

On Being Happy or Unhappy¹

Dan Haybron
Department of Philosophy
Saint Louis University
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Abstract: The psychological condition of being happy is best understood as a matter of a person's emotional condition. I elucidate the notion of an emotional condition by introducing two distinctions concerning affect, and argue that this "emotional state" view is probably superior on intuitive and substantive grounds to theories that identify happiness with pleasure or life satisfaction. Life satisfaction views, for example, appear to have deflationary consequences for happiness' value. This would make happiness an unpromising candidate for the central element in a theory of well-being, as it is in L. W. Sumner's work. Yet on an emotional state conception, happiness may prove to be a key constituent of well-being. The emotional state view also makes happiness less vulnerable to common doubts about the importance of happiness, and indicates that mood states are more important for well-being than is generally recognized.

Happiness in intelligent people is the rarest thing I know.

Ernest Hemingway

1. Introduction

"The important thing is for my kids to be happy and healthy." "You should choose whatever career will make you happiest." "I just want to be happy." I take it to be obvious that such claims use 'happiness' and its cognates to denote a state of mind. In such contexts we aren't simply referring to an abstract and formal good like well-being or flourishing. What could be the point of saying that you want your children to flourish *and* be healthy? Clearly, what interests us in such cases is a substantive good: a psychological condition that constitutes a central ingredient of human welfare. That it is merely important for well-being, and not the whole story, accounts for our sense that claims like these frequently involve a certain amount of exaggeration. (You wouldn't want to be a happy *brain in a vat*, would you?)

The question is what this condition amounts to. What is it to be happy, or unhappy, or somewhere in between? I will argue that happiness is most profitably understood as a matter of a person's overall emotional condition. This "emotional state" conception of happiness appears to

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be preferable on intuitive and substantive grounds to the views that have traditionally held sway in the philosophical literature, the hedonistic and life satisfaction theories of happiness.

Why do we need a theory of happiness? Spoilsports like Hemingway or Nietzsche notwithstanding, it is hard to see how we could possibly claim to understand human welfare without having any clear notion of what happiness is. For the most part, happiness appears to correlate strongly with well-being: on learning that a friend is happy, we normally infer that she is doing well; if we find her unhappy, we just as reasonably conclude that she is badly off. It is quite plausible, in fact, that we regularly use happiness as a proxy for well-being in ordinary practical reasoning.² Hence our tendency to make hyperbolic claims like “I just want for you to be happy.”

Perhaps it doesn't much matter what we *think* happiness is, for it makes little difference which of the various accounts we accept: the hedonistic, emotional state, and life satisfaction theories are similar enough that trying to choose among them is mainly an exercise in splitting hairs. (It is not uncommon for commentators to use these notions interchangeably.) But this is a mistake: it can matter a great deal which of these views we hold. For example, L. W. Sumner recently revived happiness in the literature on well-being by arguing that welfare consists in *authentic happiness*: being happy, where this is adequately grounded in the conditions of your life—i.e., informed—and in values that are truly yours and not, say, the result of resignation to oppressive circumstances.³ Sumner handles familiar worries about radical deception and happy slaves by arguing that such happiness is not authentic: it isn't a response to *your* life, or it doesn't reflect values that are truly *yours*.⁴ We might quarrel with this theory on various counts, but it seems to me that a plausible account of well-being should incorporate authentic happiness as a central element. Yet Sumner identifies happiness mainly with life satisfaction, and I will ar-

² Note that such inferences are defeasible, say by the discovery that the person's happiness is grounded in deception. In such cases we withdraw, not the happiness claim, but the well-being claim. Hence we are using 'happiness' as a proxy, and not a synonym, for well-being.

³ This is what he calls the autonomy constraint. He lays out this view in Sumner 1996.

⁴ Nozick's experience machine case is the classic version of the deception worry Nozick 1974. Happy slave and related worries are discussed in, e.g., Elster 1983, Millgram 2000, Nussbaum 2000, and Sen 1987b.

gue that such a view appears to have deflationary consequences for happiness' value, making it a dubious occupant of the central position in an account of well-being.

Philosophers are only just beginning to pay attention to happiness, but empirical research on the subject has grown explosively in the last decade.⁵ This research is being taken seriously by a lot of people, including policymakers. Yet it is not at all clear how much of this work really addresses happiness and what its normative implications are. Philosophical attention is badly needed to sort these questions out.

Some terminological remarks: Unlike social scientists, and for that matter pretty much everyone else, philosophers most often use 'happiness' to mean what Aristotle meant by '*eudaimonia*', namely well-being. This is understandable, since most philosophical uses of the term occur in the sorts of historical texts that philosophers regularly teach in their classes, and in these texts 'happiness' is mainly used in the well-being sense. Moreover, this usage is not uncommon in ordinary parlance. When we talk of leading a happy *life*, e.g., we seem to have something like well-being in mind—there's more to life than our mental states. But mostly we talk of how happy or unhappy people are, of *being* happy, and in such cases we mean a psychological condition. This psychological sense of happiness clearly predominates in the empirical literature, as well as in the popular media. I will likewise use 'happiness' in the psychological sense. Readers worried that I don't say more about, say, Aristotle's view of happiness should note that, in the relevant sense of the term, *Aristotle had no theory of happiness*. He had a theory of well-being.⁶

There is reason to wonder whether 'happiness', even when restricted to this psychological sense, denotes a unitary phenomenon. When we talk of people being happy, we seem at different times to have different things in mind: sometimes life satisfaction, sometimes an emotional condition, and sometimes nothing very definite. There may be no straightforward answer to the question "What is happiness?" Nonetheless, I will argue that our discourse about happi-

⁵ See, e.g., Kahneman, Diener et al. 1999, Diener and Seligman 2004, Argyle 2002, and Frey and Stutzer 2002.

⁶ Or if he did have a theory of happiness, it wasn't his account of *eudaimonia*. My view of well-being actually shares important features with Aristotle's. For more on the different senses of 'happiness', see my 2000.

ness is *primarily* concerned with emotional matters. While the term's extension in ordinary usage does at times incorporate other aspects of our psychology, these uses are secondary at best. Moreover, an emotional state account answers better to our practical interests in happiness than other views. I will accordingly argue that happiness is *best understood* as a matter of emotional state. (I will usually omit the qualifier.) Some might wish to posit a further ambiguity, between "life satisfaction" and "emotional state" senses. While it seems unwise to add still more meanings to the term in the literature, not much hangs on the issue. I would nonetheless insist that the emotional state notion is the *philosophically primary* one: the one that is most centrally embedded in our usage, and that best answers to our practical interests in happiness.⁷

My arguments will focus not on what it is to *achieve* happiness, but on the more fundamental question of what makes a state *happiness-constituting*: in virtue of what a state makes a constitutive difference in how happy or unhappy we are.⁸ This is the crucial issue: for we want to be as happy as we can be, consistently with the other things that matter. The further question of whether we will actually *be* happy, period, is less pressing. It also raises difficulties of its own.

To fix intuitions, consider some paradigmatic cases of happiness and unhappiness:

- Happiness: being in high spirits, ebullient, joyful, exhilarated, elated, carefree, contented, at peace, at ease, feeling confident and self-assured, feeling "in the zone," being in an expansive mood, delighted with one's life, or blessed with a sense of fulfillment or well-being.
- Unhappiness: being depressed, melancholy, despondent, anxious, "stressed out," seething with rage, overwhelmed by fear, worried sick, heartbroken, grief-stricken, lonely, empty, low, burdened with shame, bored, feeling insecure or worthless, feeling spiritually reduced, pressed-upon or "compressed," or deeply dissatisfied with life.

These are, I take it, more or less familiar ways of being happy or unhappy. Or, if some of them are not sufficient in themselves, they are certainly *constitutive* of happiness or unhappiness: one's happiness or unhappiness is augmented or diminished by virtue of being in these states. A

⁷ "Philosophically primary" is borrowed from Sumner (1996). I elaborate on this methodology in 2003.

⁸ When I write "happiness consists in X," I usually mean "the (un)happiness-constituting states are X." And while I will usually write 'happiness', the points will generally apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to unhappiness.

satisfactory theory of happiness should account for what is going on in these cases, or most of them.

