

In Pursuit of Happiness

Empirical Answers to Philosophical Questions

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ABSTRACT—*In this article, we provide an overview of what various philosophers throughout the ages have claimed about the nature of happiness, and we discuss to what extent psychological science has been able to substantiate or refute their claims. We first address concerns raised by philosophers regarding the possibility, desirability, and justifiability of happiness and then turn to the perennial question of how to be happy. Integrating insights from great thinkers of the past with empirical findings from modern behavioral sciences, we review the conditions and causes of happiness. We conclude our discussion with some thoughts about the future of happiness studies.*

It is not astonishing that the history of philosophy abounds with inquiries about the nature of happiness and the good life. The notion that what matters in life is not just to live but to live well is most likely as old as human existence. Down through the ages philosophers have speculated endlessly on the ways of rising above mere existence and achieving a desirable life. In this article, we examine the important issues philosophers and other great minds of history have raised regarding happiness, and we attempt to uncover the contributions of contemporary psychologists to the understanding of happiness.

We will begin our discussion with a brief history of the concept of happiness, which will be followed by a broader review of what philosophers have thought and what psychologists have discovered about the nature of happiness. Can people be happy? If they can, do they want to be happy? If they have both the ability and the desire to be happy, ought they pursue happiness for themselves and others? If they can, want, and ought to be happy, how should they go about realizing this goal? We will review answers to these and other similar questions, standing on the shoulders of great philosophers and psychologists.

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A SHORT HISTORY OF HAPPINESS

In his review of Darrin M. McMahon's book, *Happiness: A History*, Jim Holt (2006) remarks, half in jest, that the history of the idea of happiness could be summarized in a series of bumper sticker equations: happiness=luck (Homeric era), happiness=virtue (classical era), happiness=heaven (medieval era), happiness=pleasure (Enlightenment era), and happiness=a warm puppy (contemporary era). Imagine just how undemanding our task would be if only the history of happiness would yield itself to such simple, orderly classification. Yet, reality is almost always more complex than bumper stickers would have us believe, and the history of the idea of happiness, spanning more than two millennia, is a particularly intricate one. Providing a comprehensive account of this history would be beyond the scope of this article. Rather, we wish to present a brief history of happiness in Western culture that will allow us to bridge the past and the present and put the findings of current happiness researchers into context.

As is the case with many affairs of knowledge, Ancient Greece was the place and time in which the topic of the good life received serious philosophical attention. Democritus (~ 460 BC–370 BC), who suggested that a happy life is not exclusively the product of a favorable fate or of external circumstances but rather of a man's cast of mind, is considered to be the first philosopher in the Western world to inquire into the nature of happiness (Tatarkiewicz, 1976). Democritus's subjectivist view seems not to have been endorsed by Socrates or by his student Plato, who conceptualized happiness in more objective and absolute terms, such as the "secure enjoyment of what is good and beautiful" (Plato, 1999, p. 80). On the other hand, Aristotle, in his influential work *Nicomachean Ethics*, in which happiness (*eudaemonia*) was the central issue, asserted that happiness was not out of one's hands but is realizable for anyone willing to lead a life in accordance with the most valued virtues (Aristotle, 1992).

Hellenistic history also saw schools of philosophy that propounded hedonism as the royal road to the good life. A prominent example of these schools of thought was the Cyrenaics, whose founder, Aristippus, argued that "No considerations

should restrain one in the pursuit of pleasure, for everything other than pleasure is unimportant, and virtue is least important of all” (Tatarkiewicz, 1976, p. 317). Nevertheless, such a view appears to be uncharacteristically extreme even for the hedonists of Ancient Greece. In the ancient world, there was a broad consensus, first among the Greeks and then the Romans, that a good life devoid of reason and morality was simply not achievable. Even Epicurus, whose doctrines have at times been dismissed as self-indulgent hedonism, was possessed of the conviction that virtue and pleasure were interdependent and that it was simply impossible “to live pleasantly without living prudently, honorably, and justly” (Epicurus, 1994, p. 31). The Stoic philosopher Cicero was such a staunch advocate of the felicitic powers of virtue that he believed a man in possession of virtue could be happy even while being tortured (McMahon, 2006).

