

Meaning and Happiness¹

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Abstract

What is the relationship between meaning in life and happiness? In psychological research, subjective meaning and happiness are often contrasted with each other. I argue that while the objective meaningfulness of a life is distinct from happiness, subjective or felt meaning is a key constituent of happiness, which is best understood as a multidimensional affective condition. Measures of felt meaning should consequently be included in empirical studies of the causes and correlates of happiness.

Introduction

It borders on the trivial to say that for most of us the deepest satisfaction we have felt in our lives is associated with meaningful activities and relationships.

Conversely, in our darkest hours life seems pointless or shallow and our best efforts seem to lead nowhere. It is very nearly a platitude that lives that are lacking in meaning are unlikely to be happy ones, while lives imbued with purpose are likely to be happy as well. But do happiness and meaning really tend together? What is meaning in life in the first place, and how does it relate to *felt* meaningfulness of what we do? Is felt meaning a cause of happiness, or perhaps a constituent of it? Does the pursuit of meaning predictably clash with the pursuit of happiness?

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Answers to these questions bear on our most fundamental life choices – what career to pursue, where to live, whether to start a family.

We have no hope of answering such questions without philosophical reflection on what meaning, sense of purpose, and happiness really are. But they also have an empirical dimension. After all, it is a factual question what makes us happy or gives us a sense of meaning. As positive psychology has begun to flourish in the last decade or so, meaning in life and its relation to happiness has become a focus of empirical study. Although the research has yielded some interesting insights, I believe it suffers from lack of conceptual clarity that prevents it from reaching its full potential. My aim in this paper is to clarify the concept and constituents of meaning in life and the related but distinct notion of subjective or felt meaning or sense of purpose (I'll use the terms interchangeably), and investigate their relation to happiness. My hope is that what I say in Sections 2 and 3 in particular will be useful to psychologists and social scientists interested in well-being, as well as philosophers.

My point of departure is two mistaken philosophical theses that much of the psychological work relies on. In Section 1, I address the conflation of meaningfulness with sense of meaning. Most psychologists speak as if for someone's life to be meaningful is just for her to find it meaningful, either in terms of judgment or attitude. Philosophers, in contrast, typically take meaning to be objective: the degree to which someone's life is meaningful is, at least in part, independent of any belief or attitude she has towards her life. Our lives are meaningful to the extent it is *fitting* or *correct* to find them meaningful. In the first-personal case, finding life meaningful – having a sense of purpose – consists in pride for what we have already achieved, fulfilment in what we're doing now, and trust in the fruitfulness of our future efforts, or so I'll argue. It is a further question what makes these attitudes fitting, and thus life meaningful. According to my Teleological View of meaningfulness, someone's life is meaningful to the degree it is defined by identity-shaping engagement in challenging projects that build on the past in successful pursuit of something objectively valuable. Roughly, what we do is most meaningful when it moves our life story forward in the direction of making a positive difference in the world. Contrary to Susan Wolf (2010), whether we actually find our lives meaningful is irrelevant to objective meaningfulness.

In Section 2, I reject another claim common in psychology. According to what I'll call the Separation Thesis, happiness and subjective or felt meaning are distinct

psychological states or conditions. This claim is plausible in the context of a conception of happiness as a hedonic state, or satisfaction with life, or some hybrid of these. However, there is independent reason to think these views are mistaken. In particular, Daniel Haybron (2008) has convincingly made the case that happiness is best understood as a multidimensional emotional condition. I propose a new variant of this view, and argue that sense of purpose is a component of such a condition rather than a potential cause. Roughly, my view is

The Affective Condition Account of Happiness

Happiness is a multidimensional affective condition comprised of predominantly positive affect (mood, emotion, and hedonic quality) and absence of negative affect. The degree to which an affect makes a difference to *S*'s happiness is a function of the extent to which it constitutes or influences *S*'s subjective perspective (attentional focus, motivation, deliberation, and other affects).

The Affective Condition account lends direct support for the claim that felt meaning is a central aspect of the affective condition of happiness. If this is true, it makes no sense to *contrast* subjective meaning with happiness, except in the way that a part contrasts with a whole.

In Section 3, I discuss what rejecting the mental state conception of meaningfulness and the Separation Thesis means for current research in positive psychology. Unsurprisingly, it turns out that some claims made about happiness, meaning, and their relation to each other are mistaken. This has various implications for how to measure happiness and meaning. I also reject the contention that felt meaning is better understood as part of a broader psychological construct of eudaimonia than part of happiness. For positive psychology to make progress, it needs to target the sources of happiness as a positive global affective condition that contains subjective or felt meaning as a central component.

1. Meaning As a Component of Objective Well-Being

I assume that most people would accept that other things being equal, it is better to lead a meaningful rather than meaningless life. But what is it for life to be meaningful? And what sort of things make life meaningful? These are distinct questions, just as what it is for a society to be just (for example, for everyone to get

their due) is distinct from what makes a society just (for example, that everyone has equal opportunity for welfare). In this section, I will summarize and develop answers to these questions that I have introduced in earlier work (Kauppinen 2012).

Some think that what it is for someone's life to be meaningful is for her to find it meaningful, and consequently that what makes life meaningful is whatever causes one to find it meaningful. In philosophy, Richard Taylor (1970/2010) is the best-known proponent of this sort of view. He offers a bold twist on the legend of Sisyphus, the ancient whistleblower whom the gods condemned to an eternity of rolling a rock up the hill only to watch it roll back down again for leaking their secrets to mankind. For Taylor, such 'repetitious, cyclic activity that never comes to anything' (Taylor 1970/2010, 22–3) is a paradigm of a meaningless life because we find it hard to imagine anyone would want to engage in it. If, however, the gods were to inject Sisyphus with some substance that gave rise to an obsession to roll stones, his life would after all become meaningful in the only possible sense – it would be meaningful for him. When one's heart is in it, an activity that is 'objectively meaningless' in the sense that it lacks 'some more or less lasting end that can be considered to have been the direction and purpose of the activity', can nevertheless 'acquire a meaning for him whose existence it is' (Taylor 1970/2010, 25).

In psychology, conceiving of meaning in life in mentalistic terms is standard. For example, Roy Baumeister and co-authors define meaning in life as 'a cognitive and an emotional assessment of whether one's life has purpose and value' (Baumeister et al. 2013, 1). Gary Reker and Paul Wong emphasize coherence as well as purpose. According to them, personal meaning is 'cognizance of order, coherence and purpose in one's existence, the pursuit and attainment of worthwhile goals, and an accompanying sense of fulfillment' (1988, 221). Tatjana Schnell says meaningfulness is 'a fundamental sense of meaning, based on an appraisal of one's life as coherent, significant, directed, and belonging' (2009, 487).

These philosophers and psychologists thus subscribe to the following thesis:

The Mental State Concept of Meaning in Life

For S's life to be meaningful is for S to find it meaningful, where finding life meaningful can be a matter of judgment, attitude, or both.