I will begin by arguing that the life satisfaction and hedonistic views of happiness both have serious problems. My discussion of life satisfaction will be somewhat lengthy, as the theory can take many forms, each with its own difficulties. Even so, my negative arguments will be fairly schematic: the aim is merely to cast enough doubt on the competing accounts to make plausible my claims about the superiority of the emotional state view.

2. Life satisfaction

Many people—including, formerly, myself—find it plausible to identify happiness with life satisfaction: to be happy is to be satisfied with your life as a whole.⁹ This view seems attractive in light of our status as rational animals capable of reflecting on our lives and judging how well they are going. It seems important whether we are satisfied with our lives: such attitudes may appear, at least normally, to embody authoritative verdicts on how well our lives are going for us. But a number of serious difficulties confront life satisfaction views.

The first problem is that the life satisfaction theory generates seemingly fatal counterexamples in which life satisfaction and emotional state sharply diverge. On the most natural reading of the view, it is perfectly possible for someone to be satisfied with her life even though she is depressed or otherwise emotionally a shambles. Indeed, this possibility would seem to be an *attraction* to many: the tortured artist might think emotional matters unimportant, or even that it is *good* to be depressed, and thus be satisfied with her life. Her life is going well by her lights, as she is getting and doing what matters to her. Be that as it may, it is deeply counterintuitive to regard such an individual as being *happy*.¹⁰ This sort of person *rejects* happiness. Perhaps we can say that she is happy *with* her life, or even that “in some sense” she is happy, but to ascribe hap-

⁹ See, e.g., Nozick 1989 and Sumner 1996. Other philosophers making life satisfaction central to or exhaustive of (psychological) happiness appear to include Barrow 1980, 1991, Benditt 1974, 1978, Campbell 1973, Montague 1967, Rescher 1972, 1980, Telfer 1980, and Von Wright 1963. Those making life satisfaction central or identical to “happiness” in the “well-being” sense appear to include Almeder 2000, Kekes 1982, 1988, 1992, McFall 1989, Meynell 1969, Tatariewicz 1976, and Thomas 1968. I discuss life satisfaction at greater length in Haybron 2005b.

¹⁰ This point has also been made by Carson 1981 and Davis 1981b.

piness without such qualifiers seems perverse. While one might reasonably insist that a truly authoritative judgment must be wholehearted, thus incorporating a significant emotional aspect, such a requirement does nothing to rule out these counterexamples: a tortured artist could perfectly well be satisfied in this sense.¹¹ In short, where life satisfaction and emotional state diverge, happiness appears to track emotional state rather than the attitude.

One might avoid this objection by stipulating a very strong convergence between attitude and emotional state: happiness as a broad sense of well-being. Here the attitude of life satisfaction is not merely wholehearted; it more or less encompasses one's whole emotional state. A problem with this strategy is that attitudes of this sort appear to be pretty scarce: while we are sometimes in such states, we usually aren't. That is, we typically seem not to have broad feelings of satisfaction *or* dissatisfaction with our lives, to any degree. This is a problem because happiness is supposed, like pleasure, to be a dimension along which human well-being varies: each of us is somewhere on the scale between extreme happiness and unhappiness, and each of us could be more or less happy or unhappy than we presently are. Other things being equal, we try to make choices in life that will leave us happier, while avoiding options that will make us less happy. This is important: if it turns out that we usually aren't *anywhere* on the scale, because the relevant mental states aren't defined most of the time, then few choices will have any effect on our happiness. And any effects will be as fleeting as the attitudes themselves. Why, then, concern ourselves so much with happiness? The present proposal appears to have just this result: while sometimes we do have broad feelings of being satisfied or dissatisfied with our lives, such moments appear to be short-lived, mostly occurring when we are unusually reflective. We would probably do well not to make feelings of this sort a central focus of concern when thinking about matters of well-being. Similar problems of "attitude scarcity" are liable to arise on any view that imposes lavish psychological requirements on attitudes of satisfaction and dissatisfaction: the more it takes to have the requisite attitudes, the less often they will arise, and the less we will be

¹¹ See Benditt 1974, 1978, who requires that one *feel* satisfied with one's life when thinking about it.

able to assess outcomes in relation to life (dis-)satisfaction. Contrast hedonism: all of us are on the happiness scale at every waking moment, for our experience always has some hedonic character. Every instant we are conscious can thus be assessed in terms of happiness. Not so for (at least) the more demanding forms of life satisfaction.¹²

A third set of concerns is far more serious, for it indicates that our evaluations of our lives are appropriately governed by factors having nothing to do with welfare; they aren't even *supposed* to track well-being. For instance, an agent can reasonably be dissatisfied with her life when things are going well for her, and just as reasonably be satisfied on another occasion when things are going much *worse*. There are two factors at work here. The first comes to light when we consider how we ought to rate our lives, for clearly there are better and worse ways to go about it. Judging one's life favorably because 3 is a prime number is not one of the better ways. What is? At the very least, one's judgment should be grounded in one's experience of life, as well as in one's values and priorities.¹³ It should reflect one's welfare, at least insofar as welfare is subjectively conceived.¹⁴ But there are lots of options consistent with that. The options narrow considerably when we consider that our attitudes toward our lives have an ethical dimension: they reflect on our characters. One's satisfaction or dissatisfaction may reflect complacency, smugness or immodesty, ingratitude, lack of fortitude, lack of self-regard, or other vices. Most people care about such things and will want to avoid such vices in their attitudes toward their lives, and preferably exhibit the corresponding virtues. Our assessments of our lives are governed not just by prudential norms, but by *ethical* norms as well.¹⁵ And so we often admire driven individuals who are never satisfied, always trying to better themselves. We admire, too,

¹² The problem of attitude scarcity may infect even more modest forms of life satisfaction: it is questionable whether people typically have well-defined attitudes of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their lives, however we understand such attitudes (see, e.g., Schwarz and Strack 1991, 1999). I will not pursue this concern here.

¹³ I am not claiming that life satisfaction is *simply* a judgment. But however we understand these attitudes, they do seem to embody a judgment about one's life, at least insofar as we think them significant as evaluations of our lives.

¹⁴ I am not saying that life satisfaction judgments involve assessments of well-being as such. We normally care about things other than our own welfare, like virtue, and our assessments of our lives will reflect some of these concerns. But if life satisfaction is to have the close relation to well-being that happiness is thought to have, our verdicts must be driven largely by factors that *do* contribute to our well-being (even if we don't think of them that way).

¹⁵ My arguments here do not assume an objective account of well-being, and indeed seem perfectly compatible with popular desire satisfaction theories of welfare.

those who appreciate and show gratitude for all that is good in their lives, even when faced with hardship.

This is a problem because someone might reasonably be (for example) satisfied with her life, not so much because it is going well in relation to her values and priorities, but substantially because she feels she *ought* to be satisfied with it: to be otherwise under the circumstances might reflect ingratitude, say, or softness or “neediness.” Dissatisfaction might similarly be driven, reasonably, by the desire not to be too smug, complacent, Panglossian, etc. But such norms are orthogonal to the question of personal welfare, making inferences from life satisfaction to well-being deeply and inherently problematical. Perhaps such norms explain, in part, the very low rate of reported dissatisfaction among many nationalities—for instance, typically fewer than ten percent of Americans, often much fewer, rate their lives negatively.¹⁶ People may simply aspire to virtues like gratitude, fortitude, and hope. They may also have concerns about self-regard or proper pride: being dissatisfied with one’s life can amount to repudiating it, or at least what one has made of it. This in turn can seem like repudiating one’s *self*. (In two ways: both because our identities are tightly bound with our life narratives, and because we see our lives as something *we* make, and are responsible for.) And so even people experiencing great difficulty can find good reason to be satisfied with their lives.

A related problem is that life satisfaction judgments are substantially *arbitrary*, in the sense that we can reasonably and authentically assess our lives in a wide range of ways, with no grounds—at least, no decisive grounds—for choosing among them. One reason for this concerns the ethical norms we have been discussing. We saw that a diverse range of such norms governs our evaluations, and we have a good deal of scope in deciding how to balance these norms. To which virtues should I *chiefly* aspire? Gratitude, say, or noncomplacency? Different people can reasonably answer these questions differently, and the same person may wish to focus on different virtues in different contexts. A focus on gratitude may be comforting during difficult times,

¹⁶ See, e.g., Myers 1992, Diener and Diener 1996, Myers 2000.

whereas emphasizing the virtue of noncomplacency can help motivate when things are going well. And for most of us, the choice of focus is bound to be somewhat arbitrary. To the extent that we have reasons for choosing one versus another, they will have little bearing on how well our lives are actually going for us; they will instead be rooted in other matters, like contextual salience or pragmatic considerations (e.g., motivating or comforting).