Christian philosophers of the Middle Ages also considered a life of virtue as indispensable to the good life; nonetheless, virtue was no longer considered to be sufficient for happiness. Happiness was an ethereal, spiritual matter; it now lay in the hands of God, attainable only by means of devoted faith and the grace of God. Whereas earthly happiness was fallible—albeit not impossible—the Kingdom of Heaven promised complete and eternal happiness (Tatarkiewicz, 1976).

In the Age of Enlightenment, the idea of happiness grew more secular and less otherworldly. In parallel, there was an increased emphasis in Western cultures on pleasure as a path to, and even as a synonym for, happiness. These changes were best illustrated by the utilitarian philosophy of the early 19th century, which determined that happiness equaled utility and utility was derived from maximum pleasure. Utilitarians, such as the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham, regarded the maximum surplus of pleasure over pain as the cardinal goal of human striving and advocated that the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people should be the basis of morals and legislation.

The idea that humans are entitled to pursue and attain happiness gained widespread acceptance in the modern era, as manifested by the preamble to the American Declaration of Independence and the crowded self-help aisles of bookstores. Classical and medieval conceptions of happiness as “virtue” or “perfection” have been largely ignored or rendered obsolete in recent centuries. In McMahon’s apt words, humans in this day and age think of happiness “more as *feeling* good than *being* good” (2006, p. 65). Philosophical treatments of the issue of human well-being are rarer in this era than in centuries past, whereas both the behavioral and social sciences have begun to devote considerable attention to the topic (Haybron, 2007b).

WHAT IS THIS THING CALLED HAPPINESS?

Philosophers of happiness tend to agree, if on nothing else, on the difficulty of defining happiness. For science to progress, however, clearly defined and operationalized concepts are in-

dispensable. As a way to capture what lay people mean by “happiness,” psychologists pioneering the scientific study of happiness proposed the term *subjective well-being* (SWB; Diener, 1984). SWB refers to people’s evaluations of their lives and encompasses both cognitive judgments of satisfaction and affective appraisals of moods and emotions.

This conceptualization emphasizes the subjective nature of happiness and holds individual human beings to be the single best judges of their own happiness. Classical philosophers such as Socrates, who did not have faith in the intellectual prowess of the masses and distinguished between the “hoi polloi” and the “wise,” would probably disapprove of regaling personal authority to ordinary people in matters of happiness (Haybron, 2007b). Concerns regarding the adequacy of measuring happiness through self-reports have also been expressed by contemporary philosophers and psychologists (e.g., Haybron, 2007a; Schwarz & Strack, 1999). Although there is room for improvement in SWB measures and multimethod assessments should certainly be implemented whenever possible, several studies attest to the reliability and validity of self-report happiness measures in informing research (e.g., Diener & Suh, 1997).

Modern psychologists perhaps cannot hope to define *happiness* to everyone’s satisfaction; nonetheless, they have made a discovery of significance—namely, the separable components of subjective well-being that cohere in understandable ways. These components include life satisfaction (global judgments of one’s life), satisfaction with important life domains (satisfaction with one’s work, health, marriage, etc.), positive affect (prevalence of positive emotions and moods), and low levels of negative affect (prevalence of unpleasant emotions and moods). A careful examination reveals that these components have often been part of the philosophical discourse on happiness at one point or another in the last two and a half millennia. For instance, the enunciation of frequent positive affect and rare negative affect as being conducive to happiness is directly traceable to the hedonist tradition in philosophy. SWB’s acknowledgment of subjective life satisfaction as a crucial ingredient of happiness, on the other hand, resonates most with contemporary philosopher Wayne Sumner’s ideas, for whom “happiness (or unhappiness) is a response by a subject to her life conditions *as she sees them*” (1999, p. 156).

