Happiness

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Everyone wants to be happy. Happiness is obviously a good thing and if we can get it without sacrificing other important things, we would. Most people wish not just for their own happiness but also the happiness of people they love; some compassionate souls may even wish for the happiness of all sentient creatures. What exactly is it that we all want? Is it to be pleased or satisfied? To feel tranquil or joyous? To attain certain objective goods? And what role does happiness play in morality? Is the production of happiness the goal of morally right action? Is it the organizing principle of moral theory? Or is it just one contingent value among many?

Happiness is a tricky concept that has been the subject of much philosophical attention and controversy. Some of the controversy is merely apparent and disappears when we understand that happiness means different things in different philosophical traditions. The main difference in meaning divides the ancients from modern and contemporary philosophers. We will begin with this distinction, discuss the ancient view, and then turn to the modern meaning of happiness and its role in moral theory.

Distinguishing Happiness from Other Concepts

For the ancient Greek philosophers, there was no question about whether we ought to aim at *eudaimonia* (*see* EUDAIMONISM). Eudaimonia is, by definition, the end or goal of human life. What is up for grabs is the nature of eudaimonia, a subject that was hotly contested among ancient philosophers. Also up for grabs, for modern readers, is whether "happiness" is the best way to translate "eudaimonia." There are those who think that the word "happiness" now refers primarily to a psychological state and that "eudaimonia" is better translated as "flourishing" or "well-being" (e.g., Haybron 2008). On the other side, Julia Annas (1993: 453) argues in favor of "happiness" as the translation of "eudaimonia" because alternative translations risk missing what we have in common with the ancients: "For both ancients and moderns, the starting point for considering happiness is a conventionally successful life which the agent finds satisfactory."

Ordinary usage does not easily settle the question. If a person says "I'm so happy it's Friday!" she is clearly reporting a psychological state. But if your mother asks you "Are you really happy?" after you've changed careers or marriages, she is probably asking about something deeper. Talk about happy feelings invokes the psychological sense; talk about happy lives invokes the eudaimonist sense.

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One might think that the solution to this terminological mess is to use the word "well-being" to refer to eudaimonia and reserve the word "happiness" for the psychological state. Well-being is certainly distinct from happiness in the psychological sense. Indeed, one of the major contemporary debates about well-being is whether it is a subjective state or an objective condition, and this debate would make no sense if well-being were identical to happiness in the psychological sense. But philosophers specializing in ancient philosophy have, as a rule, chosen not to translate "eudaimonia" as "well-being." Why is this? To some extent it is the result of the history of the use of these concepts: the term "well-being" is often associated with utilitarianism (Nussbaum 2000: 14), a theory that is foreign to the ancient approach to ethics (*see* UTILITARIANISM). It has also been suggested that "well-being" has a broader scope than either happiness or eudaimonia. For example, the former term can sensibly be applied to plants, whereas the latter two could only be applied to conscious beings (Crisp 2008).

Given the persistent ambiguity about the term "happiness," the next section contains a brief discussion of ancient views about happiness (*see* ANCIENT ETHICS for more). When we come to contemporary views about happiness, the focus will be on the psychological sense, since the nonpsychological sense is now typically called "well-being" and these theories are covered in other entries (*see* WELL-BEING).

Ancient Views

Happiness in the ancient Greek tradition

According to ancient Greek philosophers, happiness (eudaimonia) is the final end of human life: it applies to a person's whole life and gives structure to her other aims or ends. This sense is not entirely foreign to modern ears. It is the sense of happiness that seems to be at work in the United States Declaration of Independence, which declares "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" as inalienable rights of human beings. As the final end, happiness provides structure to our other aims in life, either as an end to which all other activities are the means, or as the activity of aiming at other ends over a lifetime (Annas 1993: 45).