But the most important source of arbitrariness is the inherently *perspectival* character of life satisfaction attitudes: crudely, whether you are satisfied with your life depends on how you look at it. Consider a woman of sixty-four who, a few months ago, lost her husband of many years. How ought she—from her point of view—to evaluate her life? Should she be satisfied or dissatisfied? She may well find herself vacillating between *both* attitudes: one day she thinks about her life in relation to those she regards as truly unfortunate, counts her blessings (of which she has many), and wholeheartedly considers herself lucky—she is genuinely satisfied with her life, and takes pleasure in her good fortune. But the next she thinks more of her loss and the gaping hole in her life, and finds herself envying her married friends and wondering how she can go on. She is, at such times, deeply dissatisfied, indeed bitterly angry. And when she steps back to reflect on these oscillations, she can't honestly say that either judgment is closer to the truth—both are perfectly sensible responses to her life, and both represent *her* outlook, her priorities.

The problem is not that she's emotionally volatile. It is, rather, that she can think about her life from more than one perspective, none of which is preeminently authentic or otherwise authoritative.¹⁷ And so can we. Probably all of us have, for instance, assessed our lives from what might be called the “perspective of gratitude”: looking at our lives vis-à-vis those less fortunate than ourselves: the poor, the afflicted, or the dead. But sometimes we consider our lives from a “Stoic” perspective, in relation to those whom we most admire: am I living as well as I should, making the most of my life? These are just two of the countless perspectives we can take on our lives, and the choice among them is significantly arbitrary. Yet our satisfaction depends

¹⁷ Which is not to say that all are equally authoritative. Other things being equal, e.g., a broader perspectives seem more authoritative than narrower ones. See, e.g., Tiberius 2002.

greatly on which we choose: from the perspective of gratitude, few of us would rate our lives negatively, but from the Stoic perspective, many of us would.¹⁸

Thus it can be—and often is—substantially arbitrary whether one is satisfied or dissatisfied with one’s life. (And note that important differences can arise in *degree*, not just valence. You may be satisfied whichever of two ways you look at your life, yet see your life as a ten in one case and a mere six in the other.) This, obviously, makes the relationship between life satisfaction and well-being problematical. Consider, for instance, how we are to compare judgments made at different times, or by different people. You might rate your life more favorably than you did last year, even though things are going indisputably *worse* for you, simply because you see things from a different perspective. This doubtless happens with some cancer patients, who may be more prone to count their blessings than before their diagnosis. In other words, life satisfaction can increase while one’s life gets worse, without there being any mistake. (The increase need not involve judging, erroneously, that one’s life has gotten better; one may be well aware of the unwelcome turn yet decide to be more appreciative of the good things.) It is interesting to note that a major survey of African Americans found stagnation or decline in objective indicators of well-being between 1980 and 1992. Self-reports of happiness—which track emotional state more closely than life satisfaction reports do—likewise showed a decline. Reported life satisfaction, however, *improved* significantly over that period Adams 1997. Perhaps this reflects the operation of a coping mechanism like the one hypothesized regarding cancer patients.

In short, life satisfaction attitudes are not even *supposed* to be the sort of thing that could be a reliable gauge of well-being, or even of one of its central aspects.¹⁹ To a great extent, how satisfied one is with one’s life simply depends on how one looks at it. And there are lots of good

¹⁸ I call it the Stoic perspective because of the focus on how well one has conducted one’s life.

¹⁹ Contrast hedonism: while it is plausible that hedonic state and well-being *can* diverge significantly, it remains highly plausible that pleasure and welfare correlate very strongly. Hence, no doubt, the popularity of welfare hedonism. (For a different view, however, see Millgram 2000.) Notice that my claim does not vitiate large-scale studies of life satisfaction as gauges of well-being. For the effects of norms and perspectives may wash out over large samples, so that life satisfaction reports correlate well with well-being even while being uninformative taken individually. Finally, because the problems are in-principle, even views relying on *idealized* life satisfaction as the measure of well-being are vulnerable. E.g., even the ideally rational and informed cancer patient might be satisfied.

perspectives to choose from. It usually doesn't *seem* arbitrary, of course, since we normally take up whatever perspectives we occupy quite naturally and without thought. But arbitrary it is. As a result, life satisfaction is ill-suited to bear the sort of close relationship to well-being that happiness seems to, and thus seems unable to answer to our practical interests in happiness. Indeed, there is a voluntariness to life satisfaction that makes it hard to see how it could be a major life goal, as most take happiness to be: it's too easy to come by.²⁰ To be happy, just think of Tiny Tim. (Return to the quotes that started this paper and replace 'happy' and 'happiest' with the appropriate variants of 'satisfied with one's life'. How convincing is the result?)

Proponents of life satisfaction standardly claim that life satisfaction involves the sort of global judgment that gives rise to these worries. And for good reason: the view is appealing partly because it embodies such a judgment; whereas hedonism merely aggregates many discrete moments of pleasure, taking no direct account of the agent's priorities, or how all the bits fit together into a life. Still, perhaps life satisfaction theorists could drop the demand for a global judgment. One option is to identify life satisfaction with the *aggregate* of subject's various particular satisfactions and dissatisfactions. If, for instance, we know that Ned hates his job, his wife, his kids, his friends, his dog, and his house, we might reasonably conclude that he is dissatisfied with his life, even if he lacks any global opinion. (On the other hand, what if he insists that he is satisfied with his life? Maybe he's grateful just to be alive.) This approach also has serious problems, apart from lacking the global perspective. One is that most people's lives aren't as clear-cut as Ned's: they are a complex mix of satisfactions and dissatisfactions, all of which have to be added up to yield a picture of how satisfied they are. Barring unusually straightforward cases like Ned's, we are likely to be confounded by the task. Life satisfaction is thus liable to be radically indeterminate for many if not most people on this sort of view, to the point that meaningful comparisons may usually be impossible. The problem resembles that of attitude scarcity:

²⁰ The problem of arbitrariness is likely worse than I've indicated, since similar arbitrariness infects one's choice of a time period by which to assess one's life—nowadays, this year, as a whole?—as well as decisions about how to sum up the many incommensurable goods in one's life. We are unlikely to have any clear idea how to add up all the items in the mixed bags of our lives, and any summation will surely involve substantial elements of arbitrariness.

while some people will prove to be happy or unhappy, most will likely elude any but the very crudest characterizations, and perhaps even those.

Aggregative satisfaction is not without interest: amounting in essence to *contentment*, this sort of satisfaction can provide a gauge of the extent to which individuals actively want changes in their lives. This is important. But its connection to well-being is relatively weak: many if not most of the important things in our lives don't impact how contented we are: we take them for granted, or are resigned to them. An alternate approach to aggregation would emphasize, not *active* satisfactions, but mere opinions or preferences: we aggregate the various things the agent considers good in her life, along with those she would prefer to be otherwise—e.g., that her long-deceased father still be alive—weighted by the importance she accords to them. (Never mind that she rarely thinks about many of them.) But this approach would make happiness deeply inscrutable: how could anyone ever tell how happy someone is on this sort of view?

I cannot claim to have shown that life satisfaction theories of happiness are hopeless. My aim has merely been to show that such theories are far more problematical than they may seem—problematical enough that an emotional state view will, at the end of the day, seem the more promising approach. It appears as well that happiness-centered views of well-being, like Sumner's, face serious difficulties insofar as they identify happiness with life satisfaction. But perhaps we just need to understand happiness differently.

Again, I do not deny that we sometimes use 'happiness' to denote states of life satisfaction. We do use the term to denote those, and lots of other things. My claim in this paper is just that happiness is most plausibly and profitably understood along the lines of an emotional state theory. What we are most centrally and importantly concerned with, in thinking and talking of happiness, are matters of emotional state. The uses connected to life satisfaction are, at best, secondary. Better, it seems, just to distinguish happiness and satisfaction.