Ryff and Singer’s (1996) concept of psychological well-being and Ryan and Deci’s (2000) self-determination theory are two other prominent accounts of happiness and well-being put forth by psychologists. These theories have a less subjective and more prescriptive character in that they specify certain needs that must be fulfilled (such as autonomy, self-acceptance, and mastery) as a prerequisite of human well-being. In that sense, they are akin to the eudaemonist flourishing theories of the classical era, such as those of Aristotle (Tiberius, 2006).

It is important for the purposes of our discussion to emphasize that most of the empirical studies conducted in psychology regarding happiness, as well as most research mentioned in our

article, conceive of happiness not in the eudaimonic sense—embodying a value judgment about whether a person is leading a commendable life—but rather in the sense of subjective well-being. Clearly, high subjective well-being and eudaimonic happiness are not necessarily interchangeable concepts, and it is easily imaginable that a person could feel subjectively happy without leading a virtuous life. However, we believe, and many contemporary philosophers (Haybron, 2005; Sumner, 1999) agree, that subjective well-being and eudaimonic well-being are sufficiently close. It is reasonable to use subjective well-being as a proxy for well-being, even if it is not a perfect match. Admittedly, current empirical psychological research cannot directly answer the ancient philosophical question of how to live well. As researchers of subjective well-being, our hope is that we answer this question indirectly by illuminating a *sine qua non* of the good life—namely, subjective well-being.

CAN PEOPLE BE HAPPY?

In attempting to answer this question, we believe that a distinction between *ideal happiness* and *actual happiness* (Tatar-kiewicz, 1976) would be beneficial at the outset. Ideal happiness can be defined as happiness that is complete and lasting and that touches the whole of life. Such a happiness—perfect, pure, and perpetual—has extremely high standards and may indeed be beyond anyone’s reach. However, it is still possible for people to experience predominantly positive emotions and be satisfied with their lives. Actual happiness, as it has been called, is what psychologists are interested in as an object of scientific inquiry. This attainable type of happiness is the focus of our article as well.

It has been argued that the conflict between pessimism and optimism in philosophy is practically as old as philosophy itself (Tatar-kiewicz, 1976). On the one end of the spectrum, we find Leibniz (1646–1716), famous for his statement that we are living in the best of all possible worlds. On the other end of the spectrum, there is Hegesias, a figure from 3rd century BC Alexandria, also known as *Peisithanatos* (the death persuader) because he believed that happiness was unattainable, life was not worth living, and that the sage would choose death (Matson, 1998). Such pessimists saw human happiness as either impossible to attain or at least quite improbable, depicting the suffering and tragedy in the world as an inevitable source of unhappiness. It is also not to be forgotten that all philosophical stances inevitably reflect the soul of the times and places they have originated in. Many a distrustful claim regarding the possibility of happiness was advanced in a social context of much lower quality of life and more common unhappiness in comparison with modern times (Veenhoven, 2005).

Scientific psychology can attempt to shed some light on the issue of whether happiness is possible by addressing two pertinent questions: Do people report being happy, and is happiness an adaptive, evolutionarily feasible phenomenon? Evidence

from worldwide surveys suggests that the answer to the first question is affirmative. In an article suitably titled “Most People Are Happy,” Diener and Diener (1996) reviewed the available evidence and concluded that an overwhelming majority of individuals fall in the positive range of the happiness scale, including people with apparent disadvantages, such as quadriplegics or those in the lowest income groups. A recent opinion poll corroborates this finding by revealing that 84% of Americans see themselves as either “very happy” or “pretty happy” (Pew Research Center, 2006). Likewise, 86% of the 43 nations included in Diener and Diener’s study had average happiness levels above the midpoint of the happiness scale.