There is good reason to think this conception is erroneous. The basic argument is straightforward: it is possible for one to be *mistaken* about how meaningful one's life

is. This mistake may be a matter of belief or non-doxastic attitude – for example, one may feel satisfied with a life that doesn't merit satisfaction, perhaps as a result of self-deception. Sadly, if you spend your life filling timesheets that will be shredded without ever being read, it will have very little meaning, however much you want to fill timesheets or enjoy it, or believe it to be worthwhile. Thinking your life is meaningful doesn't make it so. We are not *infallible* about meaning. Put differently, the difference in the meaningfulness of Nelson Mandela's life and your life isn't a matter of your subjective attitudes towards them. It is rather a result of difference between what Mandela has done and what you've done. Most likely, this is something you implicitly recognize. When you aspire to lead a more meaningful life, you don't aspire to have a different attitude toward your actual activities, but to do something different.

Because it is intelligible that one is mistaken about the meaningfulness of one's life, the concept of meaningfulness is distinct from the concept of *sense* of meaning or purpose – objective meaning is distinct from subjective meaning. It is, of course, trivially true that for you to have a sense of purpose is for you to find life meaningful. How do meaning in life and sense of meaning relate to each other, then? It would be possible for the two to be completely distinct from each other. But the most fruitful approach, I believe, is understanding objective meaning in terms of *fitting* attitudes towards a life. Life is meaningful when it is fitting or correct to find it meaningful, just as something is desirable when it is fitting to desire it or admirable when it is fitting to admire it. Fitting Attitudes Analyses of this kind have many attractive features in the metaphysics of value. They promise to avoid the queerness of postulating objective values that are not constitutively linked to valuing responses. At the same time, they leave room for mistakes and objectivity in the sense of a standard of correctness that is independent of what anyone actually thinks.²

In broad terms, then, for life to be meaningful is for it to be fitting to find it meaningful. But what exactly is it to find life meaningful? What are the relevant attitudes such that they amount to finding that a life has point, purpose, and direction? If we focus on the distinctive feelings of meaningfulness, we observe that

² The challenge is to cash out the notion of fittingness in a way that doesn't collapse the view either into a form of naturalism that fails to account for why we should care about value or a form of non-naturalism that reintroduces the challenge of queerness at a higher level. I have attempted to do so elsewhere (Kauppinen 2014), and will simply assume here that it can be done one way or another.

they do not just concern the present moment. Interestingly, this receives some support from recent psychological research, which suggests that it is a common sense view that ‘meaning is about linking events across time, thus integrating past, present, and future’ (Baumeister et al. 2013, 6). It is indeed our *lives* that can seem meaningful to us, and our lives are comprised of self-relevant actions and events that stretch from the past to the future via the fleeting present. Consequently, the sense of purpose has a temporal structure. I believe it consists in pride for what we have already achieved, fulfilment in what we’re doing now, and trust or confidence in our story heading in the right direction. Predictably, different aspects are highlighted in different contexts. The sense of meaning you have when you are recognized by your peers – your efforts haven’t been wasted! – is likely to be dominated by feelings of pride, while the purpose that may dawn when you’re holding your new baby will largely comprise of trust in the worthwhileness of future activities. Sometimes when we lose ourselves in what we’re doing, fulfilment – being gripped or excited by what we do or loving it (Wolf 2010, 14) – may dwarf the other feelings. We experience the fullest sense of meaning, I conjecture, when we focus on our journey from that past to the future by way of present activity by way of constructing what psychologists call our personal story (McAdams 2008), and all the different elements are simultaneously activated. In addition, the more specific feelings involved in sense of purpose may have a kind of halo, a diffuse affective state of optimism and energy that belongs in the category of *mood*. It may be that sometimes we simply refer to such mood when talking about sense of purpose.

All these sentiments embody or constitute an evaluation of something having value or being worthwhile beyond contributing to our own good. We are proud (in the relevant, agential sense) of having made a valuable contribution. The feeling is out of place if either the contribution isn’t valuable or we aren’t responsible for it. The same goes for fulfilment and trust in future. As I argue elsewhere, there is good reason to think this evaluation isn’t a matter of belief or judgment, but is rather part of the phenomenal intentionality of the emotions.³ It is *in* feeling proud or confidently hopeful of being on the right path that we see our actions as making a positive difference. We need not be able to articulate this sense of meaning or even possess the concept of meaningfulness in order to have this experience. So finding

³ Kauppinen (2013). See also Kriegel (2013).

life meaningful isn't fundamentally a matter of *judgment*. (This will be important for understanding its relation to happiness.) We may, of course, make judgments about the meaningfulness of our lives. But on my view, they at best reflect our subjective take on meaning instead of constituting it.

With this understanding of sense of meaning or purpose, we can give the following somewhat more informative (and no doubt unobvious) analysis of meaningfulness:

Fitting Attitudes Analysis of Meaningfulness

S's life is meaningful to the degree it is fitting for S to have agential pride, feelings of fulfilment, and confident hope, and for others to admire S's life and be inspired or elevated by it.

I formulate the analysis in terms of degree of meaningfulness, since this allows for comparison of possible lives as more or less meaningful, and consequently the use of standard semantics for gradable adjectives to account for what it is for life to be meaningful *sans phrase*. According to such semantics, sentences of the form 'S's life is meaningful' are true when S's life is more meaningful than some portion of lives in the contextually salient contrast class. Given that the truth of unqualified claims about meaning in life varies with context, we should be wary of intuitions concerning meaningfulness as such. We're better off asking ourselves which features would make life *more* or *less* meaningful, or what would make life *ideally* meaningful.

The Fitting Attitudes Analysis of Meaningfulness is my answer to the *conceptual* question about the nature of meaning in life (compare: for something to be good is for it to be a fitting object of desire). I haven't yet said anything about what *makes* life meaningful (compare: what makes something a fitting object of desire). Here, once again, a subjectivist view is possible: it could be that what makes life objectively meaningful – what makes sense of purpose fitting – is that one finds it so. But this is no more plausible than the view that what makes something desirable is that one desires it. At the opposite end of the spectrum are views for which a subject's actual attitude to her life is irrelevant. Only what she does makes a difference to the meaningfulness of her life. The view I'll defend is of this type. Many others, perhaps most notably Susan Wolf, defend a kind of hybrid view. Wolf says that life is meaningful when 'subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness' (2010, 9). Meaning arises from 'active and loving engagement in

projects of worth' (2010, 32). As these slogans indicate, Wolf believes there's two sides to meaning, both of which are necessary. She believes that subjectivists are right in thinking that meaning requires 'finding one's passion' and doing things one loves. But objectivists are right in that finding fulfilment does not suffice for meaning. However gripping and exciting you find smoking pot all day or making handwritten copies of *War and Peace*, such projects will not yield a meaningful life. What is needed is engagement with objective value as well.⁴ (I'll return to Wolf's view below.)

My own answer begins with a close look at the question. Meaningfulness is supposed to be the property of a *life*, not just individual activities. I've said that someone's life comprises of self-relevant actions and events. We can meaningfully talk about someone's life at a moment or over a period of time, possibly from birth to death. Someone's life at a given moment is a hierarchical constellation of activities they're engaged in and events that bear on those activities. The activities are hierarchical in the sense that some are such that we only engage in them because they serve others – I get the car fixed because I need a means of transport, and I need a means of transport because I need to take the kids to hobbies, and I need to take the kids to hobbies because that facilitates their leading a good life, achieving which is a core aim of mine. Since the subordinate activities derive their point from the superordinate ones, it is the latter that will be central to meaningfulness.

