Dædalus

Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences

Spring 2004

Announcements

Correction: Alison Gopnik should have been acknowledged as the Consulting
Editor of the Winter 2004 issue on learning.

The Summer 2003 issue on secularism & religion has won a 2004 Wilbur Award for
excellence in reporting on religious themes.

Dædalus

Journal of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences
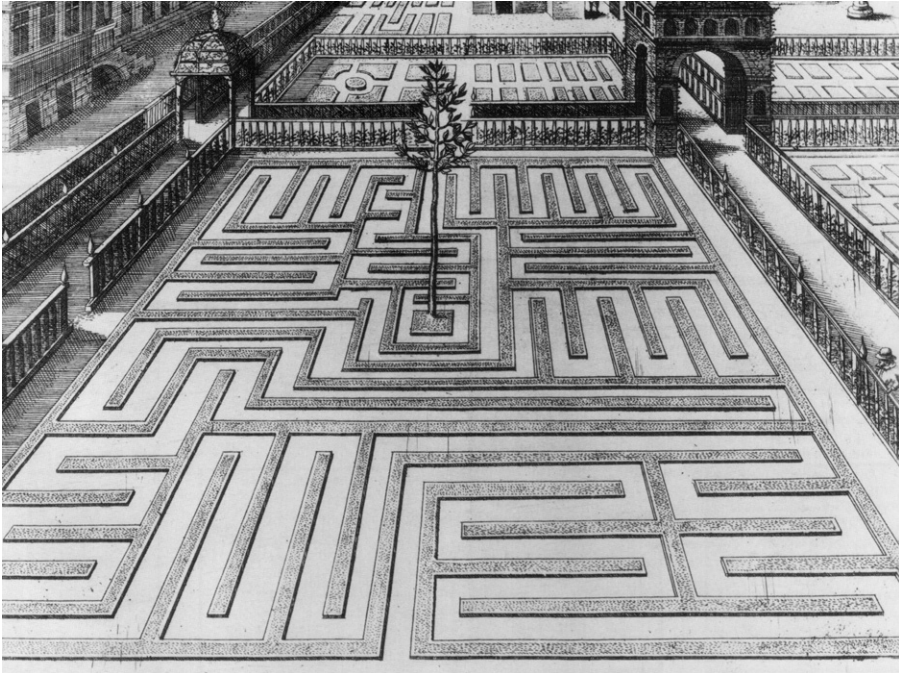
Design for the hedge maze is by Johan Vredeman de Vries, from *Hortorum viridariorumque elegantes et multiplicis artis normam affabre delineatae* (Cologne, 1615).

Dædalus was founded in 1955 and established as a quarterly in 1958. The journal's namesake was renowned in ancient Greece as an inventor, scientist, and unriddler of riddles. Its emblem, a maze seen from above, symbolizes the aspiration of its founders to "lift each of us above his cell in the labyrinth of learning in order that he may see the entire structure as if from above, where each separate part loses its comfortable separateness."

The American Academy of Arts & Sciences, like its journal, brings together distinguished individuals from every field of human endeavor. It was chartered in 1780 as a forum "to cultivate every art and science which may tend to advance the interest, honour, dignity, and happiness of a free, independent, and virtuous people." Now in its third century, the Academy, with its more than four thousand elected members, continues to provide intellectual leadership to meet the critical challenges facing our world.

Dædalus publishes by invitation only and as-
sumes no responsibility for unsolicited manu-
scripts. The views expressed are those of the
author of each article, and not necessarily of
the American Academy of Arts & Sciences.

Darrin M. McMahon

From the happiness of virtue to the virtue of happiness: 400 B.C. – A.D. 1780

It is only right that *Dædalus* should devote an issue to happiness, seeing that its publisher was chartered with the "end and design" of cultivating "every art and science which may tend to advance the interest, honour, dignity, and happiness of a free, independent, and virtuous people."

Its publisher, of course, is the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, founded in 1780 at a time when Americans – newly independent and free – were demanding that their institutions, like their government, serve a purpose, that they be *useful*. And to many eighteenth-century minds, there was simply no better test of usefulness than 'utility' – the property of promoting happiness. The English philosopher Jeremy Bentham is often credited with first articulating the creed. But when he observed in 1776 in his lawyerly prose that

"By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question," he was merely giving voice to what was already an eighteenth-century commonplace. To many enlightened souls on both sides of the Atlantic, the need to promote happiness had assumed the status of a self-evident truth.

That this truth, for all its self-evidence, was a relatively recent discovery – the product, give or take a decade, of the preceding one hundred years – is important. For though happiness itself already possessed a long history by the eighteenth century, the idea that institutions should be expected to promote it – and that people should expect to receive it, *in this life* – was a tremendous novelty.

It involved nothing less than a revolution in human expectations, while raising, in turn, a delicate question. Just who, precisely, was worthy of happiness? Was it fit for all? Was happiness a right or a reward? And what, for that matter, did the curious word really mean?

The answers to such questions take us to the heart of an eighteenth-century

Darrin M. McMahon is Ben Weider Associate Professor of European History at Florida State University. He is the author of "Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity" (2001) and the forthcoming "Happiness: A History" (2005).

contradiction that remains with us to the present day.

It may already have been noted that implicit in the few lines from the Academy's charter is another central assumption regarding happiness, though in this case the assumption is far older than the eighteenth century. If we leave aside for now the meaning of "interest, honour, and dignity," we can see most clearly that the Academy is asked not simply to cultivate every art and science that advances happiness, but every art and science that advances the happiness of a "free, independent, and virtuous people." The people in question are the citizens of the United States. And the implicit assumption is that those living in bondage or sin are not worthy of happiness. In light of the fact that slavery was long considered but a species of sin, and freedom but a product of living well, I want to focus solely on the remaining term – virtue – sketching in what follows a genealogy of its close links to happiness.

The belief in the intimate association of happiness and virtue was widely shared in the eighteenth century. The same man who coupled liberty and the pursuit of happiness so closely in the Declaration of Independence could later state without equivocation that "Happiness is the aim of life, but virtue is the foundation of happiness." Jefferson's collaborator on the draft of the Declaration and an early member of the American Academy, Benjamin Franklin, similarly observed in 1776 that "virtue and happiness are mother and daughter." This assumption had for many the status of a received truth. But the evidence for it was not at all recent.

On the contrary, it had accumulated so steadily, so imperceptibly over the course of centuries as to become less a self-evident truth than a truth unexamined, one that seemingly required no evidence at all.

It was Aristotle, in the fourth century B.C.E., who first put the matter most forcefully. Happiness, he expounded at length in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, is an "activity of the soul that expresses virtue." For Aristotle, all things in the universe have a purpose, a function, an end (*telos*). And that end, he says, is what gives expression to the highest nature and calling of the thing. In the famous example, the noble end of the acorn is to become a thriving oak, and in the same way the function of the harpist is to play the harp (and of the excellent harpist to play it well).

But can we say that there is a function specific to human beings in general? Aristotle believes that we can, and he identifies it as reason. Reason is what distinguishes us from plants, nonhuman animals, and nonliving things, and so our purpose must involve its fruitful cultivation. Living a life according to reason is for Aristotle the human function, and living an excellent life – reasoning well throughout its course and acting accordingly – is for him a virtuous life. Achieving such a life will bring us happiness, which thus represents our highest calling, our ultimate purpose, the final end to which all others are necessarily subordinate.

Happiness for Aristotle is not a fleeting feeling or an ephemeral passion. It is, rather, the product of a life well lived, the summation of a full, flourishing existence, sustained to the end of one's days, "a complete life."

It follows naturally enough that Aristotle affords at least some place to the role of fortune – chance – in influencing our happiness. For no one would count a man happy, he acknowledges, "who suffered the worst evils and misfortunes."

To do so would be to defend a "philosopher's paradox."

In conceding this role to chance as a determinant of happiness, Aristotle, on the one hand, is simply admitting with his characteristic level-headedness the limits on our ability to determine our fate. In a world of uncertainty, anything might happen before the end – a truth, Aristotle affirms, that is well captured in the celebrated phrase of the legislator Solon, "Call no man happy until he is dead." Yet on the other hand, by seeking to circumscribe the role of chance in the first place – to cow it into submission by virtue's superior force – Aristotle was also participating in a much broader philosophical shift, one that directly challenged Solon's ancient wisdom.