Though the ancients agreed that happiness is the final end of human life, they did not agree about how to specify what happiness is. Debates about the role of virtue, pleasure, and external goods such as wealth were heated among the different philosophical schools. The view that comes closest to modern views of happiness is that of the Epicureans, who defined happiness as pleasure (for original sources see Inwood and Gerson 1997). The Epicureans distinguished two different kinds of pleasure: kinetic pleasure and static pleasure. The former is the kind of pleasure we get from satisfying a recurring desire. For example, the pleasure of eating is a kinetic pleasure: the pleasure arises when we move from the state of hunger to the state of being full, after which point the pleasure diminishes (we don't gain more pleasure by continuing to eat after we're full). This kind of pleasure is inherently unstable and therefore, according to the Epicureans, not an ideal basis for a theory of happiness. The kind of

pleasure the Epicureans thought was valuable was called *ataraxia*, which is a kind of tranquility or freedom from perturbation. Thus happiness for the Epicureans is achieved by aiming not to be distressed by mental or physical annoyances. An important imperative that follows from this view is that we ought to lose the fear of death, which is one of the main sources of distress for us and which, according to these philosophers, is based on the false belief that death is bad for us.

Aristotle's conception of happiness includes pleasure, but does not make the two equivalent. For Aristotle, happiness is a rational activity in accordance with virtue, and pleasure completes or perfects good activity. Aristotle's strategy for specifying the nature of happiness is to look to the function or *telos* of a human being on the assumption that happiness is what is good for us and what is good for something depends on its function (*see* ARISTOTLE; NEO-ARISTOTELIAN ETHICAL NATURALISM). The human function is "the soul's activity that expresses reason": an activity is done well when it expresses virtue, hence "the human good turns out to be the soul's activity that expresses virtue" (Aristotle 1999: 1098a5–20). But Aristotle did not think that virtue was sufficient for happiness. A person could not be happy "on the rack," according to him, and expressing certain virtues (magnanimity, for example) requires material resources. As Julia Annas puts it (1993: 368), happiness for Aristotle "is an actively virtuous life which has available to and for it an adequate supply of external goods."

One important feature of Aristotle's theory is that it attributes happiness to lives rather than discrete moments. This stands in contrast to the psychological notion of happiness familiar to modern readers, according to which we can be happy one day and unhappy the next. Nevertheless, Aristotle's notion of happiness has something in common with the psychological sense, insofar as a happy life is one we enjoy living. Another important feature of Aristotle's view is that it involves virtuous *activity*. It is not enough, according to Aristotle, to have a virtuous character; one must practice the virtues over the course of one's life to have a happy life. This insistence on activity, as we have noted, leads to the view that external goods and good fortune are required for happiness, and this was a major point of contention between Aristotle and the Stoics.

The Stoic view is that virtue is sufficient for happiness (*see* STOICISM). So, according to the Stoics, a person on the rack could be happy if her internal state of character were in order. Consider this advice from the Stoic philosopher Epictetus (1985: 18) "remind yourself … if you embrace your child or your wife, that you embrace a mortal – and thus, if either of them dies, you can bear it." Unhappiness is not found in external circumstances, but in our reaction to them. To many this will seem like a wildly counterintuitive view of happiness. To see its merits, it is important to understand why the Stoics rejected Aristotle's more inclusive conception of happiness.

The ancient Greeks, including Aristotle, thought that happiness is a self-sufficient good in the sense that its goodness does not depend on the goodness of anything else. If you have happiness, the idea is, you do not need anything else. But when it comes to external goods, they can be used well or badly. A person with a great fortune who has the virtues of magnanimity, temperance, and practical wisdom will

spend her money wisely, but a foolish and selfish person will not. The virtues themselves, however, could not be used for ill; they will always benefit the person who has them. This is because, according to the Stoics, the virtues just are the skills of evaluating and using external goods (Annas 1993: 389). This Stoic idea is similar to one we find in Kant that the good will (an abiding intention to do the right thing) is the only thing good without qualification; all other goods are conditionally good, or good under certain circumstances (*see* KANT, IMMANUEL). The Stoic view as a view about *happiness* does seem counterintuitive, but they were led to this theory by two plausible premises: that happiness is what is good for a person and that this good must be good in itself.