Though it is rare for people to be constantly elated or ecstatic, most people report being happy most of the time. All this evidence is discordant with a view of life as a “vale of tears” and of modern society as a “sink of unhappiness.” Humans appear to have a predisposition to mild levels of happiness, which brings us to our second query: What are the adaptive functions of happiness?

It has been long recognized that negative emotions (e.g., fear, anger, and anxiety) make an individual focus on the immediate threat or problem, thereby contributing to evolutionary fitness. It is only recently, however, that we have begun to understand the adaptive advantages engendered by positive feelings. Barbara Frederickson’s “broaden-and-build theory” (1998) proposes that positive feelings allow individuals to broaden their thought-action repertoires and build intellectual, psychological, social, and physical resources over time. In other words, positive affect and general well-being produce a state from which individuals can confidently explore the environment and approach new goals, thus allowing them to build important personal resources. It follows that happiness is not just an epiphenomenon, it is also adaptive from an evolutionary point of view and brings about various benefits, as we will explore in greater detail later in our discussion.

The psychological discoveries of the past few decades seem to refute the pessimistic idea that happiness is an impossible human ambition or a fool’s dream. Let us now examine the arguments about the improbability of happiness. In the humanities, one of the most frequently encountered ideas concerning happiness is that although people are not doomed to an unhappy existence, the search for happiness will necessarily be self-defeating, and that the harder people strive for happiness, the further they will retreat from it. Schopenhauer, for instance, observed that wherever joy makes its appearance, “it as a rule comes uninvited and unannounced, by itself and *sans façon*” (Schopenhauer, 2001, p. 409). Several philosophers agreed that happiness will only lead to a wild-goose chase when pursued directly as a goal of existence and that it has to be found along the way as the byproduct of other activities. John Stuart Mill eloquently stated that only those are happy who “have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness; on the happiness of others, on the improvement of mankind, even

on some art or pursuit, followed not as a means, but as itself an ideal end” (Mill, 1944, p. 100).

One psychological study, conducted by Schooler, Ariely, and Loewenstein (2003), suggests that the conscious pursuit of happiness and the continuous assessment of one’s happiness may indeed prove deleterious to one’s well-being. In this study, participants listened to Stravinsky’s *Rites of Spring* under one of three conditions. In the first condition, the participants simply listened to the music; in the second, they were asked to make themselves as happy as possible while listening to the recording; and in the last condition, they were instructed to adjust a movable measurement scale to point to their real-time happiness. As it turned out, those in the first condition who simply listened to the recording—without trying to be as happy as possible or without constantly monitoring their level of happiness—enjoyed it most. This finding dovetails with studies showing that happy moods are associated with low degrees of self-focused attention (Green, Sedikides, Saltzberg, Wood, & Forzano, 2003).

Yet at the same time, we find support for the effectiveness of interventions to increase happiness (Fordyce, 1977; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). This means that whereas being self-conscious and obsessive about one’s happiness may backfire, there are still certain activities individuals can consciously choose to partake or lifestyle changes that they can deliberately make that will increase their happiness, such as meditation and counting one’s blessings.

In *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy observes that “there are no conditions to which a person cannot grow accustomed” (2004, p. 706). Adam Smith, in a similar vein, talks of “the never-failing certainty with which all men, sooner or later, accommodate themselves to whatever becomes their permanent situation” (2002, p. 172). Since the early studies showing that lottery winners were not happier than controls and that even paralyzed accident victims revert approximately to their initial levels of happiness (e.g., Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman, 1978), the hedonic treadmill theory—the idea that our emotional systems adjust to almost anything that happens in our lives, good or bad—has been embraced by psychologists as a guiding principle in happiness research. In affiliation with the hedonic treadmill model, the set-point theory posits that major life events, such as marriage, the death of a child, or unemployment, affect a person’s happiness only temporarily, after which the person’s happiness level regresses to a default determined by genotype (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996). The implication of these assertions is that no matter how hard we try to be happier, adaptation on the one hand and our temperament on the other will ensure that our venture will remain just a futile rat race with an illusory goal.