In order to fully appreciate this challenge, it is helpful to look for a moment at the principal word in ancient Greek for happiness, *eudaimonia*, one of a constellation of closely related terms that includes *eutychia* (lucky), *olbios* (blessed; favored), and *makarios* (blessed; happy; blissful).[1] In some ways encompassing the meaning of all of these terms, *eudaimon* (happy) literally signifies 'good spirit' or 'good god,' from *eu*=good and *daimon*=demon/spirit. In colloquial terms, to be *eudaimon* was to be lucky, for in a world fraught with constant upheaval, uncertainty, and privation, to have a good spirit working on one's behalf was the ultimate mark of good fortune. Even more it was a mark of divine favor, for the gods, it was believed, worked through the *daimones*, emissaries and conductors of their will. And this, in the pre-Socratic world, was the key to happi-

ness. To fall from divine favor – or to fall under the influence of an evil spirit – was to be *dysdaimon* or *kakodaimon* – 'unhappy' (*dys*/*kako*=bad), or more colorfully, 'in the shit,' a not altogether inappropriate play on the Greek *kakka* (shit/turds).[2] In a world governed by supernatural forces, human happiness was a plaything of the gods, a spiritual force beyond our control. When viewed through mortal eyes, the world's happenings – and so our happiness – could only appear random, a function of chance.

Central to the outlook of Hesiod and Homer, with strong echoes in many of the lamentations of Greek tragedy, this conception of happiness would prove remarkably stubborn. We need only think of the word itself: in every Indo-European language, the modern words for happiness, as they took shape in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, are all cognate with luck. And so we get 'happiness' from the early Middle English (and Old Norse) *happ* – chance, fortune, what *happens* in the world – and the *Mittelhochdeutsch Glück*, still the modern German word for happiness and luck. There is the Old French *heur* (luck; chance), root of *bonheur* (happiness), and *heureux* (happy); and the Portuguese *felicidade*, the Spanish *felicidad*, and the Italian *felicità* – all derived ultimately from the Latin *felix* for luck (sometimes

1 On this subject, see Cornelius de Heer, *Makar, Eudaimon, Olbios, Eutychia: A Study of the Semantic Field Denoting Happiness in Ancient Greek to the End of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1969).

2 The *kak-* root (bad) in Greek bears no direct linguistic relationship to the *kakk-* root (caca; turds). Yet the classical Greeks used *kak-* words as generic forms of cursing to signify 'damn,' or perhaps even more strongly, 'oh shit,' thus rendering the pun plausible if not immediately apparent in formal terms. I am grateful to Jeffrey Henderson of Boston University for sharing his expertise on this matter. On the Greek penchant for such punning in general, see Henderson's wonderful *The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

fate). Happiness, in a word, is what *happens* to us. If we no longer say that we are *kakodaimon* when things don't go our way, we still sometimes acknowledge, rather more prosaically, that "shit happens."

Despite this linguistic tenacity, most people today are probably uncomfortable with the idea that happiness might lie in the roll of the dice. And at least part of the reason for that uneasiness can be traced to Aristotle and his central contention that our behavior is the largest single factor in determining our happiness. Taking his cue from both Socrates and Plato before him, Aristotle avowed faith in human agency, in our ability to control our fortune by controlling our actions and responses to the happenings of the world.

Aristotle's efforts, in this regard, were part of a much broader movement to ensure the inviolability of a flourishing life in the face of external contingency and chance. As Martha Nussbaum has shown, Greek culture of the fourth and fifth centuries B.C.E., in fact, was obsessed with precisely this dilemma: how to ensure happiness despite what may *happen* to us, despite the unpredictability of luck.3

The same question continued to preoccupy the Romans, and indeed it is the response of the Stoic philosophers Cicero and Epictetus that best illustrates the extent of that new faith in human agency. Whereas Aristotle and others had left at least some room for the play of chance in determining happiness, Cicero and Epictetus attempted to rule out its influence altogether. If the man of virtue is the happy man, they argued, then the man of perfect virtue should be happy

come what may. Happiness is a function of the will, *not* of external forces. And so, extending this logic to its end point, Cicero is able to conclude that even the most extreme physical suffering should not thwart the happiness of the true Stoic sage. "Happiness…will not tremble, however much it is tortured." The good man can be happy even on the rack.

Like Aristotle, the great majority of the founding fathers of both the American Republic and the American Academy would likely have dismissed such talk as the defense of a philosopher's paradox. Yet in its very exaggeration the example illustrates perfectly the wider – and widely shared – classical view that happiness and pain were by no means mutually exclusive.4 Happiness itself was not a function of feeling, but a function of virtue. And as such it frequently required denial, sacrifice, even suffering. To anyone in the eighteenth century who had received a classical education – which is to say, the vast majority of educated men and women – this was a powerful set of received assumptions.

And of course Cicero and Epictetus were not the only sources of the assumption that happiness sometimes required suffering, since a very different sort of man had also equated happiness with pain. That man was Jesus Christ, and his instrument of torture, his rack, was the cross.

Admittedly, the image of a mutilated corpse, suspended by nails from planks of wood, and surrounded by weeping women, does not call happiness immediately to mind. One will certainly be for-

3 See Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

4 This, I would argue, is true even of Epicureanism, although the case is certainly complicated. For more on Epicurus, see below.

given for harboring similar reservations about the religious tradition that grew up around this lugubrious symbol. With reason, it might seem, has Christianity been called the worship of sorrow.

And yet, we need only recall Christ's frequent injunction to "rejoice and be glad" to appreciate that the appeal of this new faith lay in more than simply its invitation to take part in the suffering and sacrifice of its central founder. The promise of redemption *through* suffering – and the promise of a happiness greater than could ever be imagined on Earth – animated the tradition from the outset.

Consider, for example, the nature of Christ's promise in the Gospels, and particularly the ringing good news of the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain as recorded, respectively, by Matthew and Luke in the second half of the first century A.D.

Each begins with a series of 'beatitudes,' so named because of the Vulgate translation of the Greek term with which they open. *Beati* in Latin, *makarios* in Greek – the terms are often rendered in English as 'blessed,' although 'happy' would serve equally well, as indeed it does in some English and various other translations, such as in French, where *heureux* from the Old French *heur* is used in the cannon. What is critical, though, is the original Greek term itself – critical, on the one hand, in that the term is not *eudaimon*, a word that any educated speaker of Greek in the first century would have immediately associated with the tradition of classical philosophy; but critical, on the other, in that *makarios* was itself a term employed frequently by classical authors, including Aristotle and Plato, to signify 'happy' or 'blessed.' More exalted than *eudaimon*, without the same emphasis on chance, *makarios* signified an even loftier state, implying a direct connection to the gods. More importantly, it was the word that had already been chosen by the authors of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Jewish Bible (the Christian Old Testament), in their rendering of the classical Hebrew beatitudes, the so-called Ashrel. As Thomas Carlyle was later moved to observe, "There is something higher than happiness, and that is blessedness."

The authors of the New Testament beatitudes would certainly have agreed. Here is Matthew:

> Blessed [beati/*makarios*] are the poor in
>   spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heav-
>   en.
> Blessed are those who mourn, for they will
>   be comforted.
> Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit
>   the earth….
> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst
>   for righteousness, for they will be filled.
> Blessed are the merciful, for they will
>   receive mercy.
> Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will
>   see God.
> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will
>   be called children of God.
> Blessed are those who are persecuted for
>   righteousness's sake, for theirs is the
>   kingdom of heaven.
>   (Matthew 5:3–11)

And here is Luke:

> Blessed [beati/*makarios*] are you who are
>   poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.
> Blessed are you who are hungry now, for
>   you will be filled.
> Blessed are you who weep now, for you
>   will laugh.
> Blessed are you when people hate you and
>   when they exclude you, revile you, and
>   defame you on account of the Son of
>   Man.

*Darrin M.
McMahon
on
happiness*

Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for
surely your reward is great in heaven.

(Luke 6:20–22)

Much, of course, could be said about
these curious passages, now nearly two
thousand years old. But let it suffice here
to emphasize the promise of imminent
reward for those living virtuously in the
here and now. The merciful, the pure in
heart, the meek – all who pursue justice
and the way of the Lord – will be given
their due, granted mercy, a direct audi-
ence with God, intimacy in his family,
and the rich legacy of his kingdom. The
hungry shall be filled, the mournful shall
laugh, their gifts will be great in heaven.
And though all are enjoined to rejoice
now in this expectation – to "leap for
joy" – this is essentially a proleptic hap-
piness, a happiness of the future, what
Augustine would later call the "happi-
ness of hope."