As finite agents, we have at any given time some limited number of core projects that give shape to our lives and define who we are. We adopt goals, exercise agency to reach them, and either succeed or fail. The question of what makes life ideally meaningful at a time thus becomes this: what kind of goals, exercise of agency, and terminating events make sentiments of pride, fulfilment, and confident hope fitting to the highest degree? The nature of the sentiments themselves offers a clue. Take pride. As I said, pride presents what one has done as

⁴ Wolf calls her account the Fitting Fulfilment view. It should not be confused with my Fitting Attitudes Analysis of Meaningfulness. Her view is about what makes life meaningful, and says that life is meaningful when one is fittingly fulfilled. My analysis, in contrast, is about what it is for a life to be meaningful, and says, roughly, that it is for fulfilment to be fitting. These theses have different subject matters and different content. Importantly, my analysis involves no commitment to the idea that one has to actually feel fulfilled for one's life to be meaningful, since all that matters is that fulfilment would be fitting. On Wolf's view, in contrast, one has to feel fulfilled for one's life to be meaningful – it is a necessary, though not a sufficient condition. I'll return to this issue below.

valuable and as something that reflects one's self. Further, you won't feel proud unless you construe your task as a challenge that required you to exercise your capacities, and unless your pursuit was successful. The view that thus suggests itself is that a chapter of a life, defined by a relatively stable configuration of core projects – think about going to graduate school or staying home with the kids before they go to kindergarten or the duration of a job – is meaningful to the degree that its core projects aim at something objectively valuable and reflect who we are, involve the development and exercise of our capacities in challenging tasks that are vital to reaching the goal, and end with success.

Inevitably, human lives have more than one chapter. Core projects change as we age and our capacities wax and wane, and of course when we make life choices, such as what to study, what job to take, where to live, and who to live with. How are these chapters related to each other in an ideally meaningful life? The view I've defended (in Kauppinen 2012) is that a life that is disconnected or repetitive will not be as meaningful as a life that is coherent, where coherence means that earlier activities positively inform later goal-setting, goal-seeking, and goal-achievement. In contrast, if past activities didn't result in better aims in the future, or more skilful or wise pursuit, or make future success more likely, they would not move my life story forward as much as they could have.⁵ I might have the core project of graduating first of my class and succeed, but my education would be to a degree wasted if I never made use of it subsequently. Similarly, part of the evil of being imprisoned is that (typically) much of what we've learned is useless, and much of what we learn will be useless later. Generally speaking, there's more pride to be taken in pursuits that not only were successful in their own terms, but also changed us for the better for later activities. This is how even hardship or injury or indeed failure can contribute to lifetime meaning and well-being. In this way, building on the past gives life as a whole direction and makes it more meaningful.

One worry that I have often encountered when discussing this view is that focus on goals and projects underestimates the importance of *relationships* to meaningfulness. I believe, however, that when it comes to meaningful relationships

⁵ Terminological note: I use the term 'life story' for the causally linked chain of actions and events that forms our life, not for any narrative that we might tell of our life to ourselves or others. I'll reserve the psychological term 'personal story' for the latter. Our life story is what can make a personal story true – the *narratable* as opposed to *narrated* series of events that is inevitably linear, unlike a narrative.

in particular, it is misleading to say they are something we just *have* or that we *stand* in them. It would be more accurate to say we *live* relationships or even that we *do* them. Human relationships exist in and through the way we act. It is also important that aiming at something objectively valuable need not mean *producing* something of value. Our activities can *realize* value in other ways, too, for example by exemplifying it. Bearing these points in mind, the importance of relationships to meaning is compatible with the Teleological View.

I'll roughly summarize my argument in the following thesis:

The Teleological View of Meaningfulness

S's life is meaningful to the degree it is defined by identity-shaping engagement in challenging projects that build on the past in successful pursuit of something objectively valuable.

I have developed the thesis here on the basis of ideas concerning sense of purpose and features of a life that make it fitting. I believe it is confirmed by our robust intuitions concerning the meaningfulness of individual lives. Lives intuitively high in meaning, such as those of Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King, will rate high by this standard, while lives intuitively low in meaning, such as those spent on worthless or disconnected pursuits, will rate appropriately low, or at least lower.

One objection I've often encountered is that linking meaning to narrative progress may reflect a kind of parochial Enlightenment ideal that may even be patriarchal. Can't people in hunter-gatherer societies, for example, lead perfectly meaningful lives, in spite of living life on a day-by-day basis without pursuing cumulative long-term projects?⁶ My response to this instructive challenge is twofold. First, even in a tradition-governed society, there is the possibility of a long-term narrative arc. The young hunter may indeed be focused on getting a little meat on the table at the end of the day, every day. But some young hunters move on to leadership roles, discover new hunting grounds or techniques, or negotiate new alliances. When they get older, some former hunters pass on to future generations not just what they were taught by their elders, but also insights drawn from personal experience. My view is that those who do so lead more meaningful lives, other things being equal. Lives can exhibit coherence in my sense without the kind

⁶ Here I draw on the way Dan Haybron nicely articulated the challenge in correspondence. Similar concerns were raised by Lilian O'Brien and Antony Duff.

of upward striving that is characteristic of Western professionals (who have historically been male). Second, it is indeed a consequence of my view that the highest levels of meaning in life are not achievable in a society that by tradition or oppression prevents individuals from making the kind of positive difference they are capable of making. It is not, I think, a coincidence that our paradigms of meaningfulness are people who have, perhaps in part in virtue of historical luck, been capable of initiating or completing transformative social or scientific or artistic change.

The Teleological View is strictly objectivist in the sense that it makes no mention of *finding* one's life meaningful. In that respect, as well as in focusing on the narrative shape of a life, it departs from the now prevalent hybrid view, developed by Susan Wolf and others. Objectivism should be at least initially plausible, since it is not the case in general that something is valuable only if one actually values it – it might be good for you to drink water when dehydrated even if you don't want to. So why should we think that part of what makes life meaningful is that one finds it to be such? Wolf's first argument in favour of the subjective dimension of meaningfulness is the following:

When thinking about one's own life, for example, a person's worry or complaint that his life lacks meaning is apt to be an expression with the subjective quality of that life. Some subjective good is felt to be missing. (Wolf 2010, 11)

I believe this gets the phenomenology subtly wrong. It is not a subjective good that is felt to be missing, but an *objective* one. I'm not concerned about the fact that *I feel* my life is empty; I'm concerned about the possibility that my life *is* empty. Our focus in worrying about meaning isn't directed inwards, but outwards. (Indeed, this fits well with Wolf's own characterization of the cognitive component of fulfilment.) If what we wanted were the *experience* of meaning, then we would welcome a Taylorian injection of sense of purpose by the gods, and wouldn't worry about the worth of what we were doing. Our subjective sense of purpose is in a crucial sense transparent: we get it for free when we take our lives to have objective purpose. So it is no wonder it is the latter that we worry about when we have a crisis of meaning.

