A Happy Introduction

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Why study happiness? There are two particular issues that make the study of happiness and the good life particularly interesting. First, happiness is both a very philosophical and a very empirical matter – as well as being both research-oriented and everyday-life-related. Books about happiness pour off the presses, and happiness is poked and prodded from every disciplinary direction. Like diet books, the appetite for self-help books on happiness (e.g. a recent example by Ryan 2005) seems to be limitless. The World Database of Happiness includes at the moment almost 4400 pieces of research. There may be a variety of reasons for this. One central viewpoint is that decades of careful scholarly work, especially in economics and psychology, have recently been brought to much wider attention and a wider audience, which has given philosophers an opportunity, and a reason, to revisit the long-standing debates about Aristotelian eudaemonia, utilitarianism, free will, and so forth. Furthermore, books about happiness also tap into the growing sense of unease and discontentment in today's world, and our wish to increase self-knowledge (Reeves 2006). According to most research in social sciences and psychology (e.g. Marar 2003; Layard 2005), the elements that improve and partly constitute happiness: family relations, communities, and moral values have been undermined. We may indeed be in need of happiness and a good life and conceptualizations of them.

Second, the search for happiness and research on it is both timely and timeless. Historically, the philosophical and theological understanding of happiness was that it derived from good deeds and the improvement of one's moral character. Notions of happiness underwent a radical shift in the late 18th century with the dawn of a more subjective, psychologically-based concept of human action and human life. We moved from the Socratic question of "How ought I to live?" to the modern, and late-modern, question of "What do I really want?" From morality and the idea of being good we have moved towards individual needs and feeling good (Marar 2003). In today's individually-centred culture, this is ever more so. Therefore, it is natural to raise the question, how much does our contemporary understanding of happiness share with historical conceptualizations of this notion?

The concept of happiness has two main uses that have been known since Aristotle. On the one hand, happiness refers to states of mind of a particular kind: joyous, cheerful, pleasant experiences, emotions, and sensations. On the other hand, it was Aristotle who also pointed out that one swallow does not make a spring, as an analogy of the relation between happy experiences and a happy life. Happiness as a quality of life is not merely a sum of happy states of mind but is associated with one's settled dispositions and with one's objective situation, which, together, make one's life go well. This connection of long-term happiness and well-being has been an important issue in ethics, because many philosophers have thought that happiness is the only thing that contributes to well-being or because they have used these notions interchangeably (Griffin 1998). Of course, short-term and long-term happiness are related, because it would be odd to characterize a person's life as happy if it contained absolutely or almost no happy states of mind. Indeed, happiness in its common contemporary use combines both dimensions of the notion, as J.P. Griffin (1998) points out: "To be 'happy' is to be satisfied or contented with having a good measure of what one regards as important in life." However, various philosophical approaches have given different weight to the two dimensions of happiness.

In ancient ethical theory, the concept of happiness was inextricably interwoven with the idea of a morally good life. This *eudaemonistic* tradition linked virtue and happiness by holding that only a virtuous person can achieve happiness as a lasting quality of life. Virtue, in turn, was associated with human excellence whose standard was derived from an objective human nature or function. Virtues, such as courage, justice, and temperance, were regarded as capacities and dispositions that both constitute and express excellence in action and emotion. Happiness was, thus, a matter of conducting certain activities and functions in a virtuous manner. This kind of happiness is an inherent quality of proper action rather than a goal that we strive to reach by acting. True enough, Aristotle observed that all people aim at happiness as the supreme good of human life, but virtues are not just ladders that help us to reach this end. Even if for eudaemonists, virtues are the only means to happiness, they are also constituents of happiness that one cannot renounce without losing the good itself. Hence, there is no happiness without virtue. Some thinkers, such as the Stoics, maintained that virtue alone is both necessary and sufficient for happiness, whereas others, including Aristotle, argued that virtue is only a necessary condition of happiness, which requires non-psychological extrinsic goods, such as status, wealth, friends, and family, as well. In this latter view, happiness always depends, in part, on being fortunate, in addition to being virtuous (Parry 2006; see also Jost & Shiner 2002).