Our conviction is that the time is ripe for a revision of hedonic adaptation theories. Accumulating evidence reveals that, even though adaptation undeniably occurs to some extent and personal aspirations do rise and adjust, people do not adapt quickly

and/or completely to everything (Diener, Lucas, & Scollon, 2006). Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, and Diener (2003, 2004), for example, have observed in a 15-year longitudinal study that individuals who experienced unemployment or widowhood did not, on average, fully recover and return to their earlier life satisfaction levels. Other studies have shown that people hardly, if ever, adapt to certain elements in their lives such as noise, long commutes, or interpersonal conflict (Haidt, 2006), whereas other events such as plastic surgery may have long-lasting positive effects on one’s psychological well-being (Rankin, Borah, Perry, & Wey, 1998).

DO PEOPLE WANT TO BE HAPPY?

From antiquity to the present, the notion that happiness is a fundamental human drive has almost had an axiomatic quality in philosophy. Alexander Pope called happiness “our being’s end and aim,” and the same view finds one of its most elegant expressions in Pascal’s words:

“All men seek happiness. There are no exceptions. However different the means they may employ, they all strive towards this goal. The reason why some go to war and some do not is the same desire in both, but interpreted in two different ways. The will never takes the least step except to that end. This is the motive of every act of every man, including those who go and hang themselves” (1995, p. 45).

Whether or not happiness embodies the *summum bonum*—the highest good—is not a question that can be answered by the methods available to science. What psychologists can and did do, however, is ask people how much they desire happiness. Surveys conducted with college students in 41 nations showed that on a 7-point scale—where 7 indicated *extraordinarily important and valuable*—respondents rated happiness a 6.39 on average (Diener, Sapyta, & Suh, 1998). Similarly, King and Napa (1998) reported that Americans see happiness as more relevant to the judgment of a good life than are wealth or moral goodness, and they even think that happy people are more likely to go to heaven.

It is also worth pointing out that the desirability of happiness does not rule out the value of other human strivings. We agree with Tatarkiewicz that “it would be wrong-headed and dangerous to think of happiness as the only good” (1976, p.126). It is immensely difficult to imagine a desirable life that is devoid of happiness. As much as happiness is necessary to the good life, however, it is not sufficient. When we deem happiness a worthwhile object of study, it is because we trust that pursuing happiness is one form of the good life, but not the only one.

SHOULD PEOPLE BE HAPPY?

One recent development in happiness studies has been the discovery that, on both the individual and societal levels, hap-

piness precedes and causes a plethora of positive outcomes, instead of merely being the product of these positive outcomes (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). More specifically, happiness leads to better health, better work performance, better social relationships, and to more ethical behavior. In this section, we will discuss these findings, while at the same time comparing and contrasting them with the views of the great minds of the past.

Health

French writer Marcel Proust observes in *Remembrance of Things Past* that happiness is salutary to the body, whereas it is unhappiness that develops the forces of the mind. Although he seems to have gotten the part about unhappiness cultivating the mind wrong, as we will elaborate on shortly, current research strongly supports his insight that happiness leads to better physical health. One of the most impressive studies revealing this link was conducted by Danner, Snowdon, and Friesen (2001), who demonstrated that positive affective content in handwritten autobiographies of Catholic sisters, composed when they were at the mean age of 22, strongly predicted their longevity six decades later. Experimental data similarly testify to the salutary effects of happiness on the body: In a study in which researchers infected participants with a cold virus, those who reported high levels of happiness were found to be less vulnerable to the common cold (Cohen, Doyle, Turner, Alper, & Skoner, 2003).