3. From pleasure to happiness

Hedonism's shortcomings are instructive, as they point us toward the emotional state theory. Roughly, hedonism identifies happiness with experiences of pleasure.²¹ Happiness thus reduces to nothing more than a sequence of experiential episodes. I have argued against this view elsewhere, but it will be useful to repeat some of the critique here, as my account can be seen as an effort to remedy the defects of hedonism (2001b). Two problems with hedonism concern us here. First, it is *psychologically superficial*: it incorporates only the experiential aspect of our emotional conditions. Yet our emotional states consist in more than just experiences. Consider an irritable mood: this is not simply an experience. Indeed, irritability can lack any phenomenology at all, consisting largely or wholly in a pronounced disposition to lash out at minor provocations. To be in an irritable mood just *is*, in part, to have some such disposition. Similarly, a state of deep contentment is not reducible to any experience. One of the nice things about it is that one is more likely to enjoy things, and not so likely to become upset over minor events. The joyful tend not to see things in a pessimistic light, whereas the anxious do. And so on. Our emotional lives are extremely rich, and do not reduce to their experiential surfaces. They involve unconscious processes of various sorts, and often have physiological components. Recall the paradigm cases: it is simply not credible to regard them merely as so many experiential episodes. Nor is it plausible to claim that the states listed are happiness-constituting only *qua* pleasures. One is unhappy by virtue of being *depressed*, not by virtue of experiencing the unpleasantness of depression. Happiness has depth that the pleasure theory misses.

The second criticism of hedonism is that it is too inclusive: in its usual incarnations, all pleasures and displeasures are considered happiness-constituting. Yet many pleasures seem trivial or superficial, making no difference to how happy we are. Eating a cracker, having an itch, noting a neighbor's freshly-cut lawn, or being annoyed at dropping a pencil, are all pleasant or unpleasant experiences. But is one happier, or less happy, *thereby*? This is implausible, at least

²¹ Recent philosophers who accept or defend hedonism about (psychological) happiness include, among many others, Brandt 1979, 1989; Campbell 1973; Carson 1978, 1981; Davis 1981b, 1981a; Ebenstein 1991; Griffin 1979, 1986; Mayerfeld 1996, 1999; Sen 1987a; Sprigge 1987, 1991; and Wilson 1968.

in normal cases. Such pleasures can affect our happiness causally, as when many small physical pleasures conspire to lift our spirits. But in themselves they seem not to make any difference in how happy we are. (This is not to deny that sensual indulgence can involve happiness-constituting states. The pleasures of an extraordinary meal, say, may be highly fulfilling; even an ordinary one can improve your mood. But sometimes a cracker is just a cracker.)

The problem is not that these pleasures are short-lived: the pleasure of eating a cracker would seem orthogonal to the question of how happy one is, even if stretched out over days. (Consider, by contrast, a panic attack: for those moments, one is not exactly happy.) Nor is the problem a lack of intensity. Even intensely pleasant experiences can fail to impact our happiness: notoriously, sexual activity can leave us cold. Sometimes it just doesn't move us. This is one of the hard lessons dealt to the unsophisticated libertine, or the troubled youth seeking to relieve his melancholy through meaningless sexual encounters. Consider also the pain of having one's gouty toe stepped on. Most of us will find unhappiness in such an experience. It is hard not to let intense pain get to you. But someone of a stoic nature may be disciplined enough that such pains don't get to her at all; she maintains her equanimity throughout. Intuitively, her happiness remains untouched. It is worth noting that Stoic philosophers did not counsel us, absurdly, not to feel pain when hit on the head with a hammer; they instructed us instead not to let such things generate an emotional disturbance. Consider this passage from Epictetus's *Discourses*: "'I have a headache.' Well, do not say 'Alas!' 'I have an earache.' Do not say 'Alas!' And I am not saying that it is not permissible to groan, only *do not groan in the centre of your being*" (1925, *emph. added*). This is an important distinction that seems to have been lost in modern ethical thought.

4. The elements of the theory: two distinctions in affect

4.1 Central affective states

Intuitively, the distinction seems to concern whether a given affect involves one's emotional condition. Certain affects, notably physical pains and pleasures, seem not to be particularly emotional, and need not make a difference in our emotional conditions: they don't get to us.

Whereas others, such as the paradigm emotions and especially moods, do seem to alter our emotional conditions while they last. So long as the reader grants me this broad distinction, and allows that happiness is best understood as a matter of a person's emotional condition, the central aim of this paper will have been met.²² But though it is possible for an emotional state theorist simply to identify happiness with the aggregate of an individual's moods and/or emotions, I think there is a more helpful way to distinguish the relevant states.

The main distinction concerns what I will call *centrality* of affect. Some affective states are psychologically deep, or *central*, whereas others are comparatively shallow, superficial, or *peripheral*. The states involved in the paradigm cases are central, whereas the superficial pleasures noted in the last two paragraphs—amusement or annoyance, physical pain or pleasure, etc.—are peripheral: they seem not to alter our emotional conditions. The second major mistake of the hedonist is a failure to observe the central/peripheral distinction: peripheral affects do not appear to be happiness-constituting.

The central/peripheral distinction is well-established, if tacitly, in ordinary talk about our emotional lives. Sometimes we are quite direct about it, noting how deeply something “touched” us, the depth or profundity of emotion it aroused, etc. We also use broadly anatomical metaphors, ranging from the viscerality of “gut-wrenching,” upward to “heart-rending,” all the way to the ethereality of impacts on one's spirit or soul (“soul-crushing”). A popular song has the singer implore a lover to “satisfy my soul,” and it is obvious that he is not simply asking to be entertained.²³ The most interesting class of metaphors used to make the distinction hint at a difference between affective states that do, and do not, constitute a change in the person herself. Thus do we talk of something's not just amusing or annoying you, but “getting to you,” “bringing you down,” “lifting you up,” “moving” you, “perturbing” or “disturbing” you, and so forth. Conversely, something might just “bounce right off you”: any emotional reaction you have is small,

²² ‘Emotional condition’ seems most accurate, but calling happiness an emotional condition makes it sound like a disease, so I often use ‘emotional state’ instead.

²³ Bob Marley, “Satisfy My Soul.”

swift, and quickly forgotten. These locutions mark a morally significant distinction as well: it is fine to be annoyed at losing a dime, but a person of good character doesn't let such things *get* to her or *disturb* her. Note also that we say things like "I *am* depressed," or "I *am* happy," in contrast with "I am *experiencing* pleasure"—i.e., perhaps, "Pleasure is happening to me." Consider, finally, that many central affective state terms can be adapted to denote personality traits: thus we have depressive, anxious, serene, cheerful, and happy personalities. We do not speak of annoyed, amused, or pained personalities. Indeed, there seems not even a grammatically correct way to entertain the thought of a personality that tends to experience a lot of pleasure or pain.

This sort of language is not careless metaphor; it signifies a genuine, and important, distinction in our emotional lives. It also hints at a link between happiness and the *self* that does not obtain in the case of (peripheral) pleasure. There appears to be an inner citadel of the self—the soul?—that many affects fail to penetrate.²⁴ Central affective states seem to constitute changes in us, and are not merely things that happen to us, mainly because they concern an individual's *disposition*. While they last they amount to what are much like short-lived alterations in one's temperament, or personality. For example: to be in an irritable mood is to be, for its duration, less happy than one would otherwise be. For something to cause such a mood is one way for it to *get* to one. And to be irritable is in some sense to be a certain sort of person for that time: a crank, a sorehead, an ill-tempered grouch.

What primarily distinguishes central affective states is that they dispose agents to experience certain affects rather than others. This, indeed, appears to be their essential characteristic: insofar as one's emotional disposition is altered by virtue of being in an affective state, that state is central. If it makes no such difference, it is peripheral.²⁵ While in a depressed mood, for instance, an individual will likely find little pleasure in what happens, will tend to look on the dark

²⁴ I will suggest in §6 that this connection with the self may be important for the theory of well-being.

²⁵ Centrality comes in degrees. Might the central/peripheral distinction be *purely* a matter of degree? Possibly, but the linguistic phenomena cited above seem to mark a sharp distinction: either something gets to you or it doesn't. And something either alters one's emotional disposition or it doesn't. If there isn't a sharp distinction, then we should apparently have to grant that all affects are happiness-constituting, with more peripheral affects playing a smaller—apparently imperceptible—role than more central ones.

side of things, and may more likely be saddened by negative events. The elated person will exhibit the opposite tendencies. And someone afflicted by anxiety will tend to multiply and exaggerate potential threats, experience greater upset at setbacks, and be more prone to experience fear and perhaps anger. Whereas a more serene individual will tend to take things in stride, see fewer causes for anxiety, worry less about perceived threats, etc.²⁶ Contrast these states with the clearly peripheral ones: neither the mild irritation expressed at dropping a pencil nor the trivial pleasure of driving past a pretty house appear to have any direct impact on what other emotions one is likely to experience.