Another argument Wolf presents is that if one's actions produce something of objective value as an unintended side effect (perhaps, unbeknownst to him, Sisyphus's rock-rolling provides energy for a hospital), they don't contribute to

meaningfulness (Wolf 2010, 21). I agree with this, but the point doesn't show that feeling fulfilled is necessary for meaning, only that the value must be appropriately related to the agent's goals, which the Teleological View accommodates. Finally, there is a simple and powerful argument against the necessity of subjective attraction: it makes us infallible judges of *meaninglessness*, though not meaningfulness. If it seems or feels to me that my life lacks meaning, this will automatically be true, insofar as feelings of fulfilment are necessary for my life being meaningful.⁷ That is, again, very implausible: just as I can mistakenly think my life is meaningful, I can mistakenly think it is meaningless, and consequently fail to get joy or pride. One might, to be sure, read Wolf more charitably as claiming that life can't be *fully* meaningful unless one finds it so. This is indeed more plausible, but I still disagree. I agree that a person's life would be *better* if it not only is fully meaningful but if she also finds it meaningful. But that's because the latter kind of person is likely to be *happier* than someone who fails to appreciate the meaningfulness of her life, and happiness is an independent dimension of prudential value. Thus, there is good reason to think the degree of life's meaningfulness doesn't depend on whether the subject finds it meaningful or feels fulfilled. To put it very simply: why would *actually* feeling fulfilled by your activities make fulfillment any more *fitting*?⁸

2. Happiness and Felt Meaning

⁷ In this vein, Wolf claims that 'A person who is alienated from her life, who gets no joy or pride from the activities that comprise it, can be said to lack meaning in her life.' (2010, 34)

⁸ In her response to Robert Adams, Wolf herself backs away from the necessity of fulfilment. She says that 'it might be wiser, if less satisfyingly determinate, simply to acknowledge that there is a range of ... attitudes and conditions, which includes love and fulfilment, and which reflects the kind of intentional, but *also qualitatively positive*, attachment to an object or activity that an agent must have in order for engagement with it to contribute to the meaningfulness of his life' (Wolf 2010, 114; emphasis mine). Although broader, this conception of the subjective dimension of meaning is still vulnerable to my objections. There isn't sufficient reason to think it is necessary for a person to have a 'qualitatively positive' experience when she engages in meaningful activities. To establish this, we just need to focus on someone who lacks such experience but is engaged in a challenging core project that successfully realizes something of objective value. It is very implausible that such activity fails to contribute to the meaningfulness of her life.

In the previous section, I argued that objective meaningfulness of someone's life is independent of her subjective experience of meaningfulness. But that is not to say that subjective meaning doesn't matter. What I will argue next is that it is a central aspect of happiness. This means that I will deny the following claim:

The Separation Thesis

Happiness and subjective or felt meaning are distinct psychological states or conditions.

The Separation Thesis is a consequence of most existing definitions of happiness, which do not mention subjective or felt meaning. It has become common to distinguish at least three main types of theory of what happiness consists in: hedonism, life satisfaction, and emotional condition views, as well as various hybrids. I will first argue that the first two kinds of view are problematic, and then develop a version of the emotional condition view.

On familiar *hedonistic* views, happiness is the balance of pleasure over pain, where pleasure may be understood in various ways – sensory, preference-based, or attitudinal (Feldman 2004).⁹ Happiness hedonism faces two basic challenges. On the one hand, it counts trivial, surface pleasures that don't contribute to happiness as parts of it. As Dan Haybron points out, some pleasures can leave us cold, and some pains can leave us untouched, and so lack impact on our happiness (2008, 63–9). On the other hand, it neglects or misconceives the contribution of non-hedonic emotional states, such as moods or self-confidence, to happiness. Haybron convincingly argues that such states may lack hedonic character, and even if they have it, that is not what makes them aspects of happiness.

Feldman's attitudinal hedonism may seem to avoid this type of criticism. He says attitudinal pleasures are propositional pro-attitudes that come in degrees (2010, 111–7). We attribute such attitudes when we say someone is 'pleased with' or 'takes pleasure in' something. To be happy is, roughly, to take more attitudinal pleasure than displeasure in things. Since we can fail to be pleased by something that gives sensory pleasure and be pleased by things that don't give sensory pleasure, this view seems to avoid Haybron's objections. But is there really such a pro-attitude as

⁹ Note that hedonism about happiness is distinct from hedonism about well-being, since it says nothing about what is good for someone. It is thus not vulnerable to the Experience Machine and other arguments against the latter.

being pleased with something? I do not think so. Instead, when we talk about someone being pleased with or taking pleasure in something we can mean a number of different things. What makes it true that we're pleased with something is either that we have (or are disposed to have) a positive emotion toward it or that we judge it to meet or exceed expectations. These emotions or beliefs may cause or involve non-attitudinal pleasures, but there's no need to postulate a distinct kind of *pleasure*, and doing so is apt to confuse. When being pleased with something is just a matter of belief, it does not amount to being any happier. In contrast, as I'll argue below, some positive emotions are indeed constitutive of happiness, and come in degrees. That's the truth misleadingly stated in attitudinal hedonism.

According to *life satisfaction* views of happiness, in turn, one is happy when one either believes or feels one's life to be satisfying, or both believes and feels so. Wayne Sumner, for example, says that

The cognitive aspect of happiness consists in a positive evaluation of the conditions of your life, a judgement that, at least on balance, it measures up favourably against your standards or expectations. ... The affective side of happiness consists in what we commonly call a sense of well-being: finding your life enriching or rewarding, or feeling satisfied or fulfilled by it. (1996, 145, 146)

Here I regard Feldman's (2010) criticisms as decisive. Feldman observes that life satisfactionism must take happiness as determined either by someone's *actual* judgments and attitudes towards one's life, or by their *hypothetical* judgments and attitudes (judgments and attitudes that they would have in some non-actual circumstance, such as when they're asked whether they are happy or satisfied with their lives). Against actualist views, Feldman observes that it is possible for someone to be happy without having a standard for how one's life should go, or a conception of how one's life has gone, not to mention *comparing* the two, which is necessary for either judgment or feeling of satisfaction with one's life (2010, 82–5). Unreflective people can be happy, and lack of reflection can be necessary for one to be happy, for example when happiness comes from deep engagement in what one is doing. If so, happiness cannot consist in such judgment or feeling. This isn't a knock-down argument insofar as it is possible for a person to do all these things below the level of consciousness – but it is very much a theory-driven assumption that every happy person must indeed have unconscious thoughts of the right kind.

Against hypotheticalist views, Feldman argues that they are vulnerable to the conditional fallacy: it may be that realizing the antecedent of the relevant counterfactual conditional (such as ‘Were S to reflect on her life, she would judge it to meet her standards’) would predictably change one’s level of happiness. For example, someone who is thoughtless and spontaneous may be happy, but it may nevertheless be true that *were* she to reflect on her life and whether it meets her ideals, she would judge it negatively, and would thus count as unhappy on the hypothetical life satisfaction view.¹⁰ I want to add that even if hypotheticalism didn’t have this problem, it would be committed to the implausible view that my happiness has nothing to do with my *actual* standards, judgments, or feelings.