Happiness in the ancient Chinese tradition

There were many different schools of philosophy in ancient China; here we focus on Confucianism and Taoism, two of the most influential philosophical views in the Chinese philosophical tradition. The ancient Confucians and Taoists both distinguish between true happiness (le, 樂) and a mundane form of happiness that derives from the pursuit of wealth, honor, and material comforts. In their views, the pursuit of mundane happiness results from a preoccupation with an individualistic and fixed conception of the self, and results in suffering from fear, anxiety, jealousy, and dissatisfaction. In contrast, they believe that true happiness lies in following the "Way" (Dao, 道) (Ivanhoe 2013: 264). However, the Confucians and the Taoists differ on what the "Way" is and how to overcome the influence of the narrow (individualistic and fixed) sense of self on the pursuit of happiness. For the Confucians, the key is virtue and ritual; for the Taoists, it is living in accordance with nature. We elaborate these two positions in what follows.

The ancient Confucians believe that the satisfaction of our basic appetites and desires can contribute to our happiness. Under the influence of the narrow sense of self, people tend to arrive at the wrong priorities in their pursuit of happiness. That is, people tend to sacrifice moral good for wealth, honor, and success. According to Confucius and his followers (such as Mencius and Xunzi), the "Way" is to achieve a kind of moral ideal; that is, living the life of a "gentleman" or "superior person" (junzi, 君子) (*see* CONFUCIAN ETHICS). Thus, for the Confucian, happiness is a kind of ethical pleasure (Luo 2019) or the joy of the sage. Ethical pleasure is the deep and enduring positive emotional state that accompanies virtuous activities and rituals. As Philip Ivanhoe puts it (2013: 266), happiness for ancient Confucians refers to "a special feeling that comes to those who follow the Way; it is an ethical response to certain features of the world and primarily about how one is living one's life."

One prominent component of ethical pleasure, according to Confucianism, is a kind of "reflective equanimity" (Shun 2014), which one can achieve by following the ethical path. The state of reflective equanimity is "a form of satisfaction generated by the approval of one's own conduct, involving a wide range of possible behaviors, including ordinary acts of benevolence or the successful completion of a ritual" (Kim 2016: 44). Mencius describes this state as having the "unmoved mind"

(budongxin, 不动心). Xunzi characterizes this state as "security" (an, 安), which includes the feeling of "ease, calm, comfort, tranquility, and a peace of mind" (Fraser 2013: 67). As long as a person realizes that she is following the ethical path, she will not be subject to fear, anxiety, and bad fortune. As Confucius comments on his favorite student Yan Hui: "Worthy indeed was Hui! With a single bowl of food to eat and ladle of water to drink, living in a narrow lane – most could not have endured such hardship – but Hui never let it affect his joy. Worthy indeed was Hui" (*Analects* 6.11).

The Taoists are even more critical of the human search for mundane happiness. In their view, holding an overly attached attitude toward accumulating wealth, power, and prestige is a futile way to pursue happiness, because true happiness is a kind of heavenly joy, which one can only experience when one "forgets" or "unlearns" the lessons of civilization that instill a narrowly human conception of good and bad into people's minds (*see* DAOIST ETHICS). For Taoists like Zhuangzi, to live in accord with the Way is to live in accord with spontaneous inclinations (ziran, 自然) and to be immersed in the ultimate creative power in the cosmos. As a result, happiness is characterized as "freely wandering at ease" (xiao yao you, 逍遙遊). A person who can freely wander at ease has a kind of spiritual freedom and a positive mental state throughout the process of living. She will feel energetic (the opposite of depressed) and engaged in the process. Also, she will feel at home in this process and carefree (the opposite of feeling alienated and stressed).

To achieve the "free and easy wandering state," Zhuangzi suggests that people live in accord with the patterns and processes of the natural world and follow their inborn nature. To see the patterns and processes of the natural world, human beings need to identify with the ever-changing process of nature, and "those who follow the Dao feel part of something more grand and meaningful and this is the nature and sources of their joy" (Ivanhoe 2013: 272). One way of putting this is that we should take "the heavenly point of view," from which we can question our overly attached attitude toward external goods (Tiwald 2016: 62). By "identifying with the cosmos as a whole," according to the commentator Chris Fraser (2014: 546), "we can come to see gain and loss, even life and death, as minor, trivial changes that leave us emotionally unperturbed, just as the flow of water down a stream leaves the creatures living in it undisturbed." Zhuangzi also believes, along with Epicurus and the Stoics, that we ought to lose the fear of death. In his view, the alternation of life and death is not different from the alternation of day and night from the heavenly point of view.