Achievement

Confirming Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, happiness emerges from available data as the resource leading to the development and better use of intellectual skills and resources. The fairly common characterization of happiness as a catalyst for dumbing people down must be connected to an understanding of happiness as giddy, empty-headed hedonism. Decades of research reveals, however, that happiness primarily emanates not from the ceaseless pursuit of pleasure, but from striving for and making progress towards goals derived from one's most-prized values. Feelings of meaning, purpose, and fulfillment thus typically trump pleasure as predictors of happiness.

Proust's sadder-but-wiser maxim is contradicted by research indicating that those who are dispositionally happy or artificially put in a happy mood outperform others in various tasks such as accurate decision making, clerical error checking, anagram solving, or original and flexible thinking (Diener & Seligman, 2004). There seems to be only one sense in which people experiencing elevated moods can be considered "stupid" and that is their increased inclination to rely on heuristics (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005).

Happiness is also linked to higher achievement in professional life. Accordingly, happy individuals are more likely to

graduate from college, secure a job, receive favorable evaluations from their supervisors, and earn higher incomes, and they are less likely to lose their job and are quicker to be reemployed if they are laid off (Diener, Nickerson, Lucas, & Sandvik, 2002; Diener & Seligman, 2004).

Social Relationships and Prosocial Behavior

Most noteworthy among the arguments raised against the justifiability of happiness has been the view equating happiness with self-centeredness and insensitivity to the problems darkening the world. George Eliot (1996), for instance, talks about how happiness is considered "a well-fleshed indifference to sorrow outside it" (p. 796), and another English novelist, Sir Hugh Walpole, notes that "to confess to happiness implies a smug complacency and callousness to the general misfortunes of the world" (as cited in Tatarkiewicz, 1976, p. 348). Study after study, however, fails to substantiate the portrayal of happiness as an egotistic and apathetic state; instead, they disclose the opposite pattern. Happiness appears to bring out the best in humans, making them more social, more cooperative, and even more ethical. Illustrating this, people with chronically high or experimentally increased positive affect evaluate persons they have recently met in more positive terms, become more interested in social interaction, and also become more prone to self-disclosure (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Those who report higher life satisfaction exhibit more generalized trust in others (Brehm & Rahn, 1997), and when asked how justifiable they find some hypothetical ethical scenarios (such as buying something they knew to be stolen or avoiding a fare on public transport), participants with higher happiness levels respond in more ethical ways (James & Chymis, 2004). Furthermore, as Tov and Diener (2007) point out in their review, the virtuous relationship between happiness and socially desirable outcomes also holds true on a national level. Happier countries tend to score higher on generalized trust, volunteerism, and democratic attitudes.

HOW TO BE HAPPY?

John Locke observed that men take "various and contrary ways" to reach happiness, albeit "all aim at being happy" (1894, p. 190). The annals of philosophy are equally filled with the various and contrary ways of achieving happiness. For almost every page written on the merits of a certain quality in inducing happiness, there exists another page condemning that quality and lauding the opposite one. Yet, unavoidably, some advice is sounder than the rest, and some methods of achieving happiness are more effective than others. Scientific methods fortunately permit us to distinguish the contenders from the pretenders.

As sociologists and quality-of-life researchers expressed interest in the subject of happiness earlier than psychologists did, the first investigations about the concomitants and causes of happiness primarily involved demographic factors (e.g., age,

gender, race) and life-status variables (e.g., marital status, health). This research tradition led to the somewhat astounding discovery that objective life circumstances play a fairly minor role in explaining happiness. Scholars have estimated that demographic factors account for 8%–15% of the variance in happiness (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999).

The inadequacy of external circumstances in predicting happiness led psychologists to focus on other correlates of happiness. In this section, we will contemplate some of the conditions and sources of happiness as they are discussed by the distinguished minds of the past and as revealed by modern research.

