination add a new dimension to the quest for a meaningful and fulfilled life. The first development relates to the introduction of the concept of <i>flourishing</i>. The second concerns the growing recognition of the beneficial effects of <i>meditation</i> and <i>mindfulness</i> practice as clinical and non-clinical interventions. These two developments are slowly starting to cross-fertilize, providing new perspectives and practical approaches to the field of positive psychology. In this chapter I will outline and discuss how these developments are interrelated and why meditation and mindfulness practices are considered to be useful tools for achieving a flourishing life. First attempts at conceptualizing the psychological mechanisms that are at work when meditation practices unfold their beneficial effects will be discussed, while also considering challenges that lie ahead.</p>
	<p>Kesebir, Dienr (2009): In Pursuit of Happiness: Empirical Answers to Philosophical Questions</p> <p>Citations: 516</p>	<p>In this article, we provide an overview of what various philosophers throughout the ages have claimed about the nature of happiness, and we discuss to what extent psychological science has been able to substantiate or refute their claims. We first address concerns raised by philosophers regarding the possibility, desirability, and justifiability of happiness and then turn to the perennial question of how to be happy. Integrating insights from great thinkers of the past with empirical findings from modern</p>

		<p>behavioral sciences, we review the conditions and causes of happiness. We conclude our discussion with some thoughts about the future of happiness studies.</p>
	<p>Lewis & Cruise (2007): Religion and happiness: Consensus, contradictions, comments and concerns</p> <p>Citations: 206</p>	<p>The relationship between religion and happiness has been the focus of much research. The present review provides a critical examination of this research and, in particular, focuses on conceptual and methodological concerns. The majority of studies report a positive association between measures of religion and happiness; however, contradictory findings are common. This is exemplified in the literature that has systematically employed the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity alongside two different measures of happiness among a variety of samples. Two opposing conclusions have found consistent support. Research with the Oxford Happiness Inventory has consistently found religiosity to be associated with happiness, while research employing the Depression–Happiness Scale has consistently found no association. It is argued that such contradictions may reflect both conceptual and methodological weaknesses in this literature</p>
	<p>Gaston-Breton et al. (2021): Pleasure, meaning or spirituality: Cross-cultural differences in orientations to happiness across 12 countries</p> <p>Citations:</p>	<p>Firms and institutions are increasingly embracing well-being initiatives as a critical way to retain and engage with their employees, customers and citizens all over the world. However, cross-cultural research on the paths to happiness remains scarce and fragmented, typically conceptualizing happiness as an individualistic pleasure-based construct without considering its collectivistic meaning-based dimension. This research investigates simultaneously how hedonic (pleasure) and eudaimonic (meaning and spirituality) orientations to happiness (life satisfaction) vary across 12 countries and among 2615 individuals representing different regions of the world (six continents) and different cultural contexts (individualism or collectivism). Findings reveal no significant difference in terms of the structure of happiness across countries, and that meaning emerges as a stronger predictor of life satisfaction compared to</p>

		<p>pleasure and spirituality. Accordingly, we inform human resource and marketing managers, policy makers and individuals about common routes to well-being in an international context.</p>
<p>Reducing pain, suffering and depression</p>	<p>Bergsma (2000): Transhumanism and the Wisdom of Old Genes is Neurotechnology as Source of Future Happiness?</p> <p>Citations: 35</p>	<p>Technological progress seems to open ways for redesigning the human organism. This means that the affective system that is built into the brain by evolution can be redesigned with intent. One of the consequences will be that the word progress will get a new meaning. Progress won't be confined to enhancing the conditions of living, but it will change the way we react to the world. These possibilities are explored in a new kind of biological utopism called 'transhumanism'. This school foresees that a restructured human brain will give rise to 'more varied experience, lifelong happiness and exhilarating peak experiences everyday'. This essay considers the reality value of that expectation in the light of the current psychology of affects, in particular of presumed functions of hedonic experience. It is concluded that transhumanism overlooks that happiness will lose its meaning if it is treated as an isolated feeling. The affective system in our brain needs strong ties with the on-going interaction of the individual with its environment. Making people happier without enhancing the grip on their life will be contra-productive.</p>
	<p>Dvorsky (2008): Better Living through Transhumanism</p> <p>Citations: 46</p>	<p>A growing number of people are turning to transhumanism, which aims to promote and encourage human enhancement through the application of science and technology. They maintain that this is a good thing, and that we should encourage and work towards the attainment of a posthuman condition. Not ones to dwell on the future while passively waiting for it to happen, transhumanists engage in foresight, activist and promotional activities. Just as significantly, the day-to-day lifestyle choices of transhumanists reflect anticipated change. Transhumanism is in many respects a burgeoning lifestyle choice and cultural phenomenon.</p>
	<p>Seligman et al. (2006): Positive</p>	<p>Positive psychotherapy (PPT)</p>

[psychotherapy](#)

Citations: 2257

contrasts with standard interventions for depression by increasing positive emotion, engagement, and meaning rather than directly targeting depressive symptoms. The authors have tested the effects of these interventions in a variety of settings. In informal student and clinical settings, people not uncommonly reported them to be "life-changing." Delivered on the Web, positive psychology exercises relieved depressive symptoms for at least 6 months compared with placebo interventions, the effects of which lasted less than a week. In severe depression, the effects of these Web exercises were particularly striking. This address reports two preliminary studies: In the first, PPT delivered to groups significantly decreased levels of mild-to-moderate depression through 1-year follow-up. In the second, PPT delivered to individuals produced higher remission rates than did treatment as usual and treatment as usual plus medication among outpatients with major depressive disorder. Together, these studies suggest that treatments for depression may usefully be supplemented by exercises that explicitly increase positive emotion, engagement, and meaning

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There is talk about a “fourth industrial revolution” that will change how goods are produced. An understudied question is how this transformation can affect human well-being. Clearly past shifts in human modes of production and societal organization have changed both the opportunities for living a good life, and how they can be expressed. This paper aims to analyze how Industry 4.0 affects these factors, and in particular note where research, technical or policy work is needed to ensure that it enhances well-being rather than impairs it.

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