We can identify at least four other hallmarks of central affective states.²⁷ First, they are *productive*: they have many and varied causal consequences—generating other affective states, initiating various physiological changes, biasing cognition and behavior, etc. Second, such states tend to be *persistent*: when they occur, they generally last a while. Perhaps only a minute or so, usually longer. But there is a certain “inertia” to central affective states that peripheral affects seem to lack: they don’t vanish without a trace the instant the triggering event is over. Third, the relevant states are often *pervasive*: they are frequently diffuse and nonspecific in character, tending to permeate the whole of consciousness, and setting the tone thereof. They are often said to color our experience of life. Finally, they tend to be *profound*: they are somehow deep, including phenomenally, and often visceral in feel. Though we tend not to describe, say, a mildly depressed or giddy mood as “profound,” there is nonetheless a perceptible depth to such states that, for instance, physical pleasures lack. They seem to run all the way through us, in some sense, feeling like states *of* us rather than impingements from without. There is a certain intimacy to our experience even of a low-key mood. Profundity is part of what we have in mind when we speak of something’s “getting to” us, lifting our spirits, or bringing about a deep sense of joy, anxiety,

²⁶ Commentators on such affects tend to focus on the ways in which they influence our *cognitive* dispositions. I do not dispute the influence of central affective states on cognition, but think this matters partly because of further relations between cognition and affect. One way of being disposed toward fear, for instance, is to be prone to see things as fearful. (And such perception is itself affectively laden.)

²⁷ It is possible that these too are essential properties, or that centrality just requires having enough of these properties, including dispositionality. But I see no need to make either claim.

etc. Contrast such states with that of orgasm: while manifestly intense, this state may not always feel emotionally profound, seeming more a superficial pleasure that fails to move us.

It is revealing that every example of a central affective state described above involves a mood, or something mood-like. I would conjecture that all central affective states are in some sense mood states, and vice-versa. Only “in some sense”: emotions are not moods, yet many are clearly central: for instance, the emotion of joy that follows on hearing good news, and that of grief felt on learning of a loved one’s passing. These emotions are certainly central affective states. Moreover, they are plausibly happiness-constituting. And yet, while not moods, they do appear to be mood-*constituting*: during the episode of joy one’s mood is certainly elevated, and during grief it is melancholy. Such peripheral affects as a passing annoyance, by contrast, look to have no direct impact on one’s mood at all. At the same time, it is plausible that all moods and mood-constituting emotions are central. Thus we find, apparently, that all central affective states are either moods or mood-constituting emotions, and vice-versa.²⁸ It appears, then, that the notion of a person’s emotional condition fundamentally concerns mood-related states.

This conjecture may not survive further investigation. Some of what I would classify as central affective states may not fit the mood picture: anxiety, fatigue or weariness, listlessness, contentment or tranquility, feeling stressed, feelings of vitality, the sense of emotional or spiritual compression that often afflicts those caught up in the rat race, and the pleasant state of “flow” that comes with losing oneself in challenging activities like sailing a boat.²⁹ All of these seem to be affective, and they appear to be central and happiness-constituting. They all dispose us to experience certain affects more, others less. They are also pervasive, productive, persistent, and in some sense profound. And they seem to involve our emotional conditions. Whether these are mood phenomena will depend on our best theory of moods.³⁰

²⁸ For brevity, I sometimes use ‘moods’ to refer to central affective states generally. See Haugeland 1981, p. 271 for a description of moods that parallels my characterization of centrality.

²⁹ The term ‘flow’ comes from Csikszentmihalyi 1990.

³⁰ Some “moods,” like a reflective mood, seem not to fit this account well. I suspect that such states, which seem neither pleasant nor unpleasant, belong to a different category from the states discussed here. Recent philosophical accounts of mood include, among others, Armon-Jones 1991, Griffiths 1997, Lormand 1985, 1996, Prinz 2004, and

Notice that the acute emotion or mood of “feeling happy” is just one of the happiness-constituting states. Its role in happiness is grotesquely exaggerated in the popular imagination, doubtless accounting for much of the scorn heaped on happiness by dysthymic philosophers and the like. Most happy people *don't* feel happy most of the time: they may be relatively tranquil, fulfilled, in good spirits, etc. They need not be brimming with giddy exhilaration. Indeed, some happy individuals may never feel happy: one can imagine an Archie Bunker-like kvetch—a New York deli owner, say—who is generally fulfilled and emotionally untroubled, as his favorite sport, complaining, doesn't get him down. He may, despite appearances, be *happy*.

Let's elaborate on this a bit. I will not attempt a detailed taxonomy of happiness-constituting states, but even a rough sense of the most important states involved should convey some sense of the depth and complexity of happiness. We might provisionally distinguish three dimensions of affect that seem particularly important. The *joy-sadness* dimension naturally gets the most attention, partly it involves the emotion of feeling happy. Affects along this dimension are also hard to miss, as we tend to wear them on our faces, in smiles, frowns, laughter, and the like. While it is easy to overstate the importance of such affects for happiness, we should not understate it either; in particular, we should bear in mind that such affects can vary widely in centrality: the profound joy one might feel at the birth of a child must not be conflated with the vacant cheeriness of a shopping mall addict who finds his life agreeable but has no occasion for real joy or fulfillment. A shallow cheeriness has its merits, but if that's the best that can be said for your emotional state then it is questionable whether we could sensibly deem you happy.

A closely related dimension concerns energy or vitality: the *exuberance-depression* axis.³¹ A passionate and demanding orchestra conductor, for instance, might be exuberant, even happy, without being obviously cheerful or joyful. I do not know whether the Cleveland's

Sizer 2000. I differ from some of these authors in holding that moods typically have non-dispositional, phenomenal aspects. See also Ekman and Davidson 1994, Frijda 1993, Morris 1999, and Parkinson et al. 1996.

³¹ It may be misleading to use depression here, since it usually involves more than a lack of vitality. But I am not claiming these axes to be orthogonal, and it can be useful to highlight the difference between depression and sadness.

George Szell was like this, but he was evidently quite passionate in living—in his cooking at home as well as in his work—perhaps embodying a kind of exuberance. The mere fact that he was a harsh taskmaster need not disqualify him from happiness. A lot depends on whether his temper often left him deeply unsettled—as may have been the case for Toscanini—or whether its manifestations were typically superficial and transient, leaving his internal state largely undisturbed.

The example points to the third and perhaps most important dimension of happiness, the *tranquility-anxiety* axis. This is hardly the place to plumb the nuances of tranquility, but we might think of tranquility as “settledness”: not merely peace of mind or lack of internal discord but a kind of inner surety or confidence, stability and balance, or imperturbability.³² This is clearly a highly pleasant state, and not simply the absence of disturbance or other feeling. Nor does it rule out states of high arousal or exuberance; indeed, exuberance without any sort of tranquility is liable to be jittery and unstable. But tranquility seems crucial for being happy. Some months ago, during a stressful period preceding the birth of our twins, I noticed how happy my mood would become while bathing my three-year-old. Yet even during those moments I do not think *I* was happy, for beneath the good cheer ran a distinct undercurrent of anxiety, and I never stopped feeling off balance, unsettled.

Hemingway seems to have been no great fan of happiness, yet he arguably left us one of its more compelling depictions. To be sure, *The Old Man and the Sea*'s Santiago is not the image of happiness in the “smiley-face” sense (though Hemingway starts off telling us that his eyes are “cheerful and undefeated”³³). Yet he is a model of tranquility—Hemingway's exemplar, I suspect, of genuine happiness. To take just one example: despite his poverty, his rotten luck, and tremendous physical discomfort, his sleep throughout is plainly untroubled, characterized by pleasant dreams of watching lions on a beach and the like. The last we hear of him, “the old man

³² My views here owe much to a wonderful discussion of tranquility by Charles Griswold (1996).