The *emotional condition* view avoids the key objections against happiness hedonism and life satisfactionism. It is most thoroughly articulated by Haybron in his *The Pursuit of Unhappiness*. For Haybron, happiness is a matter of an individual ‘responding favorably, in emotional terms, to her life’ (2008, 111). Favourable response comes in three modes (113–20). *Attunement* consists in emotional states or moods like tranquility, confidence, and imperturbability. When one is attuned with one’s environment, one is relaxed and open, ‘at home’ in the world. *Engagement* is manifest in emotions like exuberance and flow, which motivate energetic pursuit of goals. Finally, *endorsement* consists in feelings like joy and cheerfulness, which motivate broadening and building on the things one’s life contains. For Haybron, the problem with our cultural stereotypes of happiness is that they focus on the readily accessible endorsement dimension at the expense of engagement and especially attunement, though the others are in fact more important for happiness. They are central in the sense that they dispose us to have other affects and moods – in Haybron’s slogan, they are productive, persistent, pervasive (permeating the whole of consciousness and setting its tone), and profound (felt as deep) (2008, 130–

¹⁰ Suikkanen (2011) responds to Feldman’s arguments against the hypotheticalist version. To avoid the conditional fallacy, he proposes, roughly, that S is happy if and only if were S’s ideal counterpart, S+, to form a plan for S’s life and a conception of how S’s life is going, S+ would judge that the life matches the plan close enough. This does indeed avoid the conditional fallacy; alas, it may be true that I in my fallen situation am unhappy even if my hypothetical counterpart, of whose views I’m regrettably ignorant, is very satisfied on my behalf with the way my life is going. As far as I can see, it would be *ad hoc* for Suikkanen to argue that whenever I have predominantly negative feelings or regard my life as a failure, my life necessarily fails to be a close enough match for my ideal counterpart’s plan.

1). Being happy is psychically affirming one's life in terms of positive central affective states in the three dimensions, as well as having a propensity for positive moods.

I believe Haybron's account is along the right lines in its emphasis on the multiple emotional dimensions of happiness. It is important that some of the emotions and moods function in the background of our consciousness rather than in the foreground, making them relatively easy to miss, which explains in crucial part why we can be mistaken about how happy we are. Nevertheless, his classification of emotions isn't entirely satisfying, as he himself acknowledges. Some positive emotions are hard to fit in the three-fold scheme – even Haybron's own example of joy seems to belong in the engagement as well as endorsement dimension. Attunement seems to consist in moods and mood propensities, while pleasure as such has no place in the account. But even if some pleasures don't make a constitutive difference to happiness, surely others do. So it is worth trying out a different way of classifying the dimensions of psychic affirmation.

I thus want to propose a new account of happiness that is inspired by Haybron's view. For reasons that will soon be clear, I'll label it the Affective Condition account. I'll begin with a general classification of affective phenomena. They fall into at least three different categories: moods, emotions, and hedonic qualities of experience. What is common to them is that unlike beliefs and desires, which can be defined in purely functional terms, their phenomenal character, the what-it's-like to experience them, is essential to what they are. All these types of affective states can be positively or negatively valenced. In the case of emotions that have an intentional object (or target), positive valence is a matter of the emotion presenting its target as good in some way. As I've suggested above, it is in virtue of phenomenal character that these emotions have the content they do. Moods and hedonic qualities, in contrast, lack intentional objects. For them to be positive is for their phenomenal character to be intrinsically preferred. That is, they are the kind of states you'd prefer to be in or have just in virtue of how they feel, other things being equal.¹¹ Being relaxed and feeling at home and the various experiences (or qualities of experience) we call pleasures have this status. It is also true of many positive emotions that we prefer them for their feel. To this extent, the category of affective positivity is unified. But it is only to be expected that emotions, being contentful

¹¹ I owe this suggestion to Erik Angner and Jason Raibley.

states, can be positive in two distinct ways. After all, they resemble beliefs and desires in being contentful and moods and hedonic qualities in being essentially phenomenal.

The rough version of the Affective Condition account is that being happy is having predominantly positive affective states in all these categories, and lacking seriously negative ones. This needs refinement, however, since not all positive affective states contribute to happiness, and not all those that do contribute equally. Admiration and esteem, for example, are positive emotions that do not necessarily contribute to happiness. It does not necessarily make me any happier that I have a positive attitude towards Angus Young or Julie Delpy. I propose that the degree to which an affective state makes a difference to a subject's happiness is a function of the degree to which it *defines the subject's perspective*. By defining the subject's perspective I mean making a difference to what the subject attends to, is motivated to do, or considers in deliberation, as well as to what other affective states the subject has. Faced with the same facts, two subjects with a different perspective may perceive different reasons to act, action opportunities, or attractive or aversive features.

Moods will typically play a central but diffuse role in defining a subject's perspective. Feeling relaxed opens up your field of attention, boosts motivation to try out new things that might fail, and invites other positive feelings, while feeling stressed has the opposite effect. In contrast, what we regard as superficial pleasures are such because they don't make such difference – as Haybron puts it, they don't touch us, and consequently make us no happier. But there are also pleasures and pains that do influence happiness on my account. The pain of being tortured occupies your whole field of attention, crowding out any other features, and gives rise to an intense desire for it to stop. Consequently, being in pain as such constitutes your being unhappy in this case. Finally, positive emotions like joy taken in what we take to reflect ourselves, from success in core projects to our national team's victory, will highlight the valuable features of their objects, move us, and engender other affects, while regarding someone else's success positively may easily remain an isolated and thus peripheral positive episode.

I'll summarize the proposal as follows:

The Affective Condition Account of Happiness

Happiness is a multidimensional affective condition comprised of predominantly positive affect (mood, emotion, and hedonic quality) and

absence of negative affect. The degree to which an affect makes a difference to *S*'s happiness is a function of the extent to which it constitutes or influences *S*'s subjective perspective (attentional focus, motivation, deliberation, and other affects).

The Affective Condition account has all the advantages of Haybron's emotional state view, of which it is a sort of variant. Unlike some forms of happiness hedonism and life satisfactionism, it shows how happiness is a desirable state that we have powerful reason to pursue. Like Haybron's view, it includes objectless moods, in which his important mode of attunement seems to consist of, and explains when and why such states are important to happiness. It also offers a recipe for distinguishing central and peripheral states, but without appealing to dispositional features. Unlike Haybron's view, it thus offers an easy answer to what distinguishes between being happy and having a happy disposition, and allows for the existence of fragile happiness. (I leave it open here whether dispositions to have positive affective states are part of happiness, as Haybron maintains. If they are, the account can be complemented by adding that being happy is being in a *robustly* positive affective condition.) Another clear difference from Haybron is the Affective Condition account allows for pleasures and pains to directly contribute to happiness, especially when central. This is intuitively appealing, and thus a reason to favour the Affective Condition view over the Emotional State theory.

If the Affective Condition account is true, it can readily be seen why and how sense of purpose or meaning is in part constitutive of happiness. First, it comprises of positive emotions (both in the sense of emotions that present something as valuable and in the sense of emotion we want to experience) and mood. Second, these positive emotions – pride, fulfilment, confident hope – construe one's life story as involving the exercise of agency in coherent pursuit of what is valuable. Where we see ourselves as coming from and going to (our 'personal story' in psychological terms), if anything, defines our subjective perspective. The attitudes we have towards our personal story will crucially shape its continuation. If I see my pursuits as wasted or pointless, I will not engage in them with enthusiasm. This is not a causal relationship: necessarily, if I see what I'm doing as pointless, I'm not enthusiastic about it. In contrast, sense of purpose guarantees motivation and focus, breeding more positive emotions and moods and sometimes thrilling pleasure. The feelings that constitute sense of meaning will thus be among the central elements of

the affective condition of happiness, while feeling that one lacks purpose will make it very hard for one's overall affective condition to be robustly positive.

Consequently, the Separation Thesis is false: subjective or felt meaning is not a psychological condition distinct from happiness, but instead a central constituent of it.