Wealth

Aristotle believed that wealth was a necessary ingredient of happiness (1991). Stoics, in contrast, believed that material possessions and wealth were in no way required for happiness. Inhabiting the middle ground were the Epicureans, who maintained that although we should have sufficient money to shelter us from harm and pain, money ceases to offer greater levels of happiness beyond a certain threshold. “Nothing satisfies the man who is not satisfied with a little” was Epicurus’s conviction (De Botton, 2000, p. 62). Research reveals a significant positive correlation between wealth and happiness. At the same time, Epicurus and his followers seem to have touched upon a keen insight about happiness with their belief in the diminishing effect of income on happiness. Frey and Stutzer (2002) established that although increased income contributes significantly to happiness at low levels of development across nations, once the threshold of around U.S. \$10,000 annual per capita income has been passed, there is not a strong correlation between wealth and life satisfaction. In a similar vein, Diener, Horowitz, and Emmons (1985) documented that very wealthy people, chosen from the *Forbes* list of the wealthiest Americans, were only modestly happier than a control group who lived in the same geographical area. Research, all in all, suggests that an adequate amount of money is a necessary condition of happiness, albeit not a sufficient one.

Friends and Social Relationships

Arthur Schopenhauer, displaying his signature misanthropy, advocated that loneliness was a superior condition to human company. He can perhaps find consolation in the fact that this idea of his would hardly attract any company. Philosophers through the ages have repeatedly pointed out, approvingly, the value and importance of friendship. Aristotle was of the conviction that “no one would choose to live without friends, even if he had all the other goods” (2000, p. 143), and Epicurus believed that “of all the things that wisdom provides to help one live one’s entire life in happiness, the greatest by far is the possession of friendship” (De Botton, 2000, p. 57). Empirical studies strongly corroborate these views. Diener and Seligman

(2002) found in their study of very happy people that every single one of them had excellent social relationships. Quantity and, more importantly, quality of friendships correlate positively with happiness, and perceived loneliness is robustly linked to depression. In light of this and other parallel findings, Reis and Gable (2003) have suggested that good social relationships may be the single most important source of happiness. It must be true that “it is man, who is essential to man’s happiness” (Tatarkiewicz, 1976, p. 130), and as much as some may believe that hell is other people, so, apparently, is heaven.

Religion

As mentioned earlier, medieval Christian scholars believed that happiness lay in God and that religious devotion was the only means of achieving it. For instance, the 6th century philosopher Boethius reasoned that if true happiness is the perfect good, it must reside in the most supreme deity (Boethius, 1999). Atheists, on the other hand, argued that God was an illusion, and some nonbelievers claimed that genuine happiness was only possible for those who realized this. One of them, Karl Marx, famously believed that religion is the opiate of the masses and perceived “the overcoming of religion as the illusory happiness of the people” as a necessity for real happiness (McMahon, 2006, p. 391). Research is powerless and therefore irrelevant when it comes to answering the question of whether God is real or an illusion; nonetheless, multiple studies reveal that religion does make people happier. More specifically, participation in religious services, strength of religious affiliation, relationship with God, and prayer all seem to contribute to happiness (Ferriss, 2002; Poloma & Pendleton, 1990;). Still, it is important to point out that the positive association between happiness and religious beliefs and practices is not a universal one, with religious people in certain countries (e.g., Lithuania, Slovakia) reporting lower levels of life satisfaction.

Personality

Investigators of happiness unambiguously agree that dispositional differences in responding to people and events have an important effect on individuals’ happiness levels. Lykken and Tellegen (1996) reported that such stable temperamental tendencies resulting from genetic inheritance account for as much as 50% of variability in happiness.