³³ Hemingway 1952, p. 10. I borrow the useful term ‘smiley-face’ from Annas 2004, who dismisses happiness as a mere matter of “smiley-face feelings.” (She claims this isn't really happiness, but that's because she uses ‘happiness’ to mean well-being. The dispute on this point is verbal.)

was dreaming about the lions,” evidently unperturbed, even unimpressed, by the long ordeal that had just culminated in losing the catch of a lifetime to the sharks.³⁴

This brief discussion barely touches on the range of states involved in happiness; just for starters we would need to add some mention of engagement or flow versus boredom, and of feelings of fulfillment versus emptiness. We may also wish to distinguish the varieties of affect differently. But I have tried only to indicate that happiness has a richer and more interesting psychology than popular stereotypes suggest. Should we wish to label happiness with a convenient slogan, we might call it, not a good mood, but *psychic flourishing*.³⁵

4.2 Mood propensities

Thus far we have it that happiness consists in one’s central affective states. This seems incomplete: happiness, at least in its prototypical instances, appears to involve something deeper and more continuous. As things stand, happiness is a simple function of one’s aggregated moods and mood-constituting emotions. Nothing connects the various affects with each other. The theory thus fails to distinguish cases in which a predominance of positive affect results purely from a fortunate confluence of positive events from cases in which this results from an underlying endogenous condition. Yet it is natural to think of happiness as usually being a lasting condition. Indeed, we might want to explain a given individual’s predominance of positive mood as a consequence of his being happy—as opposed to being, say, the result of a series of congenial events.

Consider that one of the benefits of being happy is not just that one happens to experience a lot of positive moods, but that one is prone to experience such moods. Negative events are less likely to generate bad moods. When a bad mood does come along, the happy individual can expect a quicker return to good spirits than someone who is not happy. *The happy person thus exhibits a highly desirable kind of emotional resilience.* This propensity to experience certain

³⁴ 1952, p. 127. Peaceful slumbers are an old sign of tranquility—see, e.g., the depiction of Socrates at the *Crito*’s outset. Thanks to my father for noting that Santiago’s closing dream was wholly unaffected by his recent adventures.

³⁵ This term is usefully evocative, but may be misleading in that happiness could conceivably be disordered. Moreover, ‘flourishing’ is normally considered an evaluative term, whereas ‘happiness’ here is not.

moods also enables us to predict the moods of happy individuals; thus we are normally more eager to make plans to visit with friends we know to be happy than with those who are not.

Suppose you learn that a friend has had a hair-trigger propensity for anxiety in recent months (she's struggling to complete her dissertation). Wouldn't you consider her less happy *by virtue of* that fact, quite apart from the anxious moods themselves? Suppose you catch her on a good day, when nothing has triggered the anxiety.³⁶ Would you conclude that she is, today, no less happy than were she relatively immune to anxiety? When we attend a funeral reception and see grieving family members laughing with old friends, we do not think their unhappiness has completely, if temporarily, lifted. A deeper unhappiness remains. To take a fuller example, consider two friends, Tom and Jerry, both of happy temperament, who take a relaxing vacation at the beach. During their several days together, their moods are generally quite similar and fairly positive, save that Tom is a bit more cheerful, being pleased finally to get away from home some months after a difficult divorce. By and large he is not the least melancholic—most of the time he feels wholly unburdened, laughter comes easily, and he takes great pleasure in catching up with his old friend and conversing with other vacationers. Yet Tom's emotional state remains unusually fragile: on two occasions he inexplicably bursts into tears and weeps uncontrollably. These episodes don't last long, so that Tom's moods are still, on the whole, a little more positive than Jerry's. Is it obvious that Tom is happier than Jerry? The reverse seems more plausible: it appears both that Tom's elevated propensity for sadness diminishes his happiness in itself, and that he is *less* happy than Jerry. It also seems likely that *Jerry* would not consider Tom to have been particularly happy during the trip.

I would suggest that happiness involves not just agents' moods, but also their disposition to experience moods: their *mood propensity*.³⁷ Consider, for another example, depression, which is presumably not just a bad mood, nor a series of bad moods. It is rather a broader psychological

³⁶ This case differs from having one's mood constantly pushed in one direction. Mood propensities take at least two forms: as *thresholds* for the triggering of moods, and as ongoing *tendencies* toward certain moods.

³⁷ The term should strictly be 'central affective state propensity', but this is awkward. Though I normally use the singular, one's mood propensity involves different propensities with respect to different types of moods.

condition. In typical instances of depression, it is not simply the case that one happens to be in a depressed mood a lot of the time, as if it were a coincidence that one's low mood today mirrors that of yesterday. (Maybe each day began with a separate piece of bad news.) Something deeper is happening. Thus the depressed individual's present good cheer is tarnished by the knowledge that it will soon give way to despair, as if a hidden force is dragging one's spirits ineluctably downward. This sort of phenomenon is quite common with depression, whose sufferers often experience diurnal cycles in their moods (as do non-depressed individuals). To be at a certain point in one's cycle is for one's mood propensity to be a certain way.³⁸

Three points of clarification. First, mood propensity is distinct from a person's personality or *temperament*, which is how she is characteristically disposed to react, emotionally, to various circumstances, at some basic level.³⁹ (This in turn should be distinguished from what we often *call* a person's temperament: her characteristic emotional or mood state. The fact that someone has always been depressed, for instance, does not mean he has a depressive temperament: perhaps the conditions of his life have never suited his temperament.) Whereas mood propensities vary more or less continuously—e.g., someone of cheerful temper will sometimes be uncharacteristically prone to melancholy moods, as when depressed. Second, a mood propensity in the present sense is *generalized*: it involves a tendency to experience positive moods quite generally. It is not object-specific: it does not, in other words, involve a disposition to experience positive moods only in response to a particular object or event, or class thereof. Thus it is irrelevant to questions of happiness that one is specifically disposed toward cheerful moods when in the presence of one's dog. Rather, one must be disposed to experience such moods in a wide

³⁸ It may help to consider dynamical systems approaches to mood, which conceive of an individual's mood as a point in a multidimensional state space, where each dimension represents a variable parameter (see, e.g., Parkinson et al. 1996). Certain points or regions in these spaces are *attractors*—configurations toward which subjects' moods naturally tend to gravitate. (E.g., the attractor for a depressed individual's mood will be somewhere in the region of depressed mood.) Moods can deviate from this configuration in response to particular events, but over time they will tend to converge on it. Roughly speaking, an individual's mood propensity is given by the shape of her mood state space: where are the attractors? As her mood propensity varies, so will the location of the attractors.

³⁹ "At some basic level": the qualifier reflects the relative immutability and near-innateness of temperament. Other factors also contribute to our characteristic emotional dispositions, such as our values and habits of thought.

range of circumstances.⁴⁰ Third, some mood propensities seem irrelevant to happiness: say, the tendency toward irritability brought on by a chronic pain in one's toe. Though this may be mediated by a true alteration in one's emotional disposition, we can imagine that such a pain might directly affect mood in the same way that a series of external events might, without any underlying continuity in one's emotional state. In short, we need to distinguish mood propensities that have the right categorical basis.⁴¹ I would suggest that happiness involves, not mood propensity period, but one's *emotionally-based* mood propensity. This is admittedly vague, but the idea is that mood propensity counts insofar as it reflects one's emotional condition. Toe-pain-based mood propensities do not. I will set aside this nicety in what follows.

5. The account of happiness: summary

Happiness has two components: first, a person's central affective states, and second, her mood propensity. Or, in more familiar terms, happiness consists in a person's emotional condition. To be happy is for one's emotional condition to exhibit a sufficiently favorable balance of positive versus negative. To be unhappy is for one's emotional condition to exhibit a sufficiently unfavorable balance of positive versus negative. ('Emotional condition' and 'state' are somewhat misleading; but no existing terms seem adequate to the phenomena here. Elsewhere I have suggested 'thymic state', from the Greek *thymos* (2001b, 2001a). This term still seems to me preferable, but it is wiser to stick with the more familiar terminology here.)

As I said, the question of what it is to *be* happy is not as pressing as the question of what it is for a state to be happiness-constituting. Yet it is significant: knowing that someone is happy normally licenses an inference that the person is well-off. Whether this holds depends on what the cutoffs for being happy or otherwise are. So what are they? The problem is surprisingly difficult, and I will not try to resolve it here. The traditional answer of hedonists is that a predomi-

⁴⁰ However, consider someone grieving the loss of her spouse. She may be fine so long as nothing reminds her of the loss. The problem is that *lots* of things serve as reminders, thus triggering her grief. This person is strongly disposed toward negative moods, and appears to be less happy thereby. Yet the disposition is not wholly generalized. It is a good question what exactly distinguishes this sort of case from a disposition to cheer up when writing poetry.