3. The Psychology of Meaning and Happiness

As I noted in the introduction, positive psychologists have of late taken an empirical interest in meaning in life. It follows from what I've argued that questions of meaningfulness, in fact, strictly speaking lay beyond the reach of psychological methods, since (objective) meaning in life isn't a psychological matter. However, this is not a very substantial point. It only means that psychologists should moderate their claims and talk about subjective meaning or felt meaning or finding life meaningful instead of meaningfulness itself. But this is largely a matter of framing. Although the psychological studies are not as significant as they present themselves to be, their subject matter, felt meaning and its causes, is important enough on its own. After all, since the Separation Thesis is false, it is an important part of being happy. If positive psychology can discover what gives people a sense of meaning, it will reveal important and possibly unobvious sources of happiness.

Unfortunately, psychologists generally assume the Separation Thesis is true. This results in conceptual confusion, false claims about the sources of happiness, and suboptimal measures of happiness and meaning. In this section, I propose some diagnoses and remedies, and reject the attempt to relegate sense of meaning to the category of eudaimonia rather than happiness.

3.1 Mismeasuring Happiness

Positive psychology has a keen interest in what makes people happy. In order to discover the causes of happiness, psychologists use a variety of techniques to measure how happy people are in different circumstances. The most frequently used are life satisfaction surveys, which ask people to indicate their agreement with statements like 'In most ways, my life is close to my ideal' (Diener et al. 1985). Given well-documented biases in such judgments (for an overview, see Kahneman 2011), some researchers prefer experience sampling methods, in which people are asked at intervals to report how they are feeling at the moment (Csikszentmihalyi and

Larson 1987), or the day reconstruction method, in which people are asked to divide the previous day into episodes (comparable to movie scenes) and report what they were doing and with whom, as well as how they felt during them (Kahneman et al. 2004). These measurement techniques promise to get close to people's actual lived experience rather than their retrospective evaluation of it.

These measures are widely used, and no doubt provide at least a rough indication of correlates of happiness. But there is reason to believe that they do not provide an accurate picture of some important aspects of the affective condition. I have already argued, following Feldman and Haybron, that happiness is not a matter of life satisfaction or judgment. Consequently, in addition to being subject to various biases, life satisfaction measures provide at best indirect evidence of happiness. The more direct measures of how people feel during different activities do potentially target happiness itself. The challenge for them is that the deeper aspects of our affective condition are not necessarily salient to us, especially in the midst of activity. People's self-reports are likely to be biased towards aspects of happiness that are relatively superficial, such as pleasures and the most striking positive emotions. It is much harder to get at emotions and moods that in part constitute and shape a subject's perspective than at feelings that stand out from such a perspective.

As Haybron (2007) has convincingly argued, this is no accident: it is important to the proper functioning of moods that they are in the background and don't call attention to themselves. The point of being tense or anxious is to focus attention on potential dangers in the environment, not on your own state. The same goes for central emotions to some degree. On the best kind of theories of emotion, they are *ways of being conscious of* their objects rather than *objects of* consciousness themselves. As Sartre puts it, 'But the feeling of hate is not consciousness *of* hate. It is consciousness *of* Paul as hateful; love is not, primarily, consciousness of itself: it is consciousness of the charms of the loved person.' (Sartre 1940/2004, 69). When we're asked to report how we feel, we have to shift attention from the world to our own state, and this transition is epistemically perilous. It would not be surprising if it was a general principle that the more deeply an emotion constitutes our perspective on things (rather than being one of things visible from our perspective), the less transparent it is to us, and consequently the more fallible we are in identifying it.

What this means is that it is not easy for people to tell what their affective condition is, and consequently know how happy they are. Further, the biases towards hedonic and other surface aspects – the ‘smiley-face feelings’, as they are sometimes known – will be reinforced when a shallow conception of happiness is culturally prevalent. This means that it is predictable that the contribution of sense of meaning to happiness is undercounted in such cultures, which arguably include many Western countries. I believe that this accounts for results that may seem to support the Separation Thesis. And when psychologists assume that the Separation Thesis is true, they are apt to draw mistaken inferences about the sources of happiness.

For illustration, I’ll focus on a recent set of studies by Roy Baumeister, Kathleen Vohs, Jennifer Aaker, and Emily Garbinsky (Baumeister et al. 2013). Their aim is to discover ‘differential correlates of meaningfulness and happiness’ (1) by asking subjects to rate how happy they are and how meaningful their lives are (where respondents themselves can define happiness and meaningfulness any way they choose), and then presenting them with various different items, such as how connected they feel to others and how much various activities reflect who they are. The main finding is that there are indeed differences in the correlates, in spite of significant overlap. Among things positively correlated with happiness but not sense of meaning are easiness of life (instead of life as a struggle), health, ‘feeling good’, and ability to buy things one needs. Conversely, thinking about the past or the future, deep thought, ‘being a giver’ (rather than ‘a taker’), and seeing one’s self reflected in activities that involve working for others or the future (such as taking care of children, praying, buying gifts, balancing finances, or commuting) are positively correlated with meaning but not happiness. Similar dissociations are found in Waterman (1993) and White and Dolan (2009). Baumeister et al. take these correlations to support the contention that happiness results from satisfying natural and basic needs, as well as generally getting what one wants (Baumeister et al 2013, 2–5), while (felt) meaning derives from doing things that reflect the self, especially things that benefit others (11). They also draw a methodological moral from these results: ‘Future research should distinguish happiness from meaningfulness, because many ostensible contributors to happiness are in fact mainly associated with meaning and have little or no direct contribution to happiness’ (11).

What I’ve said about happiness and meaning suggests an alternative take on the results, as well as on methodology. First, given that the subjects are Americans

and that happiness is left for them to define as they like predicts that they will ignore the deeper aspects of the affective condition of happiness and focus on smiley-face feelings, since that is the prevailing cultural stereotype (cf. Haybron 2008, 215–221). The observed correlations support this, as ‘happiness’ most strongly correlates with feeling good. Further, the distinctive items linked to happiness, such as ability to buy things one wants, are most likely to promote smiley-face feelings (if anything). Second, as I’ve argued, this cultural stereotype of happiness is mistaken: happiness consists of a global positive affective condition, perhaps a robust one. So the claim that happiness is best promoted by getting what one needs or wants – being a ‘taker’ – is not supported by the data. The most that can be concluded is that the subjects are more likely to *think* they’re happy when they get stuff they like. Alas, that may well be a mistaken belief.

Third, given that people have genuine interest in and good prudential reason to pursue happiness as a positive affective condition, it would be a serious blow to the practicality of positive psychology if it were to construe happiness in terms of superficial feelings and relegate purpose-related positive emotions, among others, to some other category. The result would be bad advice – it might well be that focusing on the satisfaction of your ‘natural needs’ would make you less rather than more happy. Future research should instead employ measures that capture the contribution of sense of meaning, among other less obvious things, to overall positive affective condition. I will propose one way of tapping into felt meaning below. Meanwhile, Mathew White and Paul Dolan’s (2009) inclusion of measures of *reward* (including sense of purpose) in day reconstruction studies alongside hedonic measures is an important step in the right direction. It is surely pre-theoretically plausible that when we find the things we do rewarding we are to some extent happy.