A significant contrast between ancient Chinese views of happiness on the one hand and ancient Greek and modern views on the other is that the ancient Chinese philosophers (both Confucians and Taoists) believe that true happiness can only be achieved through the process of overcoming a narrow sense of the self. One can either overcome the narrow sense of the self by caring about the community via the practice of virtue and rituals (as suggested by the Confucians) or by living in harmony with nature (as suggested by the Taoists). In their view, to live happily one needs to cultivate an expansive sense of the self by connecting with other people or nature in the proper way. Finally, an important contrast between all the ancient views we have surveyed and modern views about happiness is that the ancients did

not think in terms of maximization. The ancients were interested in practical guidance on the first-person question of how to live one's life, and happiness was the organizing concept for this inquiry. Bentham and Mill, the philosophers we will consider next, started with a different kind of question that had more to do with providing a foundation for morality than with how individuals should live their lives in general.

The Utilitarians

Hedonism

Writing in the late eighteenth century, Jeremy Bentham was concerned to develop a "science of morality," which would explain what we ought to do and why (*see* BENTHAM, JEREMY). He begins in *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* with the principle of utility, according to which the rightness or wrongness of actions is determined by their tendency to produce or diminish happiness. Bentham (1781) uses "happiness" interchangeably with "pleasure": "By utility is meant that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness, (all this in the present case comes to the same thing)." In marked contrast to the ancients, Bentham does not argue for the view that happiness is pleasure; rather, he takes this to be obvious and spends his time defending the theory that takes happiness/pleasure to be the object of moral concern.

Bentham does say a good deal about pleasure and here his views are also different from the ancient theories we have surveyed. Bentham calls pleasure a "perception," the experience of which can take many different forms. The enjoyment of smelling a rose, the sense of being in good health, the pleasure of intoxication, and the pleasure of exercising a skill are all just pleasures, with equal moral weight. Bentham does think that some pleasures are better than others in virtue of their *quantity*, and measurements of quantity can be quite complex. Intensity, duration, certainty, and propinquity are among the many quantitative properties of pleasures that Bentham mentions. But he does not recognize differences in the qualities of pleasure. This view stands in contrast to the Epicurean version of hedonism, according to which *ataraxia* is the only kind of pleasure worth having (*see* HEDONISM).

Lumping all these pleasures together provoked strenuous objections to utilitarianism. If happiness is the highest good, and happiness does not discriminate between the pleasures of the flesh and the pleasures of the mind, then utilitarianism (the critics thought) is a doctrine fit for pigs. John Stuart Mill, Bentham's most important follower, sought to solve this problem for utilitarianism by introducing distinctions among qualities of pleasures. Mill distinguishes "lower" and "higher" pleasures, the former being ones that we share with other animals and the latter being ones that rely on using our uniquely human capacities. The pleasures of eating, drinking, sex, and sleep count as lower pleasures, while "the pleasures of the intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments" (Mill 1979 [1861]: 8) are examples of higher pleasures.

Mill then argues that the higher pleasures have more value than the lower ones. This argument addresses the objection that utilitarianism is a "swinish doctrine," because if it is true that higher pleasures are worth more, then utilitarianism will recommend that we choose these and not debase ourselves in the pursuit of animal enjoyment. The argument Mill offers is that anyone familiar with both kinds of pleasures – any "competent judge" – would prefer the higher to the lower: "no intelligent human being would consent to be a fool … even though they should be persuaded that the fool … is better satisfied with his lot than they are with theirs" (1979 [1861]: 9). If the fool thinks differently, Mill says, this is just because he has no real experience with the pleasures of using his higher capacities.