Eudaemonistic thinking suffered a blow from Christianity, whose doctrine of original sin rejected the possibility of reaching happiness within the limits of human life and by means of human understanding alone. Full happiness was now seen as achievable only in the afterlife, where the souls of believers come into

direct contact with God. Likewise, the only path to this superhuman happiness was obedience to the word of God, as revealed in the Bible. Yet, in spite of these upheavals, Aristotelian eudaemonism survived to a large extent in the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas and in fellow medieval Thomists. Aquinas divided happiness into natural and supernatural, and agreed with Aristotle on the content of the former kind of happiness, as well as on the means of reaching it on earth. Supernatural happiness in communion with God and the theological virtues of faith, hope, love, and humility that were instrumental in reaching the final end of human existence in the afterlife were Christian supplements to the Aristotelian framework.

The experiential interpretation of happiness began to gain ground in conjunction with the downfall of virtue ethics and associated essentialist views about human nature. An important turning point in attempting to improve the human condition was the Enlightenment whose philosophers placed their reliance on reason. From this ideological background arose Utilitarianism with its ethical imperative of bringing about the greatest amount of happiness to the greatest number of people.

The classic utilitarians Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) interpreted happiness in experiential terms as pleasant sensations whose hedonic value can be measured in terms of quantity and quality. For these classic utilitarians, the moral value of an action depended on the balance of its pleasant and painful consequences to all people affected by the action, in comparison to the hedonic consequences of other actions that would have been available to the agent in the situation. Bentham thought that the measurement of happiness is simple and straightforward, because we need not take the quality of pleasures into account; hence, "pushpin equals to poetry". Mill, who suffered a nervous breakdown at the age of 26 as the result of a strict utilitarian upbringing, tried to reform the utilitarian account of happiness by introducing qualities of pleasure into the hedonic calculus and by suggesting, *pace* Aristotle, that happiness is an intrinsic property of right action, not an end that is external to the means of achieving it.

However, both additions proved to be more problematic than Mill himself realized: qualities of pleasure require distinct criteria for their evaluation, and happiness as an intrinsic property of action contradicts the consequentialist principle of evaluating the rightness of actions in terms of their results alone. Partially, for these reasons, modern utilitarians have moved away from the notion of happiness as pleasant states of mind to the idea of well-being as their central theoretical concept. Nevertheless, the connection to the more inclusive understanding of happiness remains, because well-being may contain such things as accomplishing something in one's life, knowledge of certain basic metaphysical and moral matters, deep personal relations, and so on, along with pleasant and joyful states of mind (Griffin 1998). It is along these lines that the notion of happiness is also understood in contemporary positive psychology.

Along with traditional questions about the content of happiness, we can study people's ways of expressing happiness. In contemporary linguistics, Kövecses has distinguished between two main interests regarding the language of emotion. One may be interested either in expressive emotion words, such as *wow!* or *yuk!*, or in descriptive emotion words, which describe or name certain emotions, e.g. *happiness* (1995). More generally, linguists may be interested either in the naming or expression of emotions. When the naming of emotions is in focus, the danger is that we do not learn very much about emotions, because their expression is often more indirect. However, if we focus on the expression of emotions *per se*, the question becomes how to distinguish this from whatever else there is in language. A typical division is between the rational or "objective" component of language as against the emotional or "subjective" component, but it is also possible to distinguish between linguistic and other means of expressing emotion (Konstantinidou 1997, 1–9). Nerlich's book on the development of theories of meaning in 1830–1930 also suggests that linguists have struggled to understand how emotional factors affect meaning change (1992).

One way to do linguistic research on emotions involves comparison between various languages, which may help to establish universal characteristics of both languages and emotions. Etymological relationships between words in different languages have fascinated people for a long time. It has also been suggested that there are more words and expressions for negative than positive emotions (Faber & Mairal Usón 1998, 55), although linguists are not unanimous about this. Tuovila's list of prototypical Finnish emotion words, for example, includes an evenly balanced ten negative and nine positive words alongside of one neutral word (2005, 121). In this respect, it is interesting to note that happiness has been studied by several people working in the framework of conceptual metaphor theory (Fabiszak 2001/2002; Györi 1998; Kövecses 1991; Stefanowitsch 2004; Yu 1995).

In 1935, Leonard Bloomfield thought that "We can define the names of minerals, for example, in terms of chemistry and mineralogy … but we have no precise way of defining words like *love* or *hate*, which concern situations that have not been accurately classified — and these latter are in the great majority." (1970, 139) For a few decades, the popularity of this idea discredited not only the study of emotion words but of word-meaning in general (Koerner 1978, 155–176).

Towards the end of the twentieth century and continuing into the next millennium, emotions have received a great deal of linguistic attention, not least because of a boom in linguistic interest in cognitive (or conceptual) metaphors and their universality (e.g. Kienpointner 2004). Such an interest followed the publication in particular of Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). Even more recently, linguists have begun to combine their interest in emotions with corpus linguistic analysis, i.e. searches into carefully compiled collections of electronic

data. A recent example is Bednarek's discussion of emotion talk in conversation, news reportage, fiction, and academic discourse (2008).

The most recent academic discussion related to happiness has concerned melancholy, and Eric G. Wilson, for example, has gained much attention with his book *Against Happiness – in Praise of Melancholy* (2008). For Wilson melancholy is not apathy but a dynamic state, and he considers the present-day to be unhealthily obsessed with (what he calls) happiness and the mania for positivity. This picture, however, is itself one-sided. For instance, Pessi's contribution in this volume clearly shows that it is not manic positivity, extreme happiness, nor ecstasy that people search for but rather a balance of joy and sorrow, happiness and melancholy. Philosophy supports empirical findings here: an Aristotelian 'happy individual' can experience sorrow although he is not totally defeated by it. Thus, the dynamics of melancholy versus happiness remain.

The contents of this volume go back to an interdisciplinary colloquium "Happiness: Cognition, Experience, Language" that was organized at the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, University of Helsinki, in October 2006. The volume receives its title from one of its editors, philosopher Mikko Salmela, who suggests that in emotions, cognition typically comes first, followed by experience, then by language. As the subtitle "Cognition, Experience, Language" suggests, the volume purports to say something about each.

Juha Sihvola begins the section on cognition discusses happiness in ancient philosophy with no smaller aim than to discuss the ultimate goal of human lives. Salmela continues on the nature of joy, but from a different perspective, arguing that the logical structure of joy is assertoric rather than expressive, and that the same applies to many other emotions. In short, this means that emotions make purportedly warranted claims about the world, in addition to expressing how we feel.

The experience of happiness is then charted by Markku Ojanen, who asks if its level can be raised, and by Anne Birgitta Pessi, whose respondents answered the question what for them constitutes happiness and the good life. Ojanen, after surveying a great deal of research, arrives at rather practical advice on the basis of reports on subjective well-being, whereas Pessi's empirically-based research builds a new model – 'an arrow towards the good life' - that involves relationships, balance, health, secure income, fulfilling oneself, values and spirituality, and work and leisure. Sari Kivistö's article deals with early modern treatises on the facial expression of happiness, laughter in particular, suggesting reasons why it is good to live in "temperate gaiety" rather than revel in unbridled and excessive joy.

Finally, language is discussed in articles by Hans-Jürgen Diller, Zoltán Kövecses and Heli Tissari, who all focus on the English language. Diller touches on the theme

of shifts in notions of happiness, investigating the meaning of the adjective *happy* in Middle and Modern English, his data for the latter consisting of literary prose from the 18th and 19th centuries. Kövecses, who is famous for his research on emotion concepts within cognitive linguistic circles (e.g. Kövecses 1990; 2000), complements his previous findings on happiness by discussing the conceptual structure of happiness (Kövecses 1991, cf. Salmela in this volume). Employing Kövecses's research on emotions as a starting point (2000), Tissari analyses words for happiness in 17th- to 20th-century texts.

Readers interested in particular aspects of happiness may well pick and choose an article they wish to read, but it certainly pays to dare a trip to a less familiar thematic area and to read more. The articles negotiate happiness and complement each other in many different ways, not all of which are self-evident to begin with. To give a couple of examples, health is a theme which appears in Ojanen's advice on how to raise one's subjective well-being, Sihvola's article on ancient philosophy, Tissari's account of concepts associated with happiness, and Pessi's new arrow model, while Kövecses suggests that happiness may be conceptualized in terms of insanity and disease, and Kivistö reminds us that laughter may sometimes be dangerous to one's health. Salmela's and, in particular, Sihvola's discussions complement virtue as an element of happiness in most of the articles.

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