3.2 Meaning and Eudaimonia?

Separation theorists might respond to my critique as follows: ‘What you’re talking about is not happiness, but *eudaimonia*, and we’re happy to grant that sense of meaningfulness is important to eudaimonia’. For example, Baumeister and his co-authors write that ‘Meaningfulness is seen as more central to eudaimonia than to simply feeling good.’ (Baumeister et al. 2013, 2). And Tatjana Schnell says that ‘A meaningful life is not necessarily cheerful and free of negative affect; it is better conceived as “a life lived well” in a eudaimonic sense’ (2009, 496). While I agree

with the claim that meaningfulness can come apart from cheerfulness, I maintain that we are better off with a conception of happiness that includes felt meaning than with an impoverished conception of happiness that needs to be supplemented by some other notion to capture psychological aspects of well-being. In psychology, the term ‘eudaimonia’ (with various spellings) refers to various non-hedonic dimensions of ‘optimal psychological functioning and experience’ (Ryan and Deci 2001, 142). Not all proponents of eudaimonistic accounts use the term in the same way, but it generally refers to some kind of actualization of natural potential or living in accordance with one’s true self or being a fully functioning person, reflecting the roots of the tradition in Aristotle and humanistic psychology.

Eudaimonistic views don’t usually purport to be accounts of happiness as a psychological state.²² Take the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) of Richard Ryan and Edward Deci. Ryan, Deci, and Huta (2008) explicitly say that eudaimonia isn’t a psychological state, but “a way of living that is focused on what is intrinsically worthwhile to human beings” (147). They operationalize eudaimonia in terms of three allegedly basic psychological needs: need for autonomy (understood as sense of being in control), need for competence (sense of efficacy), and need for relatedness (feeling connected to and cared about by others) (Ryan and Deci 2001). These psychological needs are apt to be satisfied when one spends one’s time mindfully and autonomously pursuing goals one regards as intrinsically rather than instrumentally valuable, such as personal growth, affiliation, contribution to community, and physical health. So SDT theorists take eudaimonic living to consist of ‘pursuing goals that are intrinsically valued and of processes that are characterized by autonomy and awareness.’ (Ryan, Huta, and Deci 2008, 163) A number of studies show that eudaimonia in this sense is correlated with good physical health and high life satisfaction.

Another major eudaimonistic approach is Carol Ryff and co-authors’ Psychological Well-Being (PWB) theory, which postulates six dimensions of

²² The exception is Alan Waterman’s (1993) view. He takes eudaimonia to consist of feelings of personal expressiveness (roughly, a fulfilling feeling of fit between oneself and one’s activity, especially when one takes oneself to be meant to do what one is doing), which constitute a kind of happiness distinct from hedonic enjoyment. Personal expressiveness evidently overlaps with what I’ve argued is sense of purpose. My main disagreement with Waterman is that according to me, feelings of fulfilment and hedonic enjoyment are both elements of the only kind of happiness there is, namely an overall positive affective condition, rather than different kinds of happiness.

psychological well-being (personal growth, autonomy, self-acceptance, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and positive relationships). Why just these six features? Ryff's central defense is that they are 'points of convergence in the prior theories' (1989, 1070). On her view, 'these goals and directions in life are, in themselves, central criteria of psychological well-being' (1989, 1078), not just means to happiness. For PWB theorists, then, unlike SDT proponents, *eudaimonia* is a psychological matter, but not identical with happiness. PWB, too, has been found to correlate with physical health and life satisfaction (Ryff and Singer 2008).

Eudaimonistic psychological theories are right in their insistence that there is more to good psychological functioning than having positive hedonic feelings and that there is more to well-being than happiness. But they remain curious beasts. As theories of well-being, they would need to be defended with arguments to the effect that doing certain things is intrinsically valuable – that it is good for someone to engage in some kind of activity or hold some attitudes regardless of its effects on happiness, health, or something else. I have not been able to locate such axiological arguments in the psychological literature, beyond appeal to authority. Moreover, I believe that eudaimonistic theories are substantively false as theories of well-being. I don't see any reason to think that personal growth or self-acceptance, for example, is good for someone, except as a means to happiness or (objective) meaningfulness.¹³ Suppose two people have different levels of self-acceptance, but they are equally (and equally robustly) happy. If this is a possible scenario, why would one of them be better off than the other? And if it is not a possible scenario, it is because feelings of self-acceptance in part constitute happiness. In that case, *eudaimonia* and happiness are not distinct after all.

Eudaimonists might respond to such axiological arguments by retreating to the more modest claim that they are simply views of good (or 'full' or 'optimal') psychological functioning, not well-being as such. But regardless of the precise terms used, claims about *good* or *optimal* functioning are still evaluative rather than

¹³ It is possible that the personal growth and self-acceptance measures actually in part tap into sense of purpose, since personal growth refers to continued development of one's potential and self-acceptance to positive attitudes towards oneself and one's past life (Ryff 1989). This is supported by the fact that they strongly correlate with the purpose in life measure (both .72 in Ryff 1989, 1073, and .64 and .55, respectively, in Ryff and Keyes 1995, 723). Ryff herself observes that "Such outcomes suggest that the scales may be measuring the same construct" (1989, 1074) (although she points to differential age profiles, for example, as evidence of distinctness).

empirical claims. And it remains difficult to see why the sort of things that eudaimonists list would be *intrinsically* good. Let me be clear here. I *agree* with eudaimonia theorists that sense of purpose – and self-acceptance, sense of control, and feeling connected to others, among other things – is part of good psychological functioning. But that is only because they contribute to happiness, either constitutively or causally, and happiness is intrinsically good for us. Indeed, happiness as positive global affective condition is our highest good as subjects of experience, as I briefly argued above.

So: once we reject the hedonistic conception of happiness and replace it with an emotional or affective condition account, there is no need to assume a distinct condition of psychological well-being such as eudaimonia. Psychological functioning is good when it instrumentally or constitutively contributes to happiness (or to leading an objectively meaningful life). The things supposedly make up eudaimonia are either parts of the affective condition of being happy or only instrumentally good. That is why talk of eudaimonia is apt to mislead. To keep the issue in clear view, we have to ask whether felt meaning contributes to happiness rather than relegating it to the ill-defined category of eudaimonia.

3.3 Measuring Subjective Meaning

I have argued that finding life meaningful is part of being happy, and pointed to difficulties in measuring such deeper aspects of happiness. I want to finish with a constructive suggestion about how we might be able to measure felt meaning. In my view, the existing instruments suffer from two complementary flaws. The first is *lack of specificity*. Some measures, such as Michael Steger's Meaning In Life Questionnaire (MLQ) directly ask people whether their life is meaningful, asking them to rate agreement with statements such as 'My life has a clear meaning or purpose,' 'I have discovered a satisfactory meaning in life,' and 'I have a clear sense of what gives meaning to my life' (Steger et al. 2006). Schnell's (2009) Sources of Meaning and Meaning in Life (SoMe) questionnaire includes similar questions, as well as 'I have a task in life' and 'I lead a fulfilled life', which are somewhat more specific, but still paraphrases of the direct question. Another much-used test, Crumbaugh and Maholick's (1964) Purpose in Life (PIL) asks about agreement with statements such as 'My personal existence is very purposeful and meaningful', 'I have clear goals and satisfying purpose in life', among other similar variants.

Wong's (1998) Perceived Personal Meaning (PPM) scale includes 'My life as a whole has meaning', 'My entire existence is full of meaning', among similar questions.