⁴¹ This is partly why I once incorporated the categorical basis—"mood base"—into the account rather than mood propensity (2001b). Mood propensity now strikes me as more plausible, though not much hangs on the choice.

nance of positive suffices for happiness, and a predominance of negative for unhappiness. This can't be right. Suppose someone experienced highly positive affect 51 percent of the time and highly negative states for the remainder. Surely we would not deem happy someone who is miserable almost half the time, even if the total quantity of positive affect outweighs that of the negative. Consider also one study's finding that European subjects reported feeling either sadness, fear, or anger 22 percent of the time, with the percentage of negative affect rising to 34 percent if we count feelings of "fatigue" (a category that includes stress and exhaustion) Brandstatter 1991. How happy can someone be who spends several hours a day being sad, angry, or afraid?⁴² Think as well of someone who, however cheerful by day, cries himself to sleep every night. Being happy evidently precludes even a large minority of negative affect.⁴³

An additional complication is that the mere absence of certain types of positive affect might undermine happiness, as in cases of superficial cheeriness with no deeper sense of fulfillment, and with emptiness instead of tranquility. It seems odd to regard as happy someone who is emotionally flat or inert, or hollow, save for a thin veneer of cheerfulness. It may be, then, that being happy requires an emotional state that is not just heavily weighted toward the positive, but specifically positive in certain, and perhaps most or all, major dimensions. This would parallel the criteria we seem to use for judging someone well-off: we tend to regard someone as being well-off just in case things are broadly favorable for her and nothing serious is wrong.⁴⁴

⁴² In informal surveys of undergraduates done at the beginning of my intro ethics courses, a majority—close to 60%—refused to ascribe happiness to someone with 38% negative affect and 55% positive affect. Initial results with a different questionnaire appear to yield a similar breakdown using the Brandstatter figures (66% PA/34% NA).

⁴³ An anonymous referee for this journal helpfully pointed out that this means someone with a "very intense emotional life" with lots of negative affect could thereby fail to be happy, while someone with a very mild emotional life, including few negative emotions, might be happy. But is the latter's life clearly better? Since she is happier, she is in that respect better off. But one might prefer the former life for at least two reasons. First, it could be more *admirable* to lead a life of passion and struggle, even if one is less happy and hence in that respect worse off (see Solomon 1998 for a nice discussion). Second, well-being probably involves success in one's commitments as well as happiness, so the passionate life, including its negative emotions, might be a benefit insofar as one *values* it. Whereas a quiet life can be quiet because the person doesn't really have any commitments, or has given up pursuing her goals.

⁴⁴ Compare also our criteria for judging someone healthy: am I healthy so long as *most* of my body is working okay? Interestingly, it is harder to say what the conditions for unhappiness, ill-being, or unhealthiness are. Part of why the cutoff problem is so hard is that it seems to involve, not just happiness, but a number of concepts.

Wherever exactly the cutoff belongs, it will likely require more than a mere majority of positive affect for being happy. This could have important implications. It could mean, for example, that the common view among empirical researchers that most people are happy is false. For this contention is based largely on findings that most people report high levels of life satisfaction, and that people tend to experience more positive than negative affect. But the former results are irrelevant if happiness and satisfaction are distinct, and the latter claim appears to use the wrong criterion. Indeed, the very data that have been taken to show most people happy, like the Brandstatter results, might instead show that most people are *not* happy.⁴⁵ Insofar as we think happy people tend to be doing well—and that does seem to be the implication of the “most people are happy” claim—then this change could alter our fundamental assessment of people’s well-being. The normative implications of such a claim aren’t entirely clear, but it would at least suggest that happiness should be a higher priority than it would be if most were happy. It seems more important to worry about those who aren’t doing well than those who are.

The account remains confessedly vague in other ways as well. For example, we have yet to see what exactly is meant by “positive” versus “negative” affect (or, for that matter, what is meant by “affect”). But it is not essential that we resolve these issues now: my goal is merely to establish the general plausibility of an emotional state conception. In fact it may be pointless to seek a high level of precision at this juncture, since any exact understanding of the states in question will surely need to be informed by empirical research, and the necessary research may not be done until the relevant distinctions have at least been crudely formulated.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Diener and Diener 1996. Also, most people report being happy; but the emotional state view gives no reason to think such reports authoritative. People might be confusing happiness with satisfaction, using the wrong cutoff, or simply be wrong about their emotional conditions, etc.

⁴⁶ Empirical researchers will want to know how to operationalize this view of happiness, and progress in sharpening the account would clearly be helpful. But two things can be noted here. First, investigators should consider assessing mood propensities directly, say through mood inductions. E.g., it should be easier to induce bad moods in unhappy than happy people. (Which is basically how I assess my happiness, short of asking my wife: how long can I sit at the computer before the urge to smash it sets in?) Second, since happiness depends less on joy/sadness affects than one might expect, researchers should ensure their instruments adequately track other affects, notably anxiety and stress.

The emotional state conception of happiness offers a plausible account of the phenomena involved in the paradigm cases, as well as other intuitive cases of happiness and unhappiness. Even apparent exceptions, like deep dissatisfaction with one's life, could largely or wholly be accommodated within this view: what makes that a case of unhappiness is arguably the negative emotional condition we associate with it. Take that away, and it is no longer so clear we are talking about a case of unhappiness. (Consider a small-town resident, impressed by television depictions of city life, who believes her environs dull and unsophisticated. Dissatisfied with her life, she wants to get out. Later, having done so, she realizes that her old life was actually rich and fulfilling, with none of the anxiety and loneliness of urban life. She might conclude that, while she had indeed been dissatisfied in her former life, she was nonetheless happy.) This theory also accounts for the broad practical significance of happiness: our emotional conditions seem to have the kind of importance that happiness is typically thought to have.⁴⁷

The emotional state view might seem to make happiness an *ad hoc* conjunction of two disparate categories. Why should happiness incorporate *these* states? What brings these states together, I would suggest, is their dispositionality: the components of happiness together fix a subject's emotional disposition, at least insofar as this reflects the individual's emotional condition. Indeed, the notion of an emotional condition itself most fundamentally concerns (but is not exhausted by) a person's emotional disposition. Peripheral affects, by contrast, do not in themselves alter a person's emotional disposition.⁴⁸ (This suggests a theoretical reason to incorporate mood propensities into the account: if happiness concerns us mainly as it involves persons' emotional dispositions, then it would be odd to leave mood propensities out of it.)

The difference is significant. As I noted earlier, changes in an agent's central affective states and mood propensity are much like changes in temperament or personality. To be happy is

⁴⁷ An additional argument favoring the emotional state theory appears in my 2001b. The argument is that only this account of happiness can account for the way we ascribe happiness in cases where subjects' present affects differ from those of the recent past. In such cases we appear to rely on what we take the subject's mood propensity to be.

⁴⁸ In earlier work I argued that central affective states and mood propensities are also joined in having similar functions—namely, responding to general features of our circumstances—unlike peripheral affects (2001a). This is a point I hope to develop further in future work. A very similar claim appears in Prinz 2004.

not merely to have experiences of a certain sort; it is also to be configured emotionally in certain ways. Indeed, one's whole *psychic* disposition seems altered. One is prone to take greater pleasure in things, to see things in a more positive light, to take greater notice of good things, to be more optimistic, to be more outgoing and friendly, and to take chances more. One is also slower and less likely to become anxious or fearful, or to be angered or saddened by events. *One confronts the world in a different way from the unhappy.* Whereas the hedonist regards happiness merely as a state of one's consciousness, the emotional state view takes it to be a state of one's *being*. When you're happy, everything is different.

6. Normative implications

That this view of happiness differs in important ways from the hedonistic and life satisfaction theories is, I take it, obvious. Less obvious, at least in relation to hedonism, is *how*. In what remains I will gesture at a few reasons for thinking these reflections significant that may not already be apparent. Since the issues raised are large, I will simply point to them without much argument, trying only to convince the reader that significant issues are at stake here.

We just saw that the emotional state view appears to forge a strong link between happiness and the self, a point that arose in §4.1 as well. Thus the central/peripheral distinction is naturally marked as a distinction between things that do, and do not, “get to us,” etc. The distinction is arguably between states *of* the self and states impinging on the self. Since many philosophers have maintained that well-being consists in some kind of self-fulfillment, a tight connection between happiness and the self may ramify for theories of well-being.⁴⁹ For if human flourishing is a matter of fulfilling the self, then our conception of the self is liable to shape our view of well-being. Nowadays we tend to think of the self as defined by one's desires, values or commitments—what one cares about, as Frankfurt says⁵⁰—and it is perhaps no coincidence that the most prominent views of well-being also center on fulfilling the individual's (informed, rational)

⁴⁹ Ideals of self-fulfillment can be found in the writings of, among many others, Aristotelians, Marxists, Thomists, and even liberal thinkers like Mill and Rawls. For general discussion, see Gewirth 1998 and Feinberg 1992.

⁵⁰ Frankfurt 1971, 1987.

desires. It requires little imagination to see how such theorists might lay claim to the notion of self-fulfillment: in fulfilling our most important desires, we achieve self-fulfillment.

Let's suppose that self-fulfillment, and well-being in turn, do consist partly in success in relation to certain of one's desires (aims, commitments, etc.). But suppose also that the self is partly defined, somewhat independently of one's desires, by one's propensities for happiness—that who we are is partly defined by what makes us happiest. Then self-fulfillment, and well-being in turn, might involve living in a way that brings one happiness.⁵¹ Consider, for instance, someone who successfully pursues a worthy career as a philosopher, but is rendered miserable by the work: it leaves her anxious, stressed, and spiritually deflated.⁵² Even if she endorses the choice with full awareness of its consequences, we would not likely regard her as having found self-fulfillment. It would seem, rather, that she is living in conflict with her nature, with who she is. She fails to flourish, not so much in having unpleasant experiences, but in living in a manner that is deeply at odds with the sort of person she is.

Whether or not such a view of well-being can ultimately be maintained—and I have not tried to argue for it here—it is not obviously implausible.⁵³ It is certainly more plausible given an emotional state view of happiness than a hedonistic one. And given the worries raised earlier about life satisfaction, it also seems more promising than a life satisfaction-based view like Sumner's. But it is enough for present purposes simply to note the emotional state view's potential ramifications for the theory of well-being.

The account also seems less susceptible than other theories to common worries about the importance of happiness. In political thought, for instance, happiness is frequently dismissed for being too subject to problems of adaptation, raising the specter of happy slaves and the like. Policymakers should thus focus their attention elsewhere, such as the distribution of resources or ca-

⁵¹ I would add that the happiness in question must be authentic, roughly along the lines suggested by Sumner.

⁵² This is a modified version of an example given by Sumner 1992.

⁵³ I argue that something like it is true in Haybron 2005a. There I also argue that Sumner's authenticity constraint is best understood as a requirement of self-fulfillment.

pabilities.⁵⁴ But an emotional state view of happiness seems less vulnerable on this count than other theories. For while it is easy to imagine people becoming resigned to oppressive circumstances, even registering satisfaction with their lives or showing the world a happy face, it is not so easy to imagine the enslaved, the solitary homeless, and the browbeaten sweatshop laborer leading *emotionally fulfilling* lives. When reading Martha Nussbaum's admirable depictions of struggling Indian women, 'psychic flourishing' is not the first term that comes to mind.⁵⁵

None of this is to deny that adaptation can drive a wedge between happiness and well-being. For this reason and others we should not expect happiness to be the sole ground of political decision-making. But I would suggest that concerns about adaptation can easily be exaggerated by a tendency either to conflate happiness with satisfaction or to view happiness in implausibly superficial terms.⁵⁶ In any event there is no evidence that people adapt so thoroughly or obstinately that policy can do nothing meaningful to promote happiness, or that doing so would not be worthwhile.⁵⁷ Suppose we know that a given policy will increase people's resources or capabilities while sharply reducing their happiness, say because they tend to choose badly or because greater freedom tends to erode the social bonds that are so crucial for happiness. (Perhaps the post-WWII United States is an actual example of this.⁵⁸) Isn't the information about happiness at least *relevant*? Wouldn't it be irresponsible to ignore it? Perhaps the real world is such as to rule out such possibilities, or maybe happiness can't be measured reliably enough to inform political

⁵⁴ See especially the Sen and Nussbaum references at the beginning of this paper.

⁵⁵ Nussbaum 2000. These cases are meant to illustrate (*inter alia*) the force of adaptation worries.

⁵⁶ Similarly, empirical research on adaptation may tend to be biased by a narrow focus on the joy-sadness dimension, which may be far more susceptible to adaptation than other dimensions, like tranquility/anxiety. (It makes sense to feel sad only for a short time after most bad events, but it is not obviously a good idea to stop being anxious and vigilant in the face of persistent threats to one's welfare or security.) Indeed the instruments themselves, like the popular Fordyce emotions questionnaire, sometimes explicitly privilege them (Fordyce 1988).

⁵⁷ In fact a major push by a number of the top researchers in this area to develop and promote national indicators of well-being, with happiness a central concern, is getting under way as I write. For an important review of the literature that argues that policy can and should be concerned with the promotion of happiness, indeed partly *because* adaptation seems particularly strong for the values measured by traditional economic indicators, see Diener and Seligman 2004. For a more skeptical assessment by a philosopher, see Millgram 2000.

⁵⁸ For some evidence that this is possible and may in fact be the case, see Schwartz 2000, 2004.

decisions. But those are bold empirical assertions that require, in any event, a decent understanding of happiness and related psychological matters.⁵⁹

7. Conclusion: from happiness to prudential psychology

My primary aim in this paper has been to establish the emotional state conception of happiness as a viable theory, with a plausible claim to superiority over the hedonistic and life satisfaction views. One can accept the general idea of an emotional state view while disputing specific aspects of my account. But I hope it is also clear that the theory of happiness *matters*. If my contentions about the emotional state view are correct, for instance, then mood-related affect proves to be far more important for human welfare than anyone would guess from the microscopic philosophical literature on mood.⁶⁰ And if we adopt a life satisfaction theory, we may be left with a deflationary view of happiness's value: life satisfaction might be significant, but it seems to have nothing like the deep and pervasive influence on our well-being that our emotional conditions do. This both threatens life satisfaction-based accounts of well-being and, given the importance most people ascribe to being happy, suggests that accepting a life satisfaction theory of happiness could result in serious mistakes about our welfare.

While it does matter how we conceive of happiness, I am less concerned about the definition of 'happiness' than that the distinctions discussed here are the right distinctions to make, that they are important, and that the psychological states in question do have the kinds of significance I have suggested. The main thing, in short, is that we better understand the psychology of well-being—*prudential psychology*, if you will (in parallel with its sister subject, moral psychology). What we choose to call "happiness" is secondary.

Prudential psychology is nothing new, even if its presence in the contemporary literature is limited. (Recent years have witnessed a significant amount of relevant work, like the growing

⁵⁹ By and large political theorists have not come right out and claimed happiness to be irrelevant in setting policy. The prevailing view is rather that happiness is not a matter of *justice*. Fair enough, but this hardly shows it not to be a pressing concern of social *morality*. Yet it is questionable whether many (non-Utilitarian) political theorists would grant even that much. And if they do, then they cannot plausibly claim that their work, which typically discusses happiness only to dismiss it, adequately represents the moral landscape facing political decision-makers.

⁶⁰ Heidegger being a notable exception.

emotions literature, but the connection with well-being usually gets little or no discussion.) Indeed, there was a time when philosophers would have been virtually unanimous that prudential psychology should be a central concern of ethical theory. Ancient philosophers seem not to have had a word that corresponds to the psychological sense of our ‘happiness’. But they considered various aspects and forms of happiness, such as tranquility, to be critically important for human welfare. Consider that all the major ideals of well-being, even the Stoic view, unmistakably involved being happy. (It is doubtful anyone would have taken them seriously if they did not.) And a decent grasp of the psychological dimensions of flourishing was, among the ancients, a top priority for ethical thought. This is plainly true not just of the hedonistic Epicureans, but also of (at least) Aristotle, Plato, and the Stoics. So while the contentions of this paper would naturally have met with resistance among the ancients at various points, the philosophical importance of the issues discussed here would have been obvious to all, and scarcely in need of explanation.

8. References

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