Mill's discussion of the qualities of pleasure helps to fill out an attractive picture of happiness. In this picture a happy person experiences pleasure from using her intellectual, creative, and moral capacities, but she also has a modicum of physical pleasure. She is free from physical and mental suffering caused by disease, death of loved ones, and so on. She is also free from another evil that Mill identified as a major source of unhappiness: selfishness. Mill thought that focus on oneself caused unhappiness because selfish interests and the pleasures we get in satisfying them dwindle as we get older and approach our own death, whereas the pleasures taken in the "collective interests of mankind, retain as lively an interest in life as on the eve of death as in the vigor of youth and health" (1979 [1861]: 13). Here we see an echo of the ancients' attention to the effect of our mortality on our happiness.

If the "competent judge" argument was meant to do more than elaborate Mill's conception of human happiness, however, it is open to criticism. For example, the argument does not seem to show that higher pleasures are worth more than the lower ones in an objective sense that would give them more weight in the utilitarian calculus, or that would give people who like the lower pleasures a reason to choose the higher ones. As many readers have noticed, the fact that Socrates (Mill's example of an intelligent person) prefers the pleasures of philosophy does not mean that the higher pleasures are better *for the fool*. Mill's argument may establish that higher pleasures are more choiceworthy for those who are capable of experiencing them, but it does not seem to establish that such pleasures are better, period.

The role of happiness in moral theory

Bentham and Mill held that happiness is the highest good. Mill's argument for this claim in Chapter IV of *Utilitarianism*, in short, is that happiness is the only thing we want for its own sake and, therefore, it is the only thing desirable or good for its own sake. This argument has been forcefully attacked and is discussed in more detail in other entries (*see* MILL, JOHN STUART). It is worth noting that Mill admits that "questions of ultimate ends do not admit of proof, in the ordinary acceptation of the term" (1979 [1861]: 34). If we think of Mill as following in the tradition started by the ancients, we could say that happiness is indisputably the highest good and that the interesting question is about what happiness is.

If we accept that happiness is the highest good, it is clear that happiness must have some important role in moral theory. Utilitarianism has a particular view about what that role is. Utilitarianism is a consequentialist moral theory, according to which the moral rightness of an action depends only on its consequences (*see* CONSEQUENTIALISM). For hedonists like Bentham and Mill, the morally relevant consequences are pleasures produced and pains avoided. So, according to their utilitarianism, the right action is the one that produces the most pleasure and the least pain overall, considering all the pleasures and pains produced by the action impartially. In Mill's words, "the 'greatest happiness principle' holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure" (1979 [1861]: 7).

Classical utilitarianism (Bentham and Mill are thought of as classical utilitarians) is a maximizing theory that directs us to maximize the amount of happiness (and minimize the amount of pain) produced by our actions. The maximizing element of utilitarianism has drawn heavy critical fire. Problems with maximizing consequentialism are discussed in other entries. The important point for our purposes is to notice that happiness is playing a different role from the one that it played in ancient theories of ethics. Happiness is still the highest good, but now it is the target of moral action rather than the guiding theme for an individual trying to figure out how best to live her own life.

Of course, there is a sense in which utilitarianism is concerned with how individuals live their lives, but it is a different sense than was true for the ancients. Utilitarianism is particularly concerned with the standard of conduct for actions that affect people (or other sentient beings). Bentham and Mill were also deeply concerned with public policy. They believed that the proper goal of state action is the maximum aggregate happiness of everyone in society (which was a revolutionary position to take in a time when the interests of some classes of people counted more than the interests of others). In their political views, then, happiness is the target for the actions of the state and, ultimately, for individual politicians trying to fulfill the duties of their offices. As we have seen, this was not so for the ancients, who thought of happiness as the organizing principle for how a person would live her own life. Of course the ancients thought we ought to treat others well, but since they did not think of happiness as the objective of moral action, they did not think treating others well meant maximizing their happiness; rather, it meant (for Aristotle and the Confucians, in particular) treating them in ways that suit one's own nature as a human being; that is, with the virtues of generosity, benevolence, justice, and so on.

Contemporary Views

It is in contemporary work that happiness has come to be distinguished from well-being. Many of those working in the utilitarian tradition now think of utility and well-being as one and the same, and "utilitarianism" is often replaced with "welfarism."