Thirty years ago, Tatarkiewicz brilliantly foreshadowed the empirical findings of personality scientists when he wrote about personality having a dual influence on happiness: “Firstly because it predisposes one to feel joy or sorrow, and secondly because it shapes a man’s life in such a way as to cause him joy or sorrow” (1976, p. 194). Research indeed shows that certain personality traits (e.g., extraversion) render individuals more likely to experience positive affect, whereas other personality traits (e.g., neuroticism) predispose individuals to negative affect (Rusting & Larsen, 1997). At the same time, confirming the

second part of Tatarkiewicz's claim, extraversion predicts the frequency of positive objective life events, and neuroticism predicts the frequency of negative objective events (Magnus, Diener, Fujita, & Pavot, 1993). Other than extraversion and neuroticism, personality traits such as self-esteem, optimism, trust, agreeableness, repressive defensiveness, desire for control, and hardiness have been found to be strong predictors of happiness (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996).

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

In this article, we have presented a chronicle of the idea of happiness from antiquity to modern times and contemplated the questions of the possibility, desirability, and justifiability of happiness as discussed by philosophers and investigated by psychologists. This was followed by an overview of the conditions and sources of happiness. The reader can gather from our analysis alone that there still remain many unanswered and even unexamined questions about the nature of happiness.

Some of the issues in happiness research that await illumination are of an empirical nature; in other words, they are directly answerable by science. Hence, we believe that, as complex as they may be, their resolution is ultimately only a matter of time. Adaptation, specifically, its exact effect on happiness and its limits, is one such issue, as is the nature of the interaction between temperament and environment in determining happiness levels. Similarly, the correlates and causes of the distinct components of happiness (i.e., positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction) constitute an important yet understudied topic. The field would also vastly benefit from learning more about the correlates of different conceptualizations of happiness, such as Ryff and Singer's concept of psychological well-being and Ryan and Deci's self-determination model. Another topic we deem to be extremely important and timely is the relationship between religious belief and happiness. The recent controversy surrounding the publication of several books that view religious belief as "an irrational embrace of myth" (Harris, 2005, p. 26; see also Dawkins, 2006) and argue that even moderate religion is pernicious to humanity further underscores the need for rigorous research on the costs and benefits of religion.

On the other hand, other questions of great concern to our field call for value judgments and are thus more philosophical and less empirical in nature. One of these questions is whether happiness should be the aim of formal education. We, as scholars of happiness, clearly believe in the value of enlightening people about where happiness can in fact be found. Whether the ultimate objective of education should be to make people happy, however, is not a question that can be answered directly, but it is one that can instead be approached through the accumulation of relevant data and through vigorous philosophical discussions about the implications of these data.

A similar value question concerns whether the aim of national policymaking should be the happiness of citizens. Numerous philosophers from Aristotle to Jeremy Bentham believed that it should be so, and several social reformers agreed with such philosophers. William Beveridge, who established Britain's welfare state after the Second World War, observed, "The objective of government in peace and in war is not the glory of rulers or races, but the happiness of the common man." Recently, some psychologists have proposed that, in addition to the prevailing economic and social indicators of the day, governments should use a national index of happiness to guide them in policymaking (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Putting aside the debate regarding the ultimate aim of governments, we believe that such an index would be a valuable complement to the current approaches used to gauge human welfare (Kesebir & Diener, in press).

ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS

Philosopher Nicholas White believed, "Philosophers' concrete advice about how to become happy isn't any better (in fact, it's probably worse) than that of the average person. They generally don't know enough of the relevant facts, and they don't have the right temperament" (White, 2006, p.15). Our discussion suggests that, though some thinkers' insights about the nature of happiness were penetrating and profound, the arguments of numerous other philosophers simply could not be substantiated by available data. These great minds provided the most important questions regarding happiness, yet their answers disagreed with each other more often than not. It was by looking at the questions posed by philosophers and by using the methods of science that we have been able to provide some initial answers to crucial questions that have vexed thinkers for millennia. If we have seen farther than our betters, it was by standing on the shoulders of the great philosophers and on the platform of science. It is our hope that the fields of philosophy and psychology will continue to mutually inspire and enrich each other, so that future psychologists and philosophers will be able to see even farther.

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