This Christian conception was tremen-
dously powerful. For the happiness
promised in the beatitudes, and subse-
quently elaborated in Christian tradi-
tion, was at once specific in its sugges-
tions of rich reward and extremely, luxu-
riantly vague. Here the imagination
could be set free to revel in the delights
of the kingdom of God, to fantasize the
total fulfillment that would justify one's
earthly pains. All the milk and honey of
Jewish deliverance was joined to a new
prospect of ecstatic, erotic communion
with God, of gazing lovingly into his
eyes, "face to face," as the Apostle Paul
had promised. The words themselves –
release, rapture, passion, bliss – are re-
vealing. Whether in heaven or the New
Jerusalem, the happiness of paradise
would be entire and eternal, endless
and complete.

Even better, the beatific vision offered
a seductive rejoinder to Solon's saying

"Call no man happy until he is dead."
In the Christian account, happiness *was*
death – a proposition that dealt a power-
ful blow to the vagaries of earthly for-
tune, while at the same time transform-
ing the end of human life from a bound-
ary into a gateway. Whereas in the classi-
cal account, happiness encompassed the
span of a lifetime, Christian beatitude
was infinite. And whereas classical hap-
piness remained a comparatively cere-
bral affair – cool, deliberative, rational,
balanced – Christian happiness was un-
abashedly sensual in its imagined ecsta-
sies. Feeling, intense feeling, was what
flowed forth with Christ's blood, trans-
formed in the miracle of the Eucharist
from the fruit of intense pain to the
sweet nectar of rapture.

And yet, for all their essential differ-
ences, there were important similarities
between the classical and Christian con-
ceptions. In each tradition, happiness
remained an exalted state, a precious
reward for great sacrifice, commitment,
and pain. The consummation, the
crowning glory of a well-lived life, hap-
piness would be granted only to the wor-
thy, the virtuous, the god-like happy few.

As Christianity was fused ever closer
with the intellectual inheritance of the
classical pagan authors, these similari-
ties were only strengthened. It is no co-
incidence that when Augustine put pen
to paper shortly after his conversion to
Christianity in 386, he entitled his first
work *De Beata Vita*, The blessed or happy
life. True, he treats there the theme that
he would develop with such eloquence
in the *Confessions* and *The City of God* –
that perfect happiness, in this life, is sim-
ply not possible, because of original sin.
Nonetheless, the work is a classical dia-
logue, with a message bearing the deep
imprint of Plato and Cicero: that the
"search for higher happiness, not merely
its actual attainment, is a prize beyond

all human wealth or honor or physical pleasure."[5] Augustine's continual assurance that although "we do not enjoy a present happiness" we can "look forward to happiness in the future with steadfast endurance," kept this once classical, now Christian, end directly in the sights of all who wandered as pilgrims on the deserts of life.

One could make similar observations with respect to various other pillars of church doctrine, citing Boethius, say, from his influential sixth-century *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, in which he repeatedly insists that the "entire thrust of the human will as directed to various pursuits is to hasten towards happiness." And of course there is Aquinas, who in stitching the rediscovered classics of Aristotle – and particularly the *Nichomachean Ethics* – into the tapestry of the medieval church ensured that Aristotle's highest end would endure, with only minor alterations, as the Christian *telos* for centuries to come. By the end of the Renaissance, in fact, Christianity and classicism had grown so closely intertwined on the subject of happiness that works of Christian Stoicism, Christian Platonism, Christian Aristotelianism, and even Christian Epicureanism tackled the subject in depth.[6]

The existence particularly of Christian Epicurean tracts on happiness may seem odd, even a contradiction in terms. Yet it is too often forgotten that Epicurus himself was an unimpeachable ascetic who taught that "genuine pleasure" was not "the pleasure of profligates," but rather the simple satisfaction of a mind and body at peace. This was a message that less severe Christians could find amenable. And with the changing attitudes toward pleasure that bubbled up from the twelfth-century 'renaissance' through the *Rinascimento* itself, increasing numbers of them did.

The fact is important, for it highlights a tension that had existed in the Christian conception of happiness from the start. On the one hand an earthly existence that demanded denial and renunciation, the embrace of suffering as *imitatio Christi* and the just deserts for original sin. And on the other, the promise of a reward that was often pleasurable – sensual – in the extreme. Heaven may always have seemed a paradise, but beginning in the thirteenth century, its luxuries achieved new levels in the Christian imagination. "In that final happiness *every* human desire will be fulfilled," Aquinas observes in the *Summa against the Gentiles*, and men and women will know "perfect pleasure," the "perfect delight of the senses," to say nothing of those of the mind. No pleasure, no pleasure at all, would be lacking – even, Aquinas specified (to the later delight of Nietzsche) the pleasure of enjoying others' pain. *Beati in regno coelesti videbunt poenas damnatorum, ut beatitude illis magis compleaceat*. The saved would feast on the sight of the sufferings of the damned.

Creative speculation on the Christian meaning of happiness multiplied during the High Renaissance. In works like Lorenzo Valla's *On Pleasure* (1431) and the monk Celso Maffei's *Pleasing Explanation of the Sensuous Pleasures of Paradise* (1504), to name only two, little was left to the imagination, with accounts brimming over with the delights that awaited

5 This is a phrase from Cicero's lost manuscript, *Hortensius*, which Augustine knew well. See Henry Chadwick, *Augustine*, Past Masters series (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 24.

6 See Charles Trinkhaus, *Adversity's Noblemen: The Italian Humanists on Happiness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940).

the faithful in the world to come.7 Classical descriptions of Elysium, the Blessed Isles, and the pagan Golden Age were freely adapted to give spice to the afterlife, as were Christians' own accounts of the Paradise before the Fall, where, as Augustine had stressed, "true joy [had] flowed perpetually from God." The Renaissance imagination thus ranged freely forward to the joys that would come, and backward to those that had been. But the impulse to do so in such graphic detail clearly came from the present. The imagined pleasures beyond, that is, were a reflection of the greater acceptance of pleasure in the here and now.

The reasons for such a broad shift are of course complex. But in terms of ideas, an important place must be given to Aquinas and his fellow Christian Aristotelians. For by de-emphasizing the total, vitiating effects of original sin, and emphasizing the place of virtue as man's *telos*, they carved out a space for cultivating and improving earthly life. To be sure, perfect happiness (*beatitudo perfecto*) would still come only with death by grace. But in the meantime, one could prepare for it by cultivating imperfect happiness (*felicitas* or *beatitudo imperfecto*) along the ladder that led to human perfection. It was by climbing – pulling oneself upward – on the heights of just such a liberal theology that Christian humanists like Erasmus and Thomas More were able to conceive of an earthly existence that was rather more than a vale of tears.

In some respects, it is true, the Protestant Reformation – with its recovery of a dour, Augustinian theology of sin – tended to put a damper on this open indulgence of pleasure. And certainly the ter-

rible violence of the ensuing Religious Wars did little to minimize pain. Yet it should also be stressed that for all their emphasis on human depravity, Calvin and Luther were by no means ill disposed to pleasure. The damned might well be "vessels of wrath," in Calvin's words, but for those in whom the workings of grace could be detected, the joys of the new Adam were at hand. As Luther felt moved to observe in his preface to St. Paul's Letter to the Romans:

> This kind of trust in and knowledge of God's grace makes a person joyful, confident, and happy with regard to God and all creatures. This is what the Holy Spirit does by faith.

Calvin, for his part, observed in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* that God's grace was the alchemy that could transform human misery – including poverty, wretchedness, exile, ignominy, imprisonment, and contempt – into gold. "When the favor of God breathes upon us, there is none of these things which may not turn out to our happiness."8 The trick of course was to be certain of God's grace and forgiveness, a certainty that in theory at least could never be had. But as Max Weber famously observed, one could always be on the lookout for signs. Did it not make sense to see earthly happiness as an indication that one might be headed in the direction of everlasting content? Not only fortune was evidence of good fortune. The ability to take pleasure in the won-

---

7 See the concise account in Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), esp. chap. 5, "The Pleasures of Renaissance Paradise."

8 On the subject of happiness in Calvin's thought, see Heiko A. Oberman, "The Pursuit of Happiness: Calvin between Humanism and Reformation," in *Humanity and Divinity in Renaissance and Reformation: Essays in Honor of Charles Trinkaus*, ed. John W. O'Malley, Thomas M. Izbicki, and Gerald Christianson (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1993).

ders of God's creation was also an encouraging sign.

In this respect, it is fair to say that just as Epicurus was hardly epicurean, Protestants and Puritans were much less puritanical than is often supposed. The sanctioning of sexual pleasure within marriage, the "affirmation of ordinary life" entailed in the enjoinder to seek God in all things, and the constant reminder that the Creator's perfect creation appeared ugly only to those who saw it through sinful eyes – all this went some way toward establishing the proposition that pleasure might be taken as a sign of grace, that happiness might be a direct reflection of the virtuous Christian soul.[9]

Thus, the Reverend Thomas Coleman, preaching before the English Parliament on August 30, 1643, likened his countrymen's struggle against Charles I to the ancient Israelites' "long pursuit of happinesse," arguing that they might be confident in attaining their end.[10] It was a felicitous phrase, and in the coming years Englishmen of a variety of persuasions employed it regularly, echoing the conviction of the author of the 1641 tract *The Way to Happiness on Earth* that this was where our journey began.[11] "The being in a state of Grace will yield . . . both a Heaven here, and Heaven here-

after," rendering "a man's condition happy, safe, and sure," emphasized the Puritan millenarian Thomas Brooks.[12] By the time of the Restoration, even High Church authors were penning popular tracts on the art of contentment, as if to give credence to an earlier author's claim that "happinesse is the language of all." "We must look through all things upon happinesse," this author observed, "and through happinesse upon all things."[13]

The claims of these seventeenth-century British divines bring us very close to the truly momentous proposition that pleasure and happiness might be considered good in and of themselves. And it should not surprise us that one of the first authors to entertain this bold suggestion – John Locke – evolved directly out of this same religious milieu.

The son of a Puritan who had fought for Cromwell in the English Civil War, Locke himself, to be sure, was no orthodox Calvinist. And whatever insight he may have gleaned from Christian sources regarding happiness was no doubt amply supplemented by his immersion in Newtonian science and his understanding of Epicurus (as inter-

9 The phrase "affirmation of ordinary life" is that of Charles Taylor, *The Sources of the Self : The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1989).

10 Thomas Coleman, *The Christian's Course and Complaint, Both in the Pursuit of Happinesse Desired, and for Advantages Slipped in that Pursuit : A Sermon Preached to the Honorable House of Commons on the Monthly Fast Day, August 30, 1643* (London : Christopher Meredith, 1643).

11 Robert Crofts, *The Way to Happinesse on Earth Concerning Riches, Honour, Conjugall Love, Eating, Drinking* (London : Printed for G. H., 1641).

12 Thomas Brooks, *Heaven on Earth, or, A Serious Discourse Touching a Well-Grounded Assurance of Men's Everlasting Happiness and Blessedness* (London : Printed for John Hancock, Senior and Junior, 1657), preface.

13 Richard Holdsworth, *The Peoples Happinesse. A Sermon Preached in St. Maries in Cambridge, Upon Sunday the 27 of March, Being the Day of His Majesties Happy Inauguration* (Cambridge : Roger Daniel, 1642), 2, 5 – 6. Holdsworth was master of Emanuel College and vice chancellor of the university. Richard Allestree's *The Art of Contentment* (Oxford : At the Theater, 1675) went through over twenty editions and was still in print in the nineteenth century. Allestree, a leading royalist divine, was the provost of Eaton.

preted by the French priest Pierre Gassendi, whose writings Locke studied closely). Quite rightly, as a consequence, historians have long emphasized the latter influences in shaping Locke's work, particularly the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), in which he presents his celebrated conception of the mind as a *tabula rasa*, born without innate ideas or the corruptions of original sin, animated by sensations of pleasure and pain.

In the famous chapter "Power" in book 2 of that work, Locke uses the phrase "the pursuit of happiness" no fewer than four times. And he indeed employs a variety of Newtonian metaphors – stones that fall, tennis balls hit by racquets, and billiard balls struck by cues – to describe the ways in which human beings are propelled, and propel themselves, through the space of their lives. The force that moves them, we learn, the power that draws them near, is the desire for happiness, which acts through the gravitational push and pull of pleasure and pain. We are drawn by the one and repulsed by the other, and it is right that this is so. For in Locke's divinely orchestrated universe, pleasure is providential; it is a foretaste of the goodness of a God who desires the happiness of his creatures. "Pleasure in us," it follows, "is that we call good, and what is apt to produce pain in us, we call evil." And happiness in its full extent is simply "the utmost pleasure we are capable of."

Here, then, was the monumental formulation. Redeeming pleasure, it unabashedly coupled good feeling with the good.

Its influence on the eighteenth century was profound. There was virtue in pleasure, Locke's readers came to believe, and pleasure in virtue. Being good meant feeling good. Arguably, there was no more widespread Enlightenment assumption. Moral sense theorists like Frances Hutcheson and Jean-Jacques Burlamaqui shared it, as did the Unitarian Joseph Priestly and the psychologist David Hartley. David Hume maintained as much, right alongside the French philosophers Helvétius and Condillac and the Italian legal theorist Cesare Beccaria. And of course there was Bentham with his felicific calculus of pleasure and pain, to say nothing of Jefferson and Franklin.

All of these men, as it happens, were deeply indebted to Locke's *Essay*. But by the second half of the eighteenth century, even many who were not tended to share its key assumptions.[14] The anonymous author of *True Pleasure, Chearfulness, and Happiness, The Immediate Consequence of Religion*, published in Philadelphia in 1767, gave no evidence of having read the wise Mr. Locke. But he undoubtedly believed with him that God delighted to see his creatures happy, and that pleasure itself was a very good thing. Christ, he argued, was a 'Happy Christ,' who had revealingly performed his first miracle at a wedding, where not coincidentally there was feasting, dancing, and ample wine. The heavenly Father, surely, did not frown on mirth; he smiled fondly upon it.

This author was probably more upbeat than most. But he was not alone in proclaiming earthly happiness to be a direct consequence of religion. By the latter part of the late eighteenth century, in fact, Christian writers on both sides of the Atlantic – Protestant and Catholic alike – were churning out works that made precisely this claim, arguing that

14 On the importance of Locke and the primacy of pleasure in the eighteenth century, see Roy Porter, "Enlightenment Pleasure," in *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Roy Porter and Marie Mulvey Roberts (New York: New York University Press, 1996).

Christianity was an excellent *means* to a much coveted earthly end. In this way, religion itself took part in the great Utilitarian current that swept the century, sweeping up all things in its midst. And if happiness and pleasure – good feeling and amusement – were now expected even of religion in this life, they could be required of most anything. Increasingly they were, making unprecedented demands on places, professions, laws, relationships, governments, scientific academies – even essays on happiness, of which there were more written in the eighteenth century than in any previous age.

It bears repeating how radical this transformation was. For henceforth religion would be asked not only to serve salvation, but to serve what in a secularizing culture was treated ever more like an end in itself: earthly happiness. Already in the early nineteenth century Tocqueville could point out that when listening to American preachers it was difficult to be sure "whether the main object of religion is to procure eternal felicity in the next world or prosperity in this." He would have much more difficulty today.

It has long been a truism of modern historiography that this shift from the happiness of heaven to the happiness of Earth was a product of the Enlightenment, the consequence of its assault on revealed religion and its own validation of secular pleasure. I would not dispute the main lines of this interpretation, but as I have tried to suggest here, it is also the case that the shift toward happiness on Earth occurred *within* the Christian tradition as well as without.

And this fact is important, for it helps to account for the ways in which eighteenth-century men and women were

able to shield themselves for so long from an uncomfortable truth. Namely, as Immanuel Kant would point out with such force at the end of the century, that "making a man happy [was] quite different from making him good." Kant, writing in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), used the term 'happy' in its eighteenth-century sense, as pleasure or good feeling – and clearly he was right. For if the proposition that doing good (living virtuously) meant feeling good (being happy) was always debatable, it was far more dubious still that feeling good meant being good. Virtue, Kant reaffirmed, with an air of common sense, was sometimes painful. And those who were happy, who felt good, were sometimes bad.

He might easily have added that by the logic of the pleasure/pain calculus, not only was it good to feel good, but it was bad to feel bad. Sadness, by this measure, would be a sin, and those who experienced it would justly feel guilty for doing so. It may be that in our own day we are close to this point. But in the eighteenth century, the proposition would still have shocked. The question is why – why did not more people think through the implications and the logic of one of the century's most dominant ethical impulses?

One answer is that they did not want to – all ages, after all, have their willful blind spots, our own day no less than the 1760s – and certainly it was nice to believe that feeling good and being good were mostly one and the same. But most men and women in the eighteenth century were simply *not able* to think through the implications of their increasingly contradictory assumptions about happiness – not able, that is, to see with the piercing vision of a Kant the contradictions that lay at the heart of the century's newly self-evident truths.

Admittedly, there were radicals who pushed the logic of the pleasure/pain calculus to its ultimate extreme. Julien Offray de La Mettrie, for one, or the Marquis de Sade, for another, argued that if pleasure was good, and pain was bad, then the most intense forms of pleasure – sexual or even criminal – should be embraced with virtuous gusto. "Renounce the idea of another world; there is none," Sade observes in his "Dialogue Between a Priest and a Dying Man" (1782). "But do not renounce the pleasure of being happy and of making for happiness in this." If the world, in short, could offer nothing better than pleasure, then should not pleasure be pursued to the hilt? And what was more pleasurable, Sade wanted to know, than a good fuck?

Such exceptions, however, prove the rule. For Sade and La Mettrie were written off as pariahs, decried as scandalous, condemned as immoral, accused of lacking virtue. Their pleasure was not happiness, contemporaries charged, but egotism, immorality, indulgence, and vice. But the assumption that many fell back on to level this charge was not the century's newly self-evident conception of happiness as utilitarian pleasure. They fell back instead on the teachings about happiness that had accumulated slowly over the centuries, amassed by Hebrews and Hellenes, classicists and Christians: that happiness and virtue, happiness and right action, happiness and godliness did indeed walk in step, but that the journey was often difficult, demanding sacrifice, commitment, even pain. That happiness, if it came at all, was not a right of being human, but a reward, the product of a life well lived.

In the eighteenth century there were still enough Stoics and close readers of the Bible – men and women steeped in classical teachings on happiness and rich in the legacy of Christian virtue – so as not to efface completely the line that separated being good from feeling good. The eighteenth century still lived on this inheritance – but we might say that it lived on borrowed time.

To his immense credit, John Locke understood this dilemma, saw with a perspicacity and foresight that rivaled Kant's own the problems raised by the novel pursuits he set in motion. In the very chapter "Power" of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke acknowledged, with more than a nod to his Calvinist past, that what prevented his system from devolving into a simple relativism of feeling was the prospect that one would judge the virtue of present pleasures and present pains – abstaining and acting accordingly – on the basis of future pleasures to come. This was "the reasonableness of Christianity." As he emphasized again, with reasonableness, in a later work of that name:

> Open [men's] eyes upon the endless unspeakable joys of another life and their hearts will find something solid and powerful to move them. The view of heaven and hell will cast a slight upon the short pleasures and pains of this present state, and give attractions and encouragements to virtue, which reason and interest, and the care of ourselves, cannot but allow and prefer. Upon this foundation, and upon this only, morality stands firm.[15]

By contrast, Locke conceded in the chapter "Power" of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, "Were all the Concerns of Man terminated in this Life, then why one followed Study and

15 John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity, as Delivered in the Scriptures*, ed. I. T. Ramsey (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1958), 70.

Knowledge, and another Hawking and
Hunting; why one chose Luxury and
Debauchery, and another Sobriety and
Riches," would simply be "because
their *Happiness* was placed in different
things." "For if there be no Prospect
beyond the Grave, the inference is cer-
tainly right, *Let us eat and drink*, let us
enjoy what we delight in, *for tomorrow
we shall die*."

In such a world, why men and wom-
en should read the publications of the
American Academy if it did not feel
good to do so – or perform any number
of other virtuous tasks – was not imme-
diately apparent.

Robert Biswas-Diener, Ed Diener & Maya Tamir

The psychology of subjective well-being

In the last few decades there has been something of a revolution in the scientific study of happiness.[1] A combination of radical new thinking and sophisticated methodology has allowed psychologists to add substantially to our understanding of this concept that has historically been the domain of philosophers and theologians. For the first time, we are able to measure happiness. And we have learned much about the biological and social factors that contribute to happiness. Perhaps just as important, we

have debunked many myths about it – such as that young people are happy and the elderly are sad, or that money is the secret to it. Above all, we have begun to learn the lesson that happiness is more than an emotional pleasantry – that it is a psychological tonic that promotes well-being in many domains of life.

The importance of using the scientific method in the study of happiness can be illustrated by referring to the work of Bertrand Russell, one of the greatest minds of the twentieth century. Russell, in his analysis of subjective well-being in *The Conquest of Happiness*, maintained that the majority of people are unhappy, in part because they compare themselves to others who appear superior to them. However, contemporary researchers have discovered that most people, at least in modern Western nations, consider themselves to be happy. Further-

Robert Biswas-Diener, who teaches in the psychology department at the University of Oregon, has conducted a number of studies of happiness, including among the Maasai in Kenya and the slum dwellers in Calcutta.

Ed Diener, Alumni Professor of Psychology at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, is past president of the International Society of Quality of Life Studies and of the Society of Personality and Social Psychology. He is editor of the "Journal of Happiness Studies."

Maya Tamir is a graduate student in the psychology department at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana.

1 For an in-depth study of the research on subjective well-being, see Ed Diener, "Subjective Well-Being," *Psychological Bulletin* 95 (1984): 542 – 575; Ed Diener, Eunkook M. Suh, Richard E. Lucas, and Heidi L. Smith, "Subjective Well-Being: Three Decades of Progress," *Psychological Bulletin* 125 (1999): 276 – 302; Ed Diener and Eunkook M. Suh, eds., *Culture and Subjective Well-Being* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000); and Daniel Kahneman, Ed Diener, and Norbert Schwarz, eds., *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology* (New York: The Russell Sage Foundation, 1999).

more, scientists have found that people can draw strength from upward social comparisons because these offer hope and inspiration. Another error drawn from Russell's work is his contention that children make people happy: researchers have found little evidence that people with children are, on average, happier than those without.

The lesson here is simply that we need the scientific method to complement our analytical efforts to understand happiness, and we hope to demonstrate in this essay that scientific research has indeed helped advance this understanding. In its infancy, psychological research on happiness consisted largely of simple descriptive studies, such as comparisons between the happiness of men and women. Only recently, in the last fifty years, have behavioral scientists undertaken a serious empirical examination of happiness. By employing testable hypotheses, longitudinal designs, controlled experiential studies, and multiple measurement methods, researchers have been able to explain aspects of subjective well-being more definitively than the less formal approaches common in the past were equipped to.

All attempts to comprehend, explain, and predict happiness presuppose that researchers can define and measure it. Many psychologists tend to tackle the sticky problem of defining happiness by looking at subjective well-being, that is, people's evaluations of their own lives, including both cognitive and emotional components. Most researchers focus on three components of subjective well-being: positive affect – the presence of pleasant emotions such as joy, contentment, and affection; negative affect – the relative absence of unpleasant emotions such as fear, anger, and sadness; and personal judgments about satisfac-

tion. Taking the three components of subjective well-being together, a happy person is someone who is frequently cheerful, only occasionally sad, and generally satisfied with his or her life. Satisfaction judgments can be general ("Overall, I am satisfied with my life") or specific ("I am satisfied with my marriage"). These judgments of life, work, marriage, school, and other domains can be based on past emotional experience or emotional memories, but can also involve explicit goals, values, and standards of comparison.

Psychologists' attempts to measure abstract concepts (such as intelligence in IQ tests) have frequently come under criticism, and the efforts of subjective-well-being researchers are no exception. The good news is that the measurement of happiness is not only possible, it is also sophisticated. Most researchers rely on a multi-method approach that employs a variety of assessment techniques. This avoids the failures associated with any single method and also capitalizes on the different assessment techniques' sensitivities to different aspects of happiness. Still, the most common, and most commonsense, way to measure happiness is through self-report surveys.

Researchers have developed a number of surveys that ask people about their relative levels of satisfaction, as well as the frequency and intensity of their emotions. Friends, family members, and roommates can also evaluate the happiness of a person close to them. This 'informant report' method produces reasonable correlations with self-report measures and protects against measurement artifacts that can arise when only one assessment is used.

To evaluate emotional experience as it occurs in everyday life, researchers have developed a technique known as experience sampling. In this assessment

Robert Biswas-Diener, Ed Diener & Maya Tamir on happiness

procedure, research participants carry palmtop computers that sound an alarm at random times throughout the day. Participants then complete short online surveys about their current emotional state and activities. The resulting data set allows subjective-well-being researchers to plot emotional peaks and troughs over days and weeks, and to analyze these in relation to the environments in which they occurred.

Yet another method of assessing subjective well-being is through people's rapid recall of positive versus negative memories. Biological methods – such as those that measure heart rate, galvanic skin response, startle reflex, hormone levels, and neurological activity – have been helpful in validating the more widely used measurements of happiness. Together, these methods produce a fairly valid portrait of people's experiences of well-being.

The happiness timeline, one of the most exciting breakthroughs in subjective-well-being research, was the direct result of multi-method assessment. Researchers noticed that when study participants completed surveys about emotion in the moment versus in retrospect, somewhat different patterns of happiness emerged. So subjective-well-being researchers now examine happiness as a phenomenon that can be separated into distinct temporal components, including emotional reactions and retrospective recall.

Economists, sociologists, and policy-makers are fond of studying poverty and other objective indicators of quality of life. Subjective-well-being researchers, on the other hand, are primarily interested in the individual's cognitive and emotional response to his or her circumstances. Because people show varying resilience, values, and ability to thrive emotionally – even in harsh conditions

– objective indicators cannot be the last word in quality-of-life assessment. For example, the dramatic increases in wealth since World War II, while unquestionably raising 'quality of life,' have been accompanied by almost no increase in happiness in many rich nations. One reason for this surprising finding could be that there is a disparity between the material benefits of economic growth in developed nations and people's emotional reactions to them.

The second sequential component to happiness is the phenomenon of retrospective recall. Whereas objective events and emotional responses may change day to day and moment to moment, retrospective recall involves longer-lasting impressions. Despite the intuitive notion that memory neatly documents our past in organized mental files, memory is often selective and deceptive. Experience-sampling studies have shown that personal beliefs can influence memory. In one study, female participants who said that women are more emotional while menstruating were likely to retrospectively report being more emotional than they actually were during their own menstrual cycle. Other findings from recall studies suggest that for short time periods after particular events people try to recall their actual experiences, whereas for longer periods they tend to rely on ready-made answers such as their self-concept of how they normally feel.

There are far-reaching implications to the finding that people's direct emotional experience of a particular event and their emotional memory of it do not always match well. Take the example of the family vacation: most are filled with a mix of pleasure and annoyance, with doses of cheer, affection, anger, and frustration. Research shows that how a person remembers her vacation is not simply an aggregate of all the emotional

highs minus all the lows. Instead, people use a host of cognitive shortcuts that includes an evaluation of the best moments and the most recent moments, and are influenced by prior expectations of how they imagined beforehand the situation would turn out. What this means, in practical terms, is that despite long lines at the airport, sunburns, and disappointing meals, people often misremember their vacations as more idyllic than they actually were. In the end, happiness, whether a matter of pleasant emotions or pleasant memories, is made up of several temporal facets that are only modestly related to one another.

One of the most encouraging results from subjective-well-being research is the finding that most people are happy – perhaps a surprising finding in the face of media reports on the rising use of Prozac and the high suicide rate in Scandinavia. But in dozens of studies of emotion and life satisfaction conducted in countries around the world, the majority of respondents report feeling slightly positive most of the time. One possible explanation for the prevalence of happiness is that people are evolutionarily geared toward a mildly positive emotional tone. Whereas negative emotions such as fear tend to limit behavioral repertoires to narrow fight-flight-fright patterns, positive emotions appear to lead to expanding important repertoires of thoughts and actions such as increased sociability, higher motivation, and goal-oriented activity.

But for all this understanding of the architecture of emotional well-being, the most compelling question remains: What causes happiness?

One of the main factors contributing to subjective well-being is personality. Extroversion and neuroticism, in particular, are strongly tied to emotional experience. Studies show that people who are highly extroverted – that is, who are more socially outgoing and exhibit more sensitivity to rewards – tend to experience higher levels of positive emotion such as joy and enthusiasm, even when they are alone. On the other hand, neurotic people are prone to experiencing more anxiety, guilt, and depression. Personality traits such as extroversion and neuroticism, both strongly influenced by genes, emerge early in life and remain somewhat stable over time. The idea that happiness hinges on heredity is supported, in part, by studies of twins who exhibit similar emotional patterns even when they have been raised apart. This does not mean, however, that happiness is solely the result of a genetic blueprint. Just as cholesterol levels have a genetic basis but can still be altered by diet, happiness levels can change according to life circumstances, activities, and patterns of thinking.

Another factor influencing subjective well-being is adaptation. Humans have a remarkable ability to adapt to both positive and negative life circumstances. One fascinating and frequently cited study conducted with spinal cord injury patients showed that within eight weeks of their injury they adapted emotionally to their condition so that their happiness was stronger than their negative emotions such as fear and anger. Other research has shown that people can adapt to a wide range of good and bad life events in less than two months. Although adaptation can offer hope to people who have experienced a tragedy, there are some events to which people are slow or unable to adapt completely. Unemployment, for example, appears to take a long-lasting emotional toll: people frequently show lower levels of life satisfaction even after they procure a new job. We also find that it takes the

average widow many years after her spouse's death to regain her former levels of life satisfaction. (Interestingly, men are more affected by labor market events such as unemployment, and women are more affected by family events such as the birth of a child and divorce.) Thus, although people have a tremendous capacity to adapt over time, they do not adapt completely to all conditions.

Another crucial factor in subjective well-being is social relationships. Having intimate, trusting social relationships appears to be necessary for happiness. Comparisons of the happiest and least happy people show that the dimension in which the happiest people are similar is having high-quality friendships, family support, or romantic relationships; the happiest folks all had strong social attachments. A study comparing the subjective well-being of pavement dwellers in Calcutta to that of their homeless counterparts in the United States produced surprising results related to social relations.

The slum dwellers of Calcutta live in shocking material deprivation: they own few possessions, earn little money, endure harsh weather conditions, and suffer from a complete lack of privacy and a lack of access to quality health care, clean water, and nutritious food. The American homeless, by contrast, have relatively easy access to shelter, free food, coats, blankets, and hygiene products. Despite their relative material prosperity, however, the homeless in America reported lower levels of subjective well-being than the pavement dwellers in Calcutta. A closer look at the data showed that a large part of the relative life satisfaction of the Calcutta sample was due to the pavement dwellers' high-quality social relationships; cultural and economic factors doom many Indians

to collective poverty with their families, while many American homeless people are often estranged from their friends and loved ones. Although good relationships cannot guarantee subjective well-being, there appears to be little happiness without them.

While personality, adaptation, and high-quality social relations are probably universal factors underlying levels of happiness, recent research has shown there are causes of subjective well-being that vary from culture to culture and from person to person.

One of the most common ways psychologists conceptualize culture is by discussing societies in terms of individualism and collectivism. Individualists are people who, culturally speaking, emphasize the value of personal freedom and tend to put personal goals above group goals when the two are in conflict. Western industrialized countries tend to be individualistic, with the United States anchoring the extreme end of the spectrum. Collectivists, on the other hand, emphasize social harmony and tend to sacrifice personal goals to group goals when the two are in conflict. India and Ghana are examples of collectivist nations. The two types of cultures prescribe different routes for achieving subjective well-being. Collectivist cultures, for example, are more likely to emphasize fitting in and fulfilling the duties associated with one's social roles, whereas individualist cultures are more likely to promote enjoyment and personal experience.

A clever study conducted with Asian, Asian-American, and European-American university students illustrates the point that different cultural groups may look for happiness in different sources. The students were brought into the research laboratory and were asked to shoot baskets into a miniature hoop.

They had ten opportunities to make baskets and their accuracy was recorded. Later they were again brought to the laboratory, but this time they could choose between shooting baskets or trying to score bull's-eyes in darts. The fun-loving European-American students who performed well the first time around generally chose to continue playing basketball. The European-American students who performed poorly were more likely to give darts a go. By contrast, the mastery-oriented Asian and Asian-American students who performed well at basketball the previous week chose to move on and attempt to master the new activity. Those Asian and Asian-American students who performed poorly the week before chose to stick with basketball in an attempt to improve. It is important to note that the moods of the Asian and Asian-American students in this study suffered relative to the moods of the European-American students; the Asian and Asian-American students traded goodness of mood for mastery, showing a willingness to exchange short-term pleasure for long-term satisfaction.

The bottom line with cultural prescriptions is that people in different cultures often approach happiness via different routes. Collectivists are more likely to achieve subjective well-being through activities that promote mastery and group harmony, whereas individualists are more likely to receive a larger emotional paycheck from activities that are pleasant and showcase their individual talents. Therefore, a good society is, to some degree, one that allows people to succeed in various endeavors congruent with their individual and collective values.

Subjective-well-being researchers have also discovered much about what does *not* cause happiness. The first three de-

cades of happiness research were largely devoted to the examination of possible demographic variables that correlated with feeling good. Researchers looked at income, sex, age, employment, religiosity, intelligence, health, geography, and education to determine who is happy. Interestingly, many of these variables, which constitute a significant share of the popular theory on happiness, are the least important to it.

Age, gender, ethnicity, education, and beauty seem, on average, only slightly related to happiness. Religiosity shows small correlations with happiness, but current methodology is insufficient to determine whether this is because of the social and psychological benefits of belonging to a social community, because of the reassuring nature of church beliefs, or because of divine intervention. Health is slightly more important, with extremely poor health often leading to misery if it interferes with daily functioning, but good health being no guarantee of happiness.

The happiness variable that seems to grab the most media attention is money. But simply put, money is usually, at best, only mildly important to happiness. Large surveys of people from scores of countries around the world show that people are happier in wealthy industrialized countries such as Canada and Sweden than in poor nonindustrialized countries such as Kenya and Bangladesh. This finding, which is frequently replicated in international surveys, suggests that more money, at the national level, may be important, perhaps because it translates into better utilities and infrastructure, less corruption, improved health care, efficient food distribution, opportunities for employment, and lower crime rates.

Once basic needs have been met, however, increases in income do little to af-

Robert Biswas-Diener, Ed Diener & Maya Tamir on happiness

fect happiness. If a nation has achieved a moderate level of economic prosperity, little increase in subjective well-being is seen as that society grows richer still. Research on groups living a materially simple lifestyle – from the Maasai in Kenya, to the Amish in America, to the seal hunters in Greenland – shows that these societies exhibit positive levels of subjective well-being despite the absence of swimming pools, dishwashers, and Harry Potter. In fact, a growing body of research suggests that materialism can actually be toxic to happiness. In one such study, people who reported that they valued money more than love were less satisfied with their lives than those who favored love. In the end, having money is probably mildly beneficial to happiness, while focusing on money as a major goal is detrimental.

Now that we understand what happiness is, how it is measured, and which factors do and do not lead to it, a new question arises: What good is it?

One of the newest and most important areas of subjective-well-being research analyzes the potential benefits of happiness. Pleasure seekers and Aristotelians alike will find comfort in the research findings that there are actually many tangible advantages of happiness. Studies show that people who are at least mildly happy most of the time have more self-confidence and better relationships, perform better at work, are rated more highly by their superiors, are better creative problem solvers, are more likely to volunteer or engage in altruistic behavior, and even make more money than their less happy counterparts. Some evidence even suggests that they are healthier and live longer. Longitudinal research, meanwhile, suggests that happiness may actually cause desirable characteristics, not just follow

them; it is likely that there is a psychological loop that reinforces itself, with success in marriage, work, and other life domains leading to continued happiness that, in turn, leads to more successes. Thus, the emerging body of research literature seems to indicate that happiness does not simply feel good – it is actually good for you.

It should be noted, however, that just because happiness is beneficial does not mean that subjective well-being should be the highest pursuit, or that it is desirable to experience it all the time. Subjective well-being is one pursuit among many, and there are occasions where people willingly sacrifice short-term happiness to achieve some other goal. The frustrations and anxieties of graduate school, for example, are consciously endured with the belief that a doctoral degree is a worthy pursuit. Besides, it is undesirable – impossible even – to experience happiness constantly. Unpleasant emotions such as guilt and grief can be highly functional in that they help regulate behavior and provide crucial information. People with a tendency toward happiness need to react to unpleasant events, and sometimes negative emotions can help people adapt and cope more effectively. Happiness, then, is much more a process than a destination.

In many modern societies, public policies stress the role of wealth in producing happiness. When material necessities are in short supply, it is understandable that economics will be the focus of policymakers and politicians. However, we propose that wealthy industrialized nations are just now at the point where subjective well-being should be the primary policy focus. Economic and social indicators related to health, education, equality, and other important aspects of quality of life should, of course, continue to be monitored. The key outcome

variable, however, should be subjective well-being, because it represents an integration and outcome of other variables. As material well-being in modern societies becomes increasingly common, people move beyond strictly economic concerns in what is important to their quality of life, and public policies ought to reflect this evolution. We propose that the economics of money should now be complemented by an economics of happiness that bases its policies on measures of subjective well-being.

Richard A. Easterlin

The economics of happiness

Most of us, I think it is safe to say, would like to be happier, would like, indeed, to hold the 'keys to happiness.' For centuries the contemplation of this desire was the exclusive preserve of philosophers and theologians, who speculated and offered prescriptions on 'the good life.' Only fairly recently has it come into the domain of social science – first in psychiatry, where depression had been the object of concern, and then, since around 1950, in the mainstream social sciences. The impetus for social science research in this area during the last half century has been the development of population surveys inquiring into people's feelings of well-being. A very simple survey question, for example, might ask a respondent, "In general,

how happy would you say you are – very happy, pretty happy, or not so happy?" Another question might be, "How satisfied are you with your life as a whole – very, somewhat, so-so, not very, or not at all?"

Over the years a substantial methodological literature has developed to consider the value of the answers to such questions. The professional consensus is that the responses, though not unproblematic, are meaningful and reasonably comparable among various groups of individuals. Although there are subtle differences between happiness and life satisfaction, I will treat them for the present purpose as interchangeable measures of overall feelings of well-being, that is, of *subjective* well-being. My focus will be on what we are learning from the survey data on the causes of subjective well-being, and, based on this, what we might do as individuals to improve it.

As I go along I shall discuss two prominent and contrasting theories of well-being, one from psychology, one from economics. In psychology, setpoint theory has gained increasing attention in the last decade or so. Each individual is thought to have a fixed setpoint of happiness or life satisfaction determined by genetics and personality; life events such as marriage or divorce, job loss, or serious injury or disease may temporarily

Richard A. Easterlin, a Fellow of the American Academy since 1978, is professor of economics at the University of Southern California. He is past president of the Population Association of America and of the Economic History Association. His writings include "Population, Labor Force, and Long Swings in Economic Growth: The American Experience" (1968), "Birth and Fortune: The Impact of Numbers on Personal Welfare" (1980), and "Growth Triumphant: The 21st Century in Historical Perspective" (1996).

deflect a person above or below this set-point, but in time each individual will adjust to the new circumstances and return to the given setpoint. Psychologists call this adjustment process 'hedonic adaptation.' One setpoint theory writer states flatly that life circumstances have a negligible role to play in a theory of happiness. If this is correct, then there is little that you or I can do to improve our well-being, and public policies aimed at making people better off by improving their social and economic conditions are fruitless.

In contrast, economics places particular stress on the importance of life circumstances – particularly on one's income and employment situation – to well-being. The view that money makes you happier finds ringing endorsement in economic theory. The implication is that one can improve one's happiness by getting more money, and that public policy measures aimed at increasing the income of society as a whole will increase well-being.

I shall argue that the accumulating survey evidence indicates that neither of these theories is correct. Contrary to setpoint theory, life events such as marriage, divorce, and serious disability or disease do have lasting effects on happiness. Contrary to economic theory, more money does not make people happier. My discussion will be guided here by what people themselves say about what makes them happy.

In the early 1960s, social psychologist Hadley Cantril carried out an intensive worldwide survey in fourteen countries, rich and poor, capitalist and communist, asking open-ended questions about what people want out of life – what they would need for their lives to be completely happy. I would like to stress the open-ended nature of Cantril's survey.

There have been many surveys of people's values and goals, but almost all present the respondent with a list predetermined by the interviewer. Cantril, in contrast, let each respondent speak for him or herself.

Despite the enormous socioeconomic and cultural disparities among the countries, what people say in Cantril's survey is strikingly similar. In every country, material circumstances, especially material living conditions, are mentioned most often. Next are family concerns such as a happy family life. This is followed by concerns about one's personal or family health. After this, and about equal in importance, are matters related to one's work (e.g., having an interesting job) and to personal character (emotional stability, personal worth, self-discipline, etc.). Concerns about broad international or domestic issues, such as war, political or civil liberty, and social equality, are rarely mentioned.

Thus, it is the things that occupy most people's everyday lives, and are somewhat within their control, that are typically at the forefront of their personal concerns – especially making a living, marriage and family, and health. The universality of these concerns helps explain why comparisons of happiness among groups of individuals are meaningful: most people base their judgments of well-being on essentially the same considerations.

In what follows I shall discuss the evidence on the relation between happiness and the three circumstances people most often name as their sources of well-being – material living conditions, family circumstances, and health. I will focus throughout on average relationships. Needless to say, what is true on average is not necessarily true for each individual; but it is important to be clear on what is typical. I'll be reporting the re-

sults of survey data – some, but not all, from my own research – that show how life events affect well-being as people progress through the adult life cycle, from early adulthood through middle age to retirement.

Most of the generalizations in the social science literature on subjective well-being are based not on life-cycle but on point-of-time studies. As shall be seen below in regard to money and happiness, point-of-time relationships are not always replicated over the life course. Even in those studies that do try to follow the same individuals over time, the period covered is rarely more than a year or two; hardly ever are data representative of the national population as a whole available for as long as five or ten years. The life-cycle approach that I use here employs the demographers' technique of birth-cohort analysis and covers a much longer segment of the life course. Although the same individuals are not interviewed in each successive year, we do have a nationally representative random sample of the same *group* of individuals – of those born in a given decade. The special advantage of this approach is that we can follow birth cohorts in American data on happiness for almost thirty years.

Let me start with health. The critical issue is whether significant changes in health have a lasting effect on happiness. One might suppose, on the one hand, that a serious accident or major disease would permanently reduce one's happiness. On the other hand, people may bounce back from such occurrences, especially if helped by medications and health devices such as wheelchairs, and by a support network of friends and relatives.

Indeed, the psychologists' setpoint theory sees people as adapting fully and returning to the level of happiness that they had before the adverse turn in health. The seminal article, repeatedly cited in the psychological literature as evidence of complete adaptation, is a 1978 study of twenty-nine paraplegics and quadriplegics by psychologist Philip Brickman and his collaborators. The study's principal conclusion is that the accident victims, when compared with twenty-two people who were comparable in all respects except that they had not experienced serious disability, "did not appear nearly as unhappy as might have been expected." As a careful reading of this statement makes clear, the study does not actually assert that there was complete adaptation. Indeed, the statistical finding is that the accident victims were significantly less happy than the comparison group.

There have been a number of studies since, some continuing to claim complete adaptation, others contradicting it. To my knowledge the most comprehensive investigation is a 1990 American inquiry that compares the life satisfaction of large national samples of disabled and nondisabled persons. The conclusion is that the life satisfaction of those with disabilities is, on average, significantly lower than that of those who report no disabilities. Even more telling is the finding that when persons with disabilities are classified in several different ways – according to the severity of the disability, to whether the respondent suffers from one or multiple conditions, to what extent the respondent is limited in daily activities, and to whether close contacts are thought to perceive the respondent as disabled – life satisfaction is lower for those with more serious problems on every single one of these dimensions.

It is highly unlikely that these systematic differences in life satisfaction arise because those with worse problems sim-

ply haven't had enough time to adapt. The more straightforward conclusion is that, on average, an adverse change in health permanently reduces happiness, and the worse the change in health, the greater the reduction in happiness. The results do not mean that no adaptation to disability occurs. But the evidence does suggest that even with adaptation, there is, on average, a lasting negative effect of poor health on happiness.

Let me turn from this point-in-time evidence to some relating to the life cycle. As we all know, among adults real health problems increase as people age. But what do people *say* about their health? If people adapted completely to adverse changes in health, as setpoint theory asserts, then there should be no change in self-reported health over the life course because people would continuously adjust to worsening health. Is it true that self-reported health doesn't change?

The answer is no; self-reported health declines throughout the life course. If one follows Americans born in the decade of the 1950s over the twenty-eight-year segment of the life span for which data are available, one finds a clear and statistically significant downtrend in their average self-reported health. This downtrend in self-reported health as people get older is also true of people born in earlier decades as far back as reliable data go.

This finding assesses adaptation in terms of self-reported health – not life satisfaction, as in the disability analysis. However, it is not the case that people with worsening health do not feel unhappy about it: they say that they are less satisfied with their health and that they are less happy generally. At a point in time among adults of all ages, reported happiness is always less, on average, the poorer the state of self-reported

health. This can be due in part to a loss of income, but more importantly to non-pecuniary effects such as limits on one's usual activities. It seems clear from comprehensive survey evidence that, contrary to the psychologists' setpoint theory, adverse health changes have a lasting negative effect on happiness, and that there is less than complete adaptation to deteriorating health.

Let me now turn to the effects of marriage and marital dissolution. One might suppose that establishing close and intimate relationships of the sort marriage embodies would typically make the partners in such relationships happier and more satisfied with life in general. Some of the initial pleasure of a new union would be expected to wear off in time; similarly, people who have lost a partner through death, separation, or divorce would be expected to adjust somewhat to single status. But, on average, the close relationships embodied in marriage would be expected to have a lasting positive effect on one's happiness, and the loss of such relationships, a permanently negative effect. (I am using 'marriage' here as a proxy for the formation of unions. These days marriage is sometimes preceded by a period of cohabitation, and the real union consequently takes place some time prior to marriage.)

The psychologists' setpoint theory would argue, however, that adaptation to marriage and marital dissolution is complete. Indeed, there is a recent empirical study of the German population claiming to support this conclusion. This study holds that around the time of marriage, happiness increases briefly during what is proverbially called the honeymoon period, but that after one year it returns to the level that prevailed more than one year before marriage.

Meanwhile, widowhood takes a somewhat longer time – eight years – for complete adaptation to occur. (Separation and divorce were not included in the study.)

American data, however, suggest that the formation and dissolution of unions produce enduring effects, thus contradicting the results of the German study. As the proportion of married Americans between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine increases, the average happiness of those who marry is consistently higher than that of the unmarried, and quite constant.

If these young Americans were simply experiencing a temporary increase in well-being when they married, their average happiness should peak at ages eighteen to nineteen, when all or almost all of those married are in the honeymoon period. Thereafter, average happiness should progressively decline as it returns to the setpoint level for an ever-larger proportion of those married. But in fact, throughout the first decade of marriage the happiness of young married persons remains constant at a higher level than that of their unmarried counterparts.

The American results also contradict the argument that the higher happiness of the married group stems from a selection effect – that those getting married are happier to start with. If they are happier to start with, then the life satisfaction of the combined group of married and unmarried people would not increase as more and more people marry. But the happiness of the group as a whole, married and unmarried, does indeed increase as the proportion of married people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine rises.

The survey evidence continues to suggest that there are lasting effects associated with marital status beyond the early adult years. The happiness of married people remains significantly greater than that of the unmarried throughout the life cycle. People who remarry are just as happy as those still in their first marriage; and even after thirty-five years of marriage, the happiness of those still in their first marriage continues to be significantly greater than that of their unmarried counterparts.

Results consistent with these are reported by American sociologist Linda Waite and her collaborators in a nationally representative study that follows five thousand married Americans over a five-year period. At the end of the period, the happiness of those still married is virtually unchanged, while the happiness of those who separated, or divorced and did not remarry, is significantly lower. Remarriage reverses the effect of divorce – those who divorced and then remarried experience about the same level of happiness as those who stayed married. The lesson is clear: on average, marriage brings greater happiness, marital dissolution, less.

Evidence of people's desires for a 'happy marriage' also contradicts the notion that people adapt completely to their marital circumstances. Six in ten people cite a happy marriage as a factor when asked about their conception of the good life. More remarkable is how women over forty-five who have never married answer this question. Among these women more than four in ten cite a happy marriage as part of the good life as far as they personally are concerned. Perhaps some have adapted, and doubtless some never wanted to marry in the first place – but a sizable proportion of these women who have been single their entire lives has not fully adjusted to the possibility of never marrying.

These are substantial reasons, I believe, for concluding that adaptation

with regard to marital status is less than complete, that the formation of unions has a lasting positive effect on happiness, and that dissolution has a permanently negative effect. If the psychologists' setpoint model is correct that life circumstances are of negligