

## WHAT DO WE WANT FROM A THEORY OF HAPPINESS?

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**ABSTRACT:** I defend a methodology for theorizing about happiness. I reject three methods: conceptual analysis; scientific naturalism; and the “pure normative adequacy” approach, where the best conception of happiness is the one that best fills a role in moral theory. The concept of happiness is a folk notion employed by laypersons who have various practical interests in the matter, and theories of happiness should respect this fact. I identify four such interests in broad terms and then argue for a set of desiderata that theories of happiness ought to satisfy. The theory of happiness falls within the province of ethics. It should, however, be viewed as autonomous and not merely secondary to moral theory.

Keywords: happiness, well-being, methodology, conceptual analysis, ethics, life satisfaction.

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*Happiness serves hardly any other purpose than to make unhappiness possible.*

– Marcel Proust

### 1. Introduction

Settling questions about the nature of happiness probably strikes more than a few philosophers as an exercise in futility. Indeed, there may be no question philosophers enjoy hearing *less* than “What do you mean by ‘happiness’?” Everyone seems to have his or her own definition of happiness, and worse, everyone seems entitled to it.<sup>1</sup> The problem, it seems, is that we lack any satisfactory answer to the question of how we are to tell a good theory of happiness from a bad one. On what grounds do we say that one conception is superior to another? As someone helpfully put it to me: How are we supposed to play this game?<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For invaluable discussion on the topics covered in this article, I wish to thank Bengt Brülde, Ruth Chang, Jerry Fodor, Douglas Husak, Barry Loewer, and L. W. Sumner.

<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Jerry Fodor for this. His comments on a related essay largely stimulated me to write this one.

Traditionally we play the game like this: prefer whichever conception best matches the ordinary concept, or the meaning of the ordinary language term. This is, more or less, the method of conceptual or linguistic analysis, and it has not proven wildly successful in this realm.<sup>3</sup> The trouble is – as it often is with analysis – that the ordinary concept of happiness appears to be neither well defined nor univocal. Indeed, there may be no “the” ordinary concept, but perhaps several, even many. Thus people’s intuitions vary widely: one person’s intuitions may favor identifying happiness with, say, having an attitude of being satisfied with one’s life as a whole; while someone else may find it equally plausible to identify happiness with something less cognitive – say, having a generally positive emotional state. Still others may feel the pull of both views, or perhaps their intuitions favor some other theory. How do we choose?

We can simplify things by confining our inquiry to the purely psychological uses of ‘happiness’ that dominate contemporary discussion, at least in the vernacular. Here the concern is with happiness understood as a typically long-term psychological condition – not the acute emotion of feeling happy, but rather whatever it is that concerns us when we talk of someone’s *being* happy these days. Whatever it is, if there is indeed one thing here, it is pretty clearly psychological. Call this *psychological happiness*. Philosophers sometimes use ‘happiness’ differently, notably to denote the kind of well-being or flourishing that in the ancient Greek of Aristotle and Plato went by the name of *eudaimonia*.<sup>4</sup> Call this condition *prudential happiness*. There is some debate over whether this sort of happiness requires something more than a state of mind; that depends on the nature of well-being. The theorist of prudential happiness stipulates at the outset that happiness is valuable, a kind of well-being, and then asks whether this condition is merely a state of mind. The theorist of psychological happiness, on the other hand, stipulates that happiness is just a state of mind and wonders what *sort* of psychological state it is. Having answered this question, we may then ask how valuable this state is. Perhaps it is not valuable at all.

However, restricting ourselves to psychological happiness – henceforth, just happiness – does little to resolve the initial worry. Even here intuitions clash, or are unclear. It is quite plausible that the relevant uses of ‘happiness’ refer sometimes to this state of mind, sometimes to that, and often don’t refer unequivocally to any particular state. It is plausible, in short, that there is more than one psychological state within the

<sup>3</sup> For a review of most of the literature of this sort, see Den Uyl and Machan 1983. With a few exceptions, philosophers pretty much gave up on the theory of happiness after this.

<sup>4</sup> For more on the different things called happiness, see my 2000 and 2001a.

extension of 'happiness', as used in the long-term psychological "sense."<sup>5</sup> Where confusion reigns as much as it does in the case of happiness, such results should not surprise us.

This state of affairs is unfortunate. If the notion is indeed as confused as it seems to be, shouldn't we simply give up on theorizing about happiness and admit that there *is no* saying what, exactly, happiness is? Moreover, happiness presumably matters for philosophy as a concern for ethical theory. Yet one might wonder why ethical theorists ought to care about *psychological* happiness. Whatever it is, it probably isn't as important as whatever Aristotle was talking about: there is more to the good life, or even well-being, than simply being happy. Maybe the nature of happiness isn't a concern for ethics at all: it is, like the natures of other psychological states, a question for psychology or the philosophy of mind. And perhaps not a very important question at that. In short, it is clear neither that the theory of happiness can yield definite answers nor that we particularly need such answers.

I think both worries are unfounded and rest ultimately on a mistaken assumption that theorizing about happiness can only be about elucidating the folk notion. If that notion is confused, we must remain silent. I want to suggest that we ought not to choose a theory of happiness solely on intuitive grounds: we should consider what's at *stake* in choosing one theory over another. Are there principled grounds for preferring one theory over others? I shall argue that there are, and that focusing on them can allow us to make progress in the theory of happiness. The character of these grounds will make it clear that inquiry into the nature of happiness does indeed fall within the purview of ethical theory, and that such inquiry *does* matter.

## 2. Prudential Psychology and the Autonomous Study of Happiness

Sadly, no one to my knowledge has explicitly taken up the question of what substantive basis there could be for selecting a theory of happiness. But the hedonistic utilitarians may have implicitly offered an answer: happiness is whatever psychological state occupies a certain role in the utilitarian moral theory – namely, the role of utility. Put this way, it is natural that we should conceive of happiness in a hedonistic manner: as equivalent to a subject's balance of pleasure over displeasure. If any psychological state could possibly fill the role of utility, then pleasure is a reasonable candidate. Here, then, is one principled method for deciding on a theory of happiness. It also makes manifest the relevance of happiness for ethics.

<sup>5</sup> For convenience, I shall often write as if there is a single folk concept of psychological happiness. Perhaps there isn't; there does not, at any rate, seem to be a single *well-defined* concept.

This notion does indeed concern psychological, and not prudential, happiness: well-being is not built into the *meaning* of the term but rather used as a (sole or overriding) criterion for ranking competing accounts. It is possible that hedonistic utilitarians have not used 'happiness' in the psychological sense. Suppose, for instance, Mill were persuaded that radical deception, such as that of a brain in a vat, is incompatible with well-being. If he then rejected happiness as the measure of utility, we could conclude that he indeed used 'happiness' in the psychological sense. If he simply revised his conception of happiness to include states of the world as well as states of mind, we would know that he was talking about prudential happiness. I believe that some hedonistic utilitarians, such as Bentham, were indeed concerned with psychological happiness, but I shall not defend this claim here. Those (if any) who *were* talking about psychological happiness may not have used principled grounds of the kind I suggested to arrive at their views; they may instead have adopted hedonism simply because they thought it the best analysis of the ordinary concept of happiness. But let's assume that some utilitarians have indeed relied on principled grounds of the type in question.

Are these the *right* grounds? Is this how we should choose a theory of happiness – namely, according to its ability to fill a certain role in moral theory? It is not. Not because hedonistic utilitarianism is false, but because the notion of happiness is not a theoretical concept at all. It is not simply up for grabs for moral theorists to use as they please. HAPPINESS is first and foremost a folk psychological concept employed by ordinary people trying to satisfy their own practical interests in leading good lives. Treating it as a purely technical notion risks leaving us with a conception of happiness that no one would recognize as such. We are of course free to use words however we wish. But 'happiness' is one of the central terms in our practical vocabulary. Co-opting it for theoretical purposes is liable to sow considerable confusion unless the theoretical notion turns out, coincidentally, to fit closely with the folk notion. Moreover, it leaves completely unanswered the question of what *happiness* – what 'happiness' really refers to – is.

Happiness is not, then, something that fills any particular role in moral theory. Or at least we cannot say *in advance* what role it fills. We shall first need to know what it is.<sup>6</sup> And we cannot rule out the possibility that happiness will not, when all is said and done, prove to be important at all. This means that we cannot yet specify why, exactly, happiness matters for ethics. But we can say this: understanding what happiness is patently *does* matter for ethics. At least it does if ethics is considered to be in the business of answering Socrates's question, How ought we to live? Since

<sup>6</sup> The ability of a given conception of happiness to occupy a certain theoretical role may, as I later point out, guide our selection of a theory to some extent. But this will be just one of a number of defeasible desiderata – and not a particularly important one either.

ethical theorists have been more than happy to claim responsibility for answering it, this seems a fair bet. Happiness matters for ethics for no other reason than that most people believe it to be extremely important, to be high on the list of things that are most important in life. Indeed, it probably ranks in the popular imagination only beneath being a morally good person. We would be derelict in our duty as ethical theorists if we simply ignored the question of what this supposedly crucial good is, and whether it is as good as virtually everyone seems to think. The worst that can happen is that we discover happiness to be badly overrated.

Inquiry into happiness ought to be an autonomous line of research in ethics. It should not be held hostage to the needs of moral theory. Happiness is worth studying in its own right. (Despair-loving cranks can, incidentally, regard most of the points made in this essay as applying equally, *mutatis mutandis*, to unhappiness. I focus on happiness purely for expository convenience.)

More generally, any serious ethics ought to study those aspects of our psychology that matter, or seem to matter, for well-being, and it ought to consider them worthy of sustained attention quite independently of their relation to moral theory. Any serious ethics, in short, ought to include a robust psychology of well-being. Call it a *prudential psychology*, à la moral psychology. Any comprehensive ethical theory that fails to incorporate a reasonably well-developed prudential psychology is radically incomplete, and can hardly be taken seriously as a full-blooded answer to Socrates's question. (Or shall we suppose that we can have anything like an adequate understanding of the good life without understanding what states of mind contribute to human welfare and how?) I would venture that any prudential psychology that lacks a credible account of happiness, or at least a serviceable substitute, is not in any sense "reasonably well-developed." (Not only because happiness is thought so important for well-being but also because the various theories of happiness pretty much run the gamut of putatively important mental states. Sorting through these should therefore teach us a lot about the field as a whole.)

### 3. Motivating Our Choice of Desiderata

#### 3.1 Theories of Happiness

We need a method for theorizing about happiness; we need to know what the rules of the game are. But first we need some idea of what our interest in happiness is. Then we might come to some understanding of what the rules should be. To set the stage I shall briefly describe the main theories on offer, followed by a list of paradigmatic cases of happiness and unhappiness.

There are three basic views of happiness, only two of which have received significant attention in the philosophical literature. (These are really families of closely related views, but I treat them as single accounts

for convenience.) We have already encountered the first, *hedonism*. This view reduces happiness to subjects' balance of pleasure over displeasure: to be happy is to experience, on the whole, a majority of pleasure.<sup>7</sup> The second theory identifies happiness instead with subjects' attitudes toward their lives: to be happy is to have a favorable attitude toward one's life as a whole, either over its entirety or just some limited period of time. This is, naturally enough, the *life-satisfaction* view.<sup>8</sup> A third view, the *affective-state* theory, identifies happiness with subjects' overall emotional states, or perhaps some important part thereof. Affective-state accounts seem to be popular among empirical researchers (Cummins 1998), but it is hard to tell, because they do not clearly distinguish such views from hedonism.

Other views exist, most notably *hybrid* accounts of various sorts. These typically conjoin life-satisfaction and hedonistic or affective-state theories, along perhaps with such other factors as satisfaction with various life domains. The best-known version of such a theory employs the psychological notion of *subjective well-being*.<sup>9</sup> Finally, a few theorists

<sup>7</sup> Hedonism about (psychological) happiness is not to be confused with other, better-known varieties of hedonism: e.g., psychological hedonism, which claims that all action aims at pleasure; and ethical hedonism, which holds that all action *ought* to aim at pleasure. Philosophers who appear to accept hedonism about psychological happiness include, among many others, such historical thinkers as Bentham, Locke, and Sidgwick; and more recently, Brandt (1959; 1979; 1989; 1992); Campbell (1973); Carson (1978a; 1978b; 1979; 1981); Davis (1981b; 1981a); Ebenstein (1991); Griffin (1979; 1986); Mayerfeld (1996; 1999); Sen (1987); Sprigge (1987; 1991); and Wilson (1968). Casual references to happiness in the philosophical literature frequently assume it to be hedonistic. Hedonism has adherents in psychology as well, such as Allen Parducci (1995) and Daniel Kahneman (1999).

<sup>8</sup> Philosophical proponents of life-satisfaction theories (of psychological happiness) appear to include Barrow (1980; 1991); Benditt (1974; 1978); Montague (1967); Rescher (1972; 1980); Telfer (1980); and Von Wright (1936). Probably also Nozick (1989), though it is not clear whether he is concerned with psychological happiness. Casual references elsewhere frequently assume a life-satisfaction view. Empirical researchers often equate life satisfaction and happiness, though it is more common for them to equate happiness with affective states or the notion of subjective well-being. (Cf. Cummins [1998].) Alex Michalos has long maintained that life satisfaction and happiness are distinct, with happiness taking something like an affective-state form (Michalos 1980). Subjective well-being may itself be regarded as a kind of life-satisfaction theory, depending on how we conceive of the two things. For instance, subjective well-being is often described as a person's evaluation of his or her life, incorporating affect, global attitudes, and domain satisfactions (e.g., Diener, Suh, et al. 1999, and Diener and Diener 1998). Ruut Veenhoven (1984; 1997) is one of the more prominent exponents of the life-satisfaction view in the social sciences.

<sup>9</sup> L.W. Sumner is one philosopher who appears to defend this sort of view of happiness (1996), though he describes it as a life-satisfaction theory. (As I noted in an earlier footnote, subjective well-being might itself be regarded as a kind of life satisfaction.) It is not entirely clear who else endorses it, since empirical researchers who use 'happiness' and 'subjective well-being' interchangeably often seem to construe happiness differently in other places. Diener is one prominent psychologist who frequently identifies happiness with subjective well-being (e.g., his 1998), but like many researchers he is not particularly committed to the identification. For the most part, empirical researchers have (wisely) avoided taking a firm stand on the definition of happiness.

have advocated what we may call *perceived desire satisfaction* accounts.<sup>10</sup> These views identify happiness with believing that enough of one's (important) desires are satisfied.

### 3.2 *The Paradigm Cases*

Happiness and unhappiness come in many forms. To get everybody on the same page, it is worth noting a few of them; call these the "paradigm cases." Starting with the negative cases, we find that someone might, over a period of time, be depressed, despondent, beset with anxiety, "stressed out," seething with rage, overwhelmed by fear, worried sick, alienated, heartbroken, grief stricken, lonely, in low spirits, burdened with shame, overcome with boredom, deeply dissatisfied with life, haunted by a sense of dread or by feelings of emptiness, or simply melancholy. A more fortunate individual might, by contrast, be in high spirits, joyful, exhilarated, elated, jubilant, carefree, deeply contented, at peace, deeply satisfied or pleased with her life, or blessed with a profound sense of fulfillment or well-being.

Persons of the former sort we naturally deem *unhappy*, while those of the latter we call *happy*. (We need not insist that each description denotes a condition that is sufficient for being happy or unhappy; all that matters is that these examples capture central features of happiness and unhappiness in some of their more common forms.) We are free to add other examples to the list, but I take it to be uncontroversial that all or most of these cases involve happiness or unhappiness. Any theory that purports to explicate the nature of happiness as we ordinarily understand it had better comport reasonably well with these cases or, barring that, explain why it need not do so.

### 3.3 *How Not to Give a Theory of Happiness, Continued*

What shall be our method? I have already rejected one approach: prefer whichever notion best fills the appropriate role in moral theory (call this the "pure normative adequacy" method).<sup>11</sup> A second approach – "scientific naturalism" – might seem more promising, and it is certainly fashionable these days: happiness is whatever scientific discovery reveals it to be. That is, we ought to defer to our best scientific theories of happiness to determine what happiness is. Happiness is a naturalistic phenomenon, and we would be foolish to deny that empirical discoveries

<sup>10</sup> David Gauthier (1967) appears to hold such a view, and Wayne Davis (1981b; 1981a) defends this sort of account under the rubric of hedonism (he defines pleasure in terms of beliefs about desire satisfaction).

<sup>11</sup> See Sumner (1996) on normative adequacy.

about human psychology could teach us something about its nature. In fact some of my arguments elsewhere draw heavily on such work. But scientific naturalism won't work for happiness: the pretheoretical notion is too ill-defined and covers too much psychological ground for empirical research alone to settle the question of what happiness is. We cannot yet identify any single thing whose essence empirical researchers might hope to discover. Take just two of the candidate theories before us: the hedonistic and life-satisfaction views. Pleasures and global life attitudes are awfully different things. What kind of empirical study could *possibly* tell us which account is correct? One might as well try performing an experiment to determine whether water is H<sub>2</sub>O or a kind of bicycle. We need at least a vague notion of what aspect of our psychology we are talking about before scientific inquiry can reveal its nature.

Scientific naturalism faces another, more serious problem: the concept of happiness is, as I noted earlier, a folk notion; 'happiness' is not a technical term for theorists to use as they please. Happiness is primarily a matter of *practical* concern for ordinary people trying to lead good lives. Empirical researchers are no more entitled to co-opt it for their parochial purposes than moral theorists are. And it is quite possible that, left to their own devices, empirical researchers would arrive at a conception of happiness that is not well suited to dealing with the practical concerns of laypersons. Suppose, for instance, that certain states of particular importance for well-being were essentially unmeasurable. We might expect scientific theorists to focus attention in more fruitful directions, perhaps conceiving of happiness in terms that are better suited for their instruments. The resulting conception of happiness might do far less to address laypersons' practical interests than an alternative that focuses on the unmeasurable states.

Consider also the interest that psychologists have in explaining why the human mind works the way it does. One way of satisfying this interest would be to identify types of mental states from an evolutionary perspective, according to their phylogenetic histories. Thus we might identify happiness with a certain class of human mental states along with their homologues in other species (homologues are features derived from some common ancestor).<sup>12</sup> The concept of happiness would thus fail to apply to any creatures without homologous states, however structurally similar their psychological make-up might be. So long as we never encounter such creatures, this may not pose much of a practical difficulty. But the fact that this is even a possibility suggests that something has gone wrong. From the practical standpoint of ordinary people, and from the standpoint of prudential psychology, the fact that two states are, or are not, homologous is irrelevant. Pain stinks whatever its evolutionary

<sup>12</sup> This proposal is analogous to the approach Paul Griffiths takes toward the emotions (1997).



origins. The fact is, laypersons don't much care how the mind got the way it is. They don't care what creature, or creatures, started the whole thing. They care how the mind *is*, specifically in respects that make a difference to their lives. My point is not to deny that happiness should ultimately be distinguished phylogenetically; perhaps it should, despite the foregoing considerations (though I am skeptical).<sup>13</sup> My point is rather to illustrate how scientific inquiry can be driven by considerations that have very little to do with the practical interests of laypersons. The result may be a theory that does little to address those interests.

### 3.4 *A Better Way*

Scientific naturalism is unsatisfactory. Does this mean that we are reduced to no more principled a method than that of analyzing the folk notion of happiness? No: though the folk notion is not up for grabs, it does not appear to refer unequivocally to any particular psychological category, as I noted earlier. Rather, the folk concept appears to refer variously to different things, often conflating different psychological categories. I suspect this results partly from simple ignorance about what there is in this region of our psychology,<sup>14</sup> and partly from a (mistaken) sense that the various states 'happiness' might be thought to denote are not importantly different from one another. Thus we do not need to be discriminating in thinking and talking about this realm of our psychology; for all intents and purposes, such states as pleasure and life satisfaction are interchangeable. As a result of such deficiencies in folk psychology there will surely be more than one psychological state we can get away with calling happiness, and intuitions are bound to differ as to which is most credible. The method of analysis either will not work at all, or it will likely leave us with several happiness concepts, with no means of choosing among them.

That said, we can still ask which of the states within the extension of the unreformed term are most *important*. What conception of happiness would best perform the work we use the notion to do? The question "What is happiness?" becomes "How is happiness best understood given

<sup>13</sup> My own view is that different taxonomies are appropriate for different purposes. A phylogenetic taxonomy is surely worthwhile for some purposes but only dubiously sufficient for all. Thus, for instance, theorists in prudential psychology may wish to classify together all states that are phenomenally identical with what we call pain (and perhaps similar in some other ways of practical significance), even if they have different adaptive-historical explanations.

<sup>14</sup> This ignorance is really quite profound, and not just among the folk. For an illustration, see my 2001a and 2002. There I argue that an adequate understanding of happiness requires us to draw a number of important new distinctions among affective states, and I suggest that we may need to posit two new classes of emotional states – "mood bases" and "thymic states."

our interests in the matter?”<sup>15</sup> Should more than one conception prove more or less equally satisfactory, we may wish to distinguish further senses of the term. But there may well be – and I believe there is – a core psychological kind<sup>16</sup> that clearly outstrips the alternatives both in importance and in its fit with the folk notion. Call the concept denoting this kind, if there is one, the *philosophically primary* notion of happiness.<sup>17</sup> This will almost certainly deviate from the folk notion, but only to a point. The aim is, after all, to find a concept that does what the folk concept should have done in the first place. (Incidentally, we might adopt this sort of aim with respect to notions quite unrelated to that of happiness. The methodology sketched in this essay could surely be adapted to address very different philosophical issues – such as, perhaps, the question of what knowledge is. Those uninterested in happiness may still find something of use here.)

To find the desired concept, we shall need to consider the extent to which the various states that ‘happiness’ might denote can satisfy the interests we have in happiness. But first we shall need to discover what our interests in the matter are.

### 3.5 *Why We Care about Happiness*

So what are our interests in the phenomenon involved in the paradigm cases, in happiness? Consider how we employ the notion of happiness, what we use it to do. Proust notwithstanding, the concept does have its uses: there are at least four broad functions that the notion performs in ordinary practice. To begin with, we often appeal to considerations of happiness when *deliberating* about important decisions. Someone trying to decide on an occupation, for instance, will very often ask which option would prove best with respect to happiness: Will I be happier as a teacher or a lawyer? Similar questions arise about other important choices – whether to marry or go to college, how to raise a child, whether to move to a distant place, and so on. Indeed, people often take the impact of their

<sup>15</sup> For ease of exposition I shall sometimes use the former question as shorthand for the latter. Perhaps the two questions are equivalent; after all, *lots* of ordinary-language terms surely have problematical references in much the same way (though probably not, for the most part, to the same extent). But this involves difficult semantic and metaphysical questions about which I would prefer to remain silent. I am content to allow that, strictly speaking, the question “What is happiness?” has no philosophically interesting answer.

<sup>16</sup> I use terms like ‘kind’ and ‘category’ very loosely here, with no particular metaphysical commitments in mind. For instance, the relevant psychological kinds may have no place in scientific, versus folk, psychology. I talk of psychological kinds only to distinguish the present subject matter from evaluative notions (kinds), such as prudential happiness. Even if well-being consists solely in the psychological state of pleasure, well-being is still an evaluative, and not a psychological, kind.

<sup>17</sup> I borrow the term *philosophically primary* from L. W. Sumner (1996).

choices on their own or others' happiness to be the most important, or even the only, factor in their decisions (at least where the decision is significant – people rarely think about happiness when deciding what to order for dinner). Policymakers likewise often consider the impact of proposed state actions on the happiness of their constituencies (though not often enough – perhaps for the very reason that happiness is currently so little understood).

Second, we advert to happiness in *evaluating* or assessing our own or others' conditions, typically to find out or report on how well someone is doing in an important respect. Thus concerned parents inquire as to whether their children are happy or unhappy. And often the first thing we wish to learn about our friends after a long separation is whether or not they are happy. Similarly, if asked how we are doing, we frequently reply by noting how happy or unhappy we are. Interestingly, a credible report of happiness or unhappiness is often if not typically taken to be sufficient grounds for concluding that someone is, or is not, doing well on the whole. (I have suggested that happiness actually serves as a proxy for well-being in ordinary practice [2001a; 2001c].)

Many times we appear to be concerned with happiness even when we do not explicitly refer to it as such. To say that one is depressed, for instance, is simply a way of saying that one is particularly unhappy (in a certain way). Indeed, it may well be that *most* talk about happiness does not use words like 'happy' and 'unhappy'. This makes sense: if being depressed is one way of being unhappy, then we should expect some reports of unhappiness to employ the more specific language of depression. It is, after all, more informative than a blank assertion of unhappiness. But the broader category of interest here is nonetheless that of happiness: the report of being depressed could just as well have been an answer to an explicit query about how happy one is. More broadly, the fact that there are many ways of being happy or unhappy indicates that *reports* concerning happiness will explicitly employ the vocabulary of happiness only when we lack sufficient information to apply more specific terminology, or where we are aggregating the happiness of multiple individuals who are each happy or unhappy in different ways. *Queries* about happiness, on the other hand, should tend to rely more on the more general terms, because in such cases we typically don't know in what manner someone will be happy or unhappy. Explicit talk of happiness should also be more common in *deliberation*, again because we tend to be unsure about how exactly our options will have an impact on our happiness. The moral of all this is that we should not be misled by the frequency or infrequency of the use of 'happiness' and its cognates in ordinary language: our interest in the subject of happiness, it appears, far outstrips our actual use of its terminology.

The third function of the concept of happiness is to aid us in *prediction*. Happiness appears to have deep and far-reaching effects on

our psychology and behavior – hence, in great part, our profound interest in the matter. If this is right, then one's being happy or unhappy should license a wide range of predictions. For example, our interest in the happiness of our family, friends, and acquaintances may not be entirely altruistic: happy people are a lot more fun to be around than unhappy ones (unless, that is, *you* are unhappy). They may also be more useful in various ways – consider the enervating stupor of the depressed person, or contrast the repellent effects of a mopey companion when you are seeking romantic encounters with the attractive powers of a high-spirited friend (who is, one hopes, not so appealing as to subvert one's own prospects). And if we discover that our friends are deeply unhappy, we can predict that they will be less pleasant and useful companions than if were they happy. Such predictions appear to carry forward well into the future: knowing that a friend is unhappy, I can reasonably predict that an outing planned to take place in a week, two weeks, or perhaps even a month will be less agreeable than I would prefer. Of course, my friend can make exactly those predictions herself, and may rue the fact that she will probably sour the occasion with her foul disposition. More salient to her purposes, however, is that she can expect her experience to be relatively unpleasant for the near future.

These sorts of predictions reflect the fact that happiness has a certain *inertia*: people who are happy or unhappy tend to stay that way for some time. This holds even where the events that elicited the happiness have passed. Thus, receiving an award may make one happy, even if only for a while, and one of the nice things about this is that the hedonic payoff does not simply vanish the moment the ceremony ends, or even when one stops thinking about the prize. It persists – perhaps for just an hour, maybe for a few days. And so long as it lasts, it tends to color whatever else one does. The happiness generated by winning a prize may lessen the drudgery of going back to work – may even make a normally unpleasant activity pleasant. Contrast this with the typical experience of eating an apple. The experience may be pleasant, but the hedonic payoff typically ends when the eating is done. Unless the apple is pretty extraordinary, it will have little or no bearing on the quality of one's subsequent activities – certainly nothing like the effect had by the award-generated happiness. Knowing that an event will increase happiness or unhappiness enables us to predict not only what our experience of that event will be like but also what our experience will be like for some time *after* the event. Happiness licenses predictions that other goods do not, and this adds to its significance for us.

Unsurprisingly, happiness also has uses in *explanation*, and this is the last role I shall discuss. For instance, that someone is unhappy may explain why he keeps trying to effect major changes in his life – changing jobs, trying out new religions, moving out of state, and so forth. We can also explain patterns in individuals' emotions and behavior, or particular

emotions and behaviors, by reference to facts about happiness or unhappiness. Why has Nell been smiling so much lately? No particular reason, she's just happy. Sometimes the best explanation of a person's inordinate joy over a small gift is that he is happy; of someone's present bad mood, that she is unhappy these days. Puzzled over a friend's inexplicably nasty remark, a person may find some relief in the discovery that the comment reflects no personal animosity, just the friend's general unhappiness. Similarly, the fact that a relation has not written for a long time may simply reflect that he is unhappy. Happiness can also be used to explain the hedonic quality of subjects' experience and their enjoyment of various activities. Why has Nell's experience been so pleasant lately? She even seems to be having fun doing her taxes. Did she win the lottery or something? No: she is just happy, and her happiness causes her to take more pleasure in things than usual.

The roles of evaluation, and particularly deliberation, are more important than those of prediction and explanation. But the notion of happiness appears to perform all of these functions. This is why we care about it. A good theory of happiness ought to respect this fact. I now wish to argue, based on the foregoing interests, that there are at least seven constraints on theories of happiness. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, and it focuses only on the most interesting desiderata. None of them, save perhaps the first, is absolute: these are defeasible criteria; the best theory of happiness will go farther toward satisfying them than the alternatives. In short, the desiderata are:

1. Descriptive adequacy
2. Practical and theoretical utility
3. Prudential value
4. Ubiquity
5. Causal depth
6. Efficiency
7. Principled unity

## 4. The Desiderata

### 4.1 *Descriptive Adequacy*

This desideratum and the next are the most basic and general of the seven; the others derive from them. I borrow the notion of descriptive adequacy from L. W. Sumner (1996). The idea is that a conception of happiness should, at a minimum, be recognizable as such. It should concern something we can at least get away with calling happiness without butchering the language. Ideally, a theory will provide a close fit with our considered intuitions about happiness – at least to the extent that these are relatively uniform – and generate few or no serious

counterexamples. More broadly, it should, as Sumner would put it, comport with our experience of happiness. It should, shall we say, “ring true.”

This requirement is flexible, but only up to a point. A theory that flouts too many strong intuitions about happiness risks changing the subject. At a certain point we cease to be talking about anything recognizable as happiness at all. We therefore cease to have a theory of happiness and have instead a theory of something else. We may indeed wish to change the subject and talk about something else when all is said and done, but first we need to know what *happiness* could be.

I have already argued that there probably is no single well-defined concept behind ordinary usage of ‘happiness’ in its psychological sense(s). But from this it hardly follows that the notion of happiness is free for the taking. The ordinary notion of happiness is not all chaos, and I believe that a sustained examination of the different theories of happiness will reveal far more order than we might have expected. While any credible account is going to be to some extent revisionary, there are important limits to how much we can revise.

#### 4.2 *Practical and Theoretical Utility*

Call this desideratum “utility” for short. This is just the idea that we should prefer a conception of happiness that vindicates our profound interest in the matter, that best enables us to satisfy our practical and theoretical purposes. Given the status of HAPPINESS as a folk psychological concept, the practical purposes of laypersons take precedence.<sup>18</sup> But theoretical purposes, especially those of value theorists but also those of scientists, may count as well. Thus hedonistic utilitarians can legitimately appeal to the need for a criterion of utility. It’s just that this need won’t carry anything like the weight it would on a pure normative adequacy approach.

This is a highly generic desideratum. The remaining criteria are mostly more specific applications of it (though descriptive adequacy also plays a role in most of them). But it is worth distinguishing separately – partly to make its role explicit, and partly because we may later discover important aspects of utility other than those defended here.

#### 4.3 *Prudential Value*

Happiness should prove to have tremendous prudential value. It should in fact be *central* to well-being – high on the list of things that are most important to human welfare. That is, after all, largely why we place so

<sup>18</sup> Those of policymakers are also important, but to a lesser degree.

much importance on it in our deliberations and evaluations of individuals' conditions. People frequently organize their lives around what they think will make them happy. This is not to say that being happy must be necessary for well-being, or that it must be sufficient. Perhaps it is, perhaps not. (In fact it is exceedingly unlikely that happiness could be sufficient for well-being, simply because it is stipulated to be a psychological state. Yet it is implausible, for well-known reasons, that any state of mind could suffice for well-being.) But happiness should be extremely important, and reliably so: being happy should, with few or no exceptions, be a pleasant or otherwise prudentially desirable condition.

At a minimum, happiness should be far more desirable prudentially than unhappiness. How happy one is should invariably make a big difference to one's welfare. Similarly, differences in happiness should typically be matched by comparable differences in well-being. Exceptions, if there are any, should be clearly unusual and explicable in ways that do not vitiate the importance we attach to happiness. (For example, they should be limited to atypical circumstances or to people with strange tastes or values.) For normal people who are normally situated, there should be no realistic prospect of being lastingly happy yet not being significantly better off for it. Conversely, being lastingly unhappy yet none the worse for it should not be a realistic possibility.

This need not beg the question for those who hold little stock in positive states of mind. For *unhappiness* is just as much our concern as happiness is, and it is questionable whether even a Nietzsche would desire a lifelong acquaintance with the extremes of unhappiness. Humans may not always seek happiness, but anyone who seeks out the most unpleasant forms of misery just for the sake of being miserable is nuts. That said, our theory of well-being can make a difference in choosing a theory of happiness. Someone who truly holds little stock in pleasure and freedom from suffering, for instance, may prefer a life-satisfaction account to hedonism. Those, if any, who value neither pleasure nor satisfaction may conclude that *no* descriptively adequate conception of happiness will satisfy the prudential value requirement.

We should not, then, stipulate that happiness must be valuable to some degree. Such a demand would put us in the entirely different business of theorizing about prudential happiness. Rather, the point is that, *ceteris paribus*, we should prefer a theory on which happiness turns out to have great prudential value to one on which it does not.

Happiness is an obvious candidate for a, perhaps *the*, central notion in prudential psychology. And prudential value, as I noted above, is largely why ordinary people care about happiness. It had, therefore, better fulfill the prudential value requirement, or we've got problems. At any rate, it is difficult to see how any descriptively adequate account of happiness could fail to satisfy this demand. Consider what we would think of a

theory of pleasure or emotion that left it a complete mystery why anyone should care about it. We would conclude that the theory must be false – not because pleasure and emotion are evaluative kinds, but simply because the idea that pleasure and emotion aren't at all important is incredible.

Is there any constraint on *how* happiness is to contribute to well-being? We should probably be more flexible about this, but descriptive adequacy suggests a couple of things. First, the value of happiness does not appear to be primarily, or at least straightforwardly, instrumental; we typically do not seek it as a means to something else, at least not in the obvious way that we seek money as a means to other things. Whatever value happiness has should stay very close by. Second, the most obvious reason for thinking happiness to be valuable is that it is presumably *pleasant* to be happy; what value it has at least appears to be mostly hedonic.<sup>19</sup> Perhaps this is not the case, but any theory that denies it should explain why, and further explain why happiness *is* valuable.

#### 4.4 Ubiquity

It is often observed that happiness comes in *degrees*: one can be more or less happy or unhappy, or somewhere in between. This is a very important property of happiness, and we should insist on it. But no one to my knowledge has developed this idea as fully as it deserves. It matters whether happiness comes in degrees, for the reason that the notion would otherwise not be very useful. People do sometimes talk of happiness as a purely ideal condition that one either attains or – more likely – does not, and this sort of talk is distressingly common. But from a practical standpoint utopian ideals aren't very important, particularly if we are using 'happiness' in a psychological and not a prudential sense. (If you're going to speculate about ideal conditions, why limit yourself to states of mind alone?) Precious few of us will attain perfect bliss no matter what we do. So why worry about it? A happiness that comes in degrees is far more interesting.

It is more interesting still if it is also, in its various degrees, *ubiquitous*. That is, happiness, unhappiness, and states in between should be widespread if not universal. The generic concept of happiness, where this also denotes states of unhappiness and those in between, should apply to most or all people most or all of the time. This is for the same reason we want happiness to come in degrees: the less often the notion applies, the less we ought to care about it. Suppose that the notion of happiness applied only rarely. Then what would be the point of troubling

<sup>19</sup> This is perfectly compatible with hedonism about happiness proving false: many things are valuable because pleasant without themselves being literally reducible to pleasant states of consciousness.



yourself over whether you would be happier as a teacher or a lawyer if, in all likelihood, the answer would be neither – not because it wouldn't make a major difference to your state of mind but simply because the concept of happiness probably won't apply to you in either case? No point at all. Similarly, policymakers need not concern themselves much with how their policies will affect the happiness of their constituencies: they probably won't, or the impact will be inconsequential. The problem is not the familiar one that happiness is elusive. Perhaps it is. The problem is rather that *happiness, unhappiness, and everything in-between is elusive* if ubiquity, or something close to it, fails to hold. Our best efforts may or may not lead us reliably to happiness. But we might at least have hoped that we could do *better or worse* with respect to happiness. (Compare the notion of health.)

Considerations of descriptive adequacy indicate that happiness is in fact ubiquitous: Who is not capable of being more or less happy or unhappy than he or she is now? You can't be more or less of something if you aren't on the scale at all (even at the zero point). (None of this is to say that there must be some determinate fact of the matter about precisely *how* happy or unhappy one is, or whether one is definitely happy, unhappy, or somewhere in-between. But there should, in the general case, at least be a *vague* fact of the matter.)

#### 4.5 Causal Depth

I noted earlier that happiness appears to have far-reaching consequences for a person's state of mind and behavior. Theories ought to respect this appearance, or explain why they need not if they do not. Causal depth, as I shall call it, has three aspects. First, happiness should be *productive*. That is, it should be prolific in its causal effects. Second, it ought to be *wide ranging* in its effects; its effects should not be limited to a narrow class of states. Third, it should be psychologically *deep*: it should affect one's state of mind at a very profound and basic level, in typically lasting ways, not simply in superficial and transient ways. (Recall my remarks about the inertia of happiness.)

The causal-depth requirement is warranted on grounds of descriptive adequacy alone: How could anything plausibly called happiness possibly fail to have these features? How could it turn out that happiness is psychologically superficial, or has few or very limited causal effects? There is a reason why people so frequently describe happiness as a phenomenon of the soul or spirit. But the causal-depth requirement also reflects considerations of utility: our ability to make the various predictions and explanations noted earlier has a lot to do with the causal depth of happiness. (As does its prudential value.)

#### 4.6 Efficiency

Efficiency reflects the role of happiness in ordinary deliberation and evaluation: people have to work with limited cognitive resources and information. Time and effort expended in deliberation or while assessing someone's condition have costs. Errors can also be costly. The less time and effort it takes for us to satisfy our epistemic requirements the better. Since there are lots of goods from which to choose, we must be wise in selecting which goods to consider in our deliberations and evaluations.<sup>20</sup> We ought to direct our attention toward *efficient* goods. Efficient goods, in the present sense, are those that provide an optimal balance of value and epistemic accessibility. Epistemic accessibility is a function of the amount of effort required to assess correctly the good in question (or at least to be accurate enough – practical purposes need not require truth). In the case of deliberation, this means accurately determining which option does best with respect to the value one seeks. For evaluation, it means correctly judging how well the subject did, or is doing, with respect to the relevant value.

We should prefer a conception of happiness that makes it a more efficient good over one that makes it less efficient. This desideratum has the consequence that we may find a less valuable good to be more important for practical purposes than a more valuable one – namely, if the latter is a relatively inefficient good. For example, we might consider making mood states a focus of our deliberations for certain important life decisions. Mood states are presumably valuable as sources of pleasure. But if it is pleasure that we ultimately care about, why not focus directly on pleasure instead? This would incorporate all the pleasures of mood states but add to these the physical and intellectual pleasures, along with the pleasures of minor emotions that do not involve mood. There are at least two ways in which pleasure may be a less efficient good than mood state. First, it might turn out that, over the long run, the non-mood-related pleasures are relatively unimportant; they do contribute to our quality of life, but their contribution is small compared to that of the mood-related pleasures. Second, mood states may be very reliable *indicators* of whatever hedonic value they do not incorporate. Even if non-mood-related pleasures are significant, it might still turn out that our mood states, besides being hedonically valuable themselves, correlate very strongly with our overall hedonic states.

Either of the two possibilities mentioned could have the following consequence: at least for the class of major life decisions in question, the best choice with respect to mood state will invariably be the best choice with respect to overall hedonic state. If so, then the question of efficiency boils down to this: *About which is it easier for us to deliberate successfully,*

<sup>20</sup> For convenience I shall focus on deliberation.

mood state or pleasure? Since the class of mood states appears to be significantly smaller than the class of pleasures, and since it is going to be important (given our suppositions) to get the mood states right in either case, the answer looks to be mood state. A focus on pleasure itself merely adds to our task without producing any real benefit. It is less efficient.

I defend an affective-state theory against hedonism partly on these grounds in another article (2001b). For current purposes it suffices to note that such a scenario is at least conceivable. Efficiency matters. (Efficiency also highlights an important difference between the theoretical interests of moral theorists and the practical interests of laypersons: the foregoing considerations might interest, say, utilitarians by suggesting how people ought to deliberate if they want to maximize utility [namely, by focusing on things other than utility itself]. But matters of efficiency will be irrelevant for deciding what ought to be the ultimate criterion of utility. Thus hedonistic utilitarians will quite rightly be unswayed by considerations of efficiency. But this is just a reason for doubting that a conception of utility will provide a satisfactory reconstruction of the notion of happiness. This is after all a concept that functions to serve exactly the sorts of interests for which efficiency is important.)

#### 4.7 *Principled Unity*

We need not demand that happiness be a natural kind in any strict sense. At any rate, I shall make no such demand, since talk of natural kinds invites controversy over metaphysical questions on which I would prefer to remain agnostic. We might understand natural kinds as the kinds that appear in the best scientific theories. But I have already argued that the concept of happiness is not a theoretical notion, and that it functions not to serve the explanatory purposes of scientists but to fulfill the practical interests of laypersons. Perhaps the notion of happiness does have a place in our best scientific psychology, but we need not insist on that. Maybe we shall want a practical psychology that employs kinds with little scientific utility.

Let's be permissive in the range of kinds we are willing to consider admitting into our ontology, at least in this early stage of our inquiry. But not *too* permissive: we don't want to admit just any conjunction of properties or states, however grue-some or otherwise unprincipled. We want our kinds, particularly happiness, to exhibit what I shall call, for lack of a better name, *principled unity*. There should be some decent explanation for incorporating into happiness whatever one's theory incorporates. Or, barring that, at least some prospect that such an explanation exists. (Such explanations may not be easy to discover.) And the explanation should be principled, not simply that our intuitions about happiness suggest that it incorporates everything but the kitchen sink.

Preferably, happiness should be a relatively natural kind, but only in the weak sense that it groups together psychological phenomena in a reasonably natural manner.

I suggest that the constituents of happiness should all answer to some common interest (or coherent set of related interests), particularly if they can vary independently of each other. Perhaps this interest is simply in denoting a relatively natural class of mental states. Or maybe it is in denoting those states that have a certain practical significance. What we want to avoid is circumstances like the following: suppose happiness incorporates states of type F, G, and H. Suppose further that these states are only loosely correlated, and that our interest in each type of state is radically different in nature and degree. Under these conditions, learning that, say, Americans are happier than the French would be relatively uninformative: for we won't know whether they are happier with respect to F, G, or H, or some combination. But a difference in F may be far more important than a difference in H; and a difference in G may be comparable in importance to a difference in F yet be completely different in its ramifications. We may thus have no idea how to respond to claims about happiness. Perhaps the right weighting scheme can overcome problems generated by differences in the magnitude of value. But what could make up for the difficulties caused by conjoining states with very different practical implications? The problem is that happiness, thus understood, fails to exhibit principled unity. (At least, it does so relative to a certain set of practical interests. Principled unity is an interest-relative notion; what counts as a usefully integrated kind depends on what your concerns are. Here the primary interests are the practical ones of laypersons. But a given kind may lack principled unity for these interests while exhibiting unity with respect to the theoretical interests of psychologists or moral theorists.)<sup>21</sup>

#### 4.8 *Summing up*

If we had to distill these desiderata into a single question, it would be this: *Is there any type of psychological state credibly called happiness that is central to well-being and otherwise important for the practical purposes of laypersons?* I noted earlier that there is likely to be more than one thing we can get away with calling happiness. Perhaps, for instance, both affective-state and life-satisfaction theories capture different aspects of the ordinary notion, or even different senses of 'happiness'. What then? In such a case we shall look to whichever account best satisfies the

<sup>21</sup> Subjective well-being may be one such kind, as I suggest in my 2001c. Its comprehensiveness and putative connection with measurable quantities may make it useful for the purposes of social psychologists and other theoreticians, while not doing much to address the interests of laypersons.

various desiderata. If we can plausibly do so, we should simply use 'happiness' to denote the referent of the winning account. (Maybe this theory can account for most or all of the intuitions that seem to favor the alternative.) If not, then we may wish to distinguish further senses of 'happiness' (perhaps "affective" vs. "attitudinal" happiness). But the philosophically primary notion will be the one denoted by the winning account. In the event of a tie or near tie, we shall presumably conclude that there are two philosophically interesting psychological states called 'happiness', neither of them primary. Various linguistic strategies might be employed to avoid confusion – including, perhaps, eliminating the term *happiness* from the philosophical lexicon (at least in its psychological senses).

Perhaps the best way to see how all this fits together is to look at an abbreviated example of the methodology in action. Consider the life-satisfaction theory. I believe this view has serious difficulties, mainly because the connection between our attitudes toward our lives and what would make them valuable appears to be quite tenuous.<sup>22</sup> On the one hand, we might think life satisfaction valuable because it *feels* good. Yet life satisfaction can diverge quite radically from the affective states that are supposed to make it feel good. Indeed, even *depressed* individuals can, in at least one important sense, be satisfied with their lives. (Perhaps Wittgenstein, who declared his life "wonderful" at his death, was an example of this.) Such cases do not seem to be particularly exotic: in one oft-cited study, 93 percent of subjects rated their lives positively, and only 3 percent of subjects assessed their lives negatively – not much higher than, and perhaps lower than, the rate of depression (Andrews and Withey 1976; Myers 2000).

It is possible to preserve prudential value by building the requisite affect into the attitude (à la a "sense of well-being"). But empirical research indicates that most people do not have such attitudes, positive or negative: when asked how satisfied they are with their lives, most people do not report on an existing attitude. Instead they construct something on the spot, based on whatever information comes most readily to mind (Schwarz and Strack 1999). This sort of on-the-fly construction does not seem at all compatible with the idea that people typically have the sorts of robust attitudes toward their lives that the view in question posits. If you have a sense of well-being – where this is a sense that your life is going well, and not just a matter of feeling good – you should not have to make something up when asked to report your level of satisfaction with your life. Most people, it seems, do not have such attitudes. Life satisfaction, so construed, violates the ubiquity constraint.

Perhaps more plausibly, life satisfaction might be considered valuable as an evaluation, specifically because of its relation to preference satisfaction:

<sup>22</sup> I develop these claims at greater length in my unpublished 2001c.

if you are satisfied with your life, your life is very likely going the way you want it to. But the connection between preference satisfaction and life satisfaction is substantially arbitrary: it is quite possible to be *more* satisfied with a *lower* level of desire satisfaction than a higher one, and this need involve no error at all. A major reason for this is that people do not have fixed standards concerning what level of success is “good enough.” Sometimes we adopt modest standards – for instance, comparing ourselves to the less fortunate – while at other times we are more demanding. And at any given time one could just as reasonably and authentically use any of a range of more or less demanding standards. The choice is substantially arbitrary. Thus the fact that one person is less satisfied than another, or that someone who was satisfied last year is dissatisfied now, says little about whether things are going worse in the one case versus the other. Maybe things are going *better*, but the standards that happen to be in use are more modest. The importance of life satisfaction in relation to preference satisfaction is, then, questionable.

Life-satisfaction theories may have other problems relating to the descriptive adequacy and causal-depth requirements. (Is it plausible to call a satisfied depressive happy? And does a mere disposition to construct judgments about one’s life – which suffices for satisfaction on one version of the theory – exhibit anything like the causal depth that happiness appears to have?) The most serious problem, on the whole, is that life satisfaction does not seem to be a particularly important life concern however we understand it. It is, it appears, badly overrated. We should look for a conception of happiness that better satisfies our desiderata, if there is one. I believe there is: the affective-state theory. But I shall not defend this claim here.

The foregoing sketch is not meant to be persuasive; the idea is merely to illustrate how we might go about choosing a theory of happiness.

## 5. Conclusion

I hope it is clear by now that there are real things at stake in the theory of happiness, that it is possible to engage in serious philosophical debate over substantive issues concerning the nature of happiness. We have important interests in happiness, and it matters which theory we accept: some conceptions will address those interests better than others. How could it be otherwise? How could there possibly fail to be anything at stake in choosing between conceptions as radically different as, say, hedonistic and life-satisfaction views? The idea that we ought only to seek an intuitively acceptable analysis of the folk concept of happiness, and cease inquiring if no such analysis is forthcoming, or if intuitions conflict, is really quite bizarre. But it seems to have been the operative assumption

behind most existing philosophical work on the subject, and to have a lot to do with the relative scarcity of such work.

The notion of happiness is not up for grabs. Theorists are not free to use 'happiness' however they please – or rather, they are no more free to do so for 'happiness' than for 'moral', 'good', or any other term that has an established, if imprecise, meaning. There are limits to how we can employ the term while still claiming to be talking about something recognizable as happiness. Because it is foremost a term in the practical vocabulary of laypersons, empirical researchers may not lay claim to it, use it as their theoretical purposes require, and then assert without argument that they are shedding light on the phenomenon we all know as happiness.

Moral theorists are similarly bound by the status of HAPPINESS as a practical concept of folk psychology. The theory of happiness should not be shackled to the technical demands of moral theory. It should be autonomous. Yet it should be an autonomous part of *ethics*. For it is an important concern for anyone interested in the character of the good life, as ethicists purport to be. And even though happiness is a psychological and not an evaluative kind, we cannot adequately determine what it is outside the framework of value inquiry, of inquiry into the nature of well-being and the good life. For the best conception of happiness is the one that best enables us to satisfy our practical needs as ordinary individuals trying to lead good lives.

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