Any version of such direct set of questions relies on people's own grasp of the concept of meaning in life. The problem with this is that it is not at all clear what people's responses target, given the many meanings of 'meaning'. In particular, no reliable inferences can be drawn about whether people experience their lives as purposeful and coherent in the relevant sense. This is analogous to the problems with asking people directly about happiness. In the happiness case, cultural stereotypes and affect bias predictably lead to overemphasis on smiley-face feelings at the expense of other aspects of the emotional condition. When people assess the meaningfulness of their lives, they may think of significance in some culturally salient respect, compare themselves to culturally salient exemplars, or draw on irrelevant associations of 'meaning', for example targeting the question of whether events in their lives *make sense* (fit into an intelligible pattern). It is thus not a given that their answers tap into their sense of purpose, unless the questions target it more specifically. For some evidence of this, consider that among the activities reflecting self that were correlated with felt meaning in the Baumeister et al. (2013) study were 'Watching TV', 'Listening', 'Emailing', and 'Sleeping' (9). Perhaps these are indeed among the things that the subjects see as giving their lives a point, but the answers are more likely to reflect the vagueness of the question.¹⁴

Other survey instruments aim to avoid this by asking more specific questions, but end up conflating felt meaning with its possible sources. For example, Peterson, Part, and Seligman's (2005) Orientations to Happiness measure supplements the direct questions with items such as 'In choosing what to do, I

¹⁴ Heinzelman and King (2013) argue that though measures that 'rely on a person's intuitive definition of meaning' 'may seem troubling', 'this reliance, in our view, is appropriate given the inarticulate nature of experiences of meaning in life' (8). I obviously disagree. In research on happiness and well-being, we need to capture the felt meaningfulness of our lives, and not meaning in some other sense. Ironically, Heinzelman and King's own article provides some evidence for need of a more precise target, as they run together questions of meaningfulness with questions of making sense of events. But your life can make sense to you without your finding it meaningful – for example, even if it makes perfect sense to you how you ended up on death row, you may find biding your time pointless.

always take into account whether it will benefit other people,' 'I have a responsibility to make the world a better place,' and 'I have spent a lot of time thinking about what life means and how I fit into its big picture'. Wong's (1998) Personal Meaning Profile allegedly 'measures people's perception of personal meaning in their lives', but then asks for agreement with statements describing potential *sources* of meaning, such as 'I have someone to share intimate feelings with', 'I seek to glorify God', and 'I accept what cannot be changed'. In the same vein, Schnell's (2009) SoMe scale includes 'I feel part of a bigger whole' in addition to direct meaningfulness measures. None of these elements is a constituent of sense of meaning, but simply a potential cause. It cannot be concluded that someone who rates highly on these scales enjoys a sense of purpose. That is an *a posteriori* question that cannot be answered using such measures. It may of course be, as other research suggests, that self-acceptance, giving, or feeling part of something promotes felt meaning. But *assuming* they do prevents asking that crucial causal question.

What is needed, then, is a measuring instrument that ensures, as far as possible, that people understand exactly what they're being asked about without prejudging what their sources of meaning are. Drawing on the discussions above, the following are possible items on such a scale:

My life is meaningful.

I often feel a sense of purpose.

I'm proud of what I've done in life.

What I do makes a difference for the better.

My life is moving in the right direction.

The first two questions are general and resemble those used in existing scales. As I said above, I don't believe that subjective meaning is fruitfully conceptualized in terms of the subject's judgment or belief about meaningfulness. But such judgments will, in part, reflect how the subject feels about her life, so there is no harm in asking them in a suitable context. The third question directly targets the important agential pride component of sense of meaning, and thus the agency, value, and connection-to-past aspects of meaningfulness. The fourth question targets agency, value, and irreplaceability in the present. The fifth targets attitude toward the future and its link to past and present. It would probably also be useful to include reverse-coded items, such as 'Most of what I do is pointless', but I've left them out to keep things as simple as possible. This sketch would need to be validated for desirable psychometric properties, so I am not saying psychologists should rush out to use it

as a basis for future research as such. But I believe questions of this sort are necessary to distinguish meaning in the relevant sense from other dimensions of subjective well-being.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I've defended the view that meaning in life is an objective matter: for life to be meaningful to some degree is for it to be fitting to find it meaningful to that degree. I've also argued that sense of purpose is fitting, roughly, to the degree that one builds on the past in successful pursuit of objectively valuable aims. On this view, meaning in life is independent of whether one actually finds one's life meaningful. However, felt meaning is a central element in the affective condition of happiness, since it consists of positive emotions and moods that crucially define the subject's perspective.

It is to the credit of psychologists that they have increasingly recognized the importance of meaning in life to human flourishing. However, I've argued that the existing studies, theories, and measures suffer from lack of conceptual clarity. To begin with, since the degree to which someone's life is meaningful is not a function of their actually finding it meaningful, self-report measures are not an adequate basis for drawing conclusions about what makes life meaningful. Instead, assessing the meaningfulness of someone's life calls for value judgment about the worthwhileness of the activities that shape their lives. It is on the basis of such judgments that we can confidently say that Nelson Mandela's life was more meaningful than the British fascist leader Oswald Mosley's life, for example.

Subjective sense of meaning or purpose, in contrast, is a proper and important object of empirical psychological study. It is what existing psychological instruments of meaning actually try to measure. I briefly argued that such measures could be improved by targeting the specific feelings that comprise felt meaning. But my main point has been that the contrast positive psychologists sometimes draw between (felt) meaning and happiness – what I have called the Separation Thesis – is based on a mistaken conception of happiness. Since happiness is a positive affective condition, and sense of purpose is a central positive affect, measures of felt meaning are themselves partial measures of happiness. Felt meaning is neither a potential *cause* of happiness, nor something that might *contrast with* happiness. To

claim otherwise makes no more sense than claiming that joy is a cause of happiness or that sources of joy contrast with sources of happiness.

One important consequence of what I've been saying is that good measures of happiness must include measures of felt meaning, along with measures of other positive affective states. Since happiness is a multidimensional affective condition, any proper measuring instrument must also be multidimensional. Measures that leave it open for the subjects to interpret happiness as they like – questions of the type 'How happy are you these days?' – are likely to be influenced by cultural and affect-type biases that often lead people to ignore the deeper aspects of the affective condition. It is thus better to target the different positive emotions, moods, and hedonic states that comprise happiness directly, and perhaps to devise a way of measuring how central they are to the subject's perspective. Properly developing such a measure is a task that I cannot attempt here.

Although I have been critical of existing psychological instruments and interpretations of the data, I do not mean to dismiss the valuable research that has already been conducted. For example, although I disagree with the interpretation of the data that Baumeister et al. (2013) have gathered, if the results hold up in future studies, they suggest that different constituents of happiness have different sources. If so, what increases happiness along one dimension may decrease happiness along another dimension. For example, it is possible that having children tends to increase some positive affects, such as sense of purpose, and decrease other positive affects, such as hedonically positive experiences (for data suggesting this, see Dolan and White 2009 and Nelson et al. 2013). In determining the overall effect of potential choices on happiness, we must then balance these effects against each other. What I want to emphasize is simply that we are talking about trade-offs between constituents of happiness rather than between happiness and something else, such as the questionable construct of eudaimonia. Insofar as positive psychology can help us anticipate what different options are likely to mean for the different dimensions of happiness, it will be an extremely valuable tool. My hope is that the philosophical criticisms I have presented will prove to be constructive in improving the young science of happiness.

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