In this line of research, preference satisfaction theories of well-being have been very influential (*see* DESIRE THEORIES OF THE GOOD; PREFERENCE). Objective theories, such as the capabilities approach, have also been taken seriously by those who are interested in the political dimension of well-being research (*see* CAPABILITIES). Informed preference theories and objective theories of flourishing are not typically offered as theories of *happiness*, however, because of the fact that in the modern context the term "happiness" is typically taken to refer to a psychological notion. In this section we focus on the psychological notion of happiness and leave these other important theories to be discussed in other entries.

Hedonism, life satisfaction, and the emotional state theory

Hedonistic theories of happiness (like Bentham's and Mill's) hold that happiness is pleasure and the absence of pain (*see* PLEASURE). Bentham and Mill had what L. W. Sumner (1996) calls an "internalist" view of pleasure, also called the experience account (Moore 2004) or the feeling theory (Bramble 2013) because it identifies pleasure with a distinctive experience or feeling. Though both Bentham and Mill thought there were distinctions to be made among different kinds of pleasures, they also assumed that all pleasurable experiences had enough in common that they could be commensurated on the same scale. But these assumptions are debatable: what exactly do the pleasure of reading a great novel and the pleasure of eating chocolate have in common? Such worries have spurred revised theories of what pleasure is.

The main rival has been called an externalist or attitudinal theory of pleasure. This theory identifies pleasure with an attitude – "being pleased" – taken toward a state of affairs (Feldman 2004). On this view, what makes an experience or state of affairs pleasurable is that the person having the experience has a certain pro-attitude toward it: "a person takes attitudinal pleasure in some state of affairs if he enjoys it, is pleased about it, is glad that it is happening, is delighted by it" (Feldman 2004: 56). This solves the problem caused by the fact that different pleasant experiences do not seem to have any common distinctive element, because on this view what they have in common is not something intrinsic to the experience. Rather, pleasures have in common that they are all the object of the pro-attitude "being pleased by."

The main objection to attitudinal hedonism is that "it seems to take the fun out of pleasure" (Haybron 2008: 64; see also Moore 2004 on the "killjoy objection"). The thought is that we can have pro-attitudes toward states of affairs that do not seem intuitively to be pleasant. For example, a person may be glad that she feels guilty about missing an appointment with a student, because she thinks that this speaks well of her character (perhaps in the past she has missed appointments without remorse and has been trying to improve). Here is a case in which the person is pleased by her guilt, but it seems odd to say that the guilt itself counts as pleasure thereby. Further, even if this were accepted as a theory of pleasure, critics have suggested, it is less intuitive as a theory of happiness.

Hedonism of all forms has also been attacked for leaving out something important. A well-known way of putting this objection is Nozick's (1974) "experience machine" thought experiment. Nozick asks us to imagine we have the option of being hooked up to a machine controlled by very trustworthy neuroscientists who will ensure that we have a more pleasant life attached to the machine than otherwise. We are also to imagine that others have a similar option, so we will not be causing other people harm by opting to hook up to the machine. Would we do it? Nozick says that many people would choose not to use the experience machine because we care about things other than pleasure – being in touch with reality, for example, or *doing* certain things rather than just thinking that we are. Whether this sort of problem counts as an objection to hedonism as a theory of *happiness* is complicated. If we think of happiness as the ancients did, as the *summum bonum* or the ultimate end of life, then the claim that there are other important things in life besides pleasure is a real challenge. On the other hand, if we think of happiness as a psychological condition that might be one component of flourishing or well-being, then this problem dissolves (because then it would be open to say that one would choose to sacrifice happiness for other goods that could not be had in the machine). Nevertheless, the other problems with the two main theories of pleasure have caused some people to look elsewhere for an understanding of happiness even in the psychological sense.

The life satisfaction theory of happiness, defended most systematically by Sumner (1996: 156), identifies happiness with life satisfaction, which is "a positive cognitive/affective response on the part of a subject to (some or all of) the conditions or circumstances of her life." Sumner argues that what is correct about hedonism is that pleasures and pains are very important sources of happiness and unhappiness. But, on his view, what *makes* them such is our attitudes toward them. This leads him to the view that the nature of happiness itself – that which explains why the various ingredients of happiness end up on the list – is having a positive attitude toward your life as a whole. This positive attitude has a cognitive component: "a judgement that, on balance and taking everything into account, your life is going well for you"; and an affective component: "finding your life enriching or rewarding, or feeling satisfied or fulfilled by it" (Sumner 1996: 145).

The main criticism of the life satisfaction theory of happiness is that our attitudes toward the overall conditions of our lives seem to fluctuate in ways that do not track fluctuations in our happiness (Haybron 2007, 2008; Tiberius and Plakias 2010). For example, a person may be more or less satisfied with her life depending on with whom she happens to compare herself. If she thinks about her friend who is going through a messy divorce, she may feel very glad about her own happily partnered life. But if she compares herself with the Joneses who are making more money and taking exotic vacations, she may assess her life as going less well. If happiness is supposed to be an enduring psychological condition, these kinds of fluctuations seem in tension with attributions of happiness. Moreover, these variations raise the questions: Which of the various perspectives one could have on happiness is the correct one? If the person could be happy or unhappy depending on her perspective, is she happy or not?

The third option is the view that happiness is an emotional state. This theory is defended most prominently by Dan Haybron (2008: 127), according to whom to be happy "is to have predominantly positive, versus negative, moods and emotions" (see also Rossi and Tappolet 2016). Haybron argues that his "happiness as psychic affirmation" is more intuitively compelling and practically relevant than the alternatives. The emotional state theory has the advantage over hedonism that it seems better able to capture the right elements: it does not count trivial pleasures as part of happiness, but it does count positive moods that are not attitudinal pleasures. Because the emotional state theory makes long-term emotional dispositions and mood propensities crucial to happiness, it may do better than the life satisfaction theory at capturing the relative stability of happiness.

One thing that many contemporary writers on happiness have in common is that, unlike the classical utilitarians, they do not necessarily take happiness to be the goal of moral action. Sumner, for instance, takes well-being (or welfare) to be the appropriate target of consequentialist moral theory, and he does not identify life satisfaction with well-being. Only *authentic* happiness (i.e., informed and autonomous life satisfaction) counts as well-being, according to him. This recent tendency to distinguish happiness from well-being may be the result of the psychologizing of "happiness," plus the recognition that "well-being" is a normative concept that cannot be reduced to a psychological function.

The fact that there are these different views about happiness raises questions about method. How do we argue for one view over another? What makes one theory better? The standard view in the literature is that theories of happiness (or well-being) should be evaluated against the criteria of descriptive and normative adequacy (Sumner 1996). In other words, a theory of happiness should capture our core intuitions about what happiness is and it should be adequate to the role happiness plays in moral theory. Trying to meet these criteria involves the theorist in a process of reflective equilibrium in which she assesses competing theories by considering various cases, thought experiments, and potential counterexamples (*see* REFLECTIVE EQUILIBRIUM; see also Tiberius 2013).

Engaging the empirical sciences

Traditionally, philosophers have engaged in this process of reflective equilibrium from their armchairs and "armchair" methods have recently been under attack. There are two important points to make about the question of appropriate methods in philosophical research on happiness.

First, the armchair was never an isolation chamber. Though philosophers theorizing about happiness have not traditionally done their own empirical studies, they certainly have relied on information they get from their own experience, literature, and the empirical sciences. Moreover, contemporary philosophers do now draw on empirical research done by psychologists (Tiberius and Haybron 2022). Psychologists' theories of well-being and happiness line up fairly well (though not perfectly) with philosophical theories (Tiberius 2006). When it comes to *happiness* (or what

psychologists might call "subjective well-being," as opposed to well-being *simpliciter*), the psychological research is divided between hedonists who think that the right thing to measure is moment-to-moment affect (so-called objective happiness; Kahneman 2000) and life satisfaction theorists who think the right thing to measure is a person's global judgment about how satisfied she is with her life overall (Pavot and Diener 1993). This body of research is full of fascinating findings, many of which corroborate traditional philosophical ideas. For instance, as Aristotle and Mill would have predicted, the positive effect of friendship and pro-social behavior on happiness has been well established (see, for example, Aknin et al. 2019 and Piliavin 2002). The psychological findings are too numerous and complex to summarize here. In addition to the other works cited in this paragraph, interested readers could begin with Diener et al. (2018).

Second, some philosophers are beginning to use empirical methods to investigate intuitions about happiness (*see* EXPERIMENTAL ETHICS). For example, Felipe De Brigard (2010) surveys intuitions on the experience machine thought experiment and uses the data he collects to argue against Nozick's assumption about why most of us would not plug into the machine. Nozick thought it was because we care about reality, but De Brigard argues that it is due to our favoring the status quo. If Nozick's argument against hedonism depends on his explanation for our response to the thought experiment, these empirical results could matter philosophically.

Most of the attention to happiness in experimental philosophy has focused on the folk concept of "happiness" (Kneer and Haybron 2020; Phillips et al. 2017). For example, Jonathan Phillips, Luke Misenheimer, and Joshua Knobe (2011) have used survey methods to argue that "happiness" is a value-laden concept. They present subjects with scenarios of people who are living good lives (lives filled with meaningful projects and relationships) and are subjectively happy (pleased, satisfied, enjoying their lives) and people who are subjectively happy but living bad lives. Subjects who are asked to rate the happiness of the people in these scenarios tend to say that the people who are living good lives are much happier than the people who are living bad lives, even though the subjective states (the psychological happiness) of the two people are described as being exactly the same. This kind of evidence lends credence to the hypothesis that our ordinary notion of "happiness" is not purely psychological.

The relevance of studies about the folk concept of happiness to philosophical theorizing can be debated. On the one hand, if reflective equilibrium is the method philosophers are using to defend their theories, surely the facts about "our intuitions" are relevant to the endeavor. But on the other hand, insofar as we are trying to pick out a concept that plays a certain role in a moral theory and distinguish it from other closely related concepts (such as well-being, pleasure, or flourishing), it may be that folk intuitions are misleading. There could be good reasons for thinking of happiness as a long-term psychological condition, despite the way the concept is used in ordinary language. For example, we may want to mark the distinction between a desirable psychological condition and a desirable kind of life by using the words "happiness" and "well-being" to refer to these two states, respectively.

Attention to the folk concept would not have been foreign to the ancients. Aristotle, at least, thought it was important to consult widely shared opinions – the *endoxa* – in order to arrive at the best theory of happiness (Kraut 2006). But the ancients certainly did not think that shared opinions were all that mattered; unconventional theories like Stoicism would never have been taken seriously had that been true, and ancient Chinese philosophers explicitly rejected ordinary, "mundane" views about happiness as contrary to true happiness. One way to resolve the tension between various conceptions of happiness is to say that different philosophers are just working on different projects: some (like Feldman, Haybron, and Sumner) are trying to understand the nature of the desirable psychological state we call happiness; and others (like the ancients and perhaps some experimental philosophers) are trying to understand the overall goal of life, of which psychological happiness may be one component. How satisfying this strategy is depends on what work the theory of happiness is meant to do. If the theory of happiness is meant to have a large role in a theory of morality or prudence, attempts to fill this role with a purely psychological notion may founder. On the other hand, if the theory of happiness is meant to illuminate the psychological component of an explicitly normative concept such as "well-being" or flourishing, separating one from the other might be just the right approach.

***See also*:** ANCIENT ETHICS; ARISTOTLE; BENTHAM, JEREMY; CAPABILITIES; CONFUCIAN ETHICS; CONSEQUENTIALISM; DAOIST ETHICS; DESIRE THEORIES OF THE GOOD; EUDAIMONISM; EXPERIMENTAL ETHICS; HEDONISM; KANT, IMMANUEL; MILL, JOHN STUART; NEO-ARISTOTELIAN ETHICAL NATURALISM; PLEASURE; PREFERENCE; REFLECTIVE EQUILIBRIUM; STOICISM; UTILITARIANISM; WELL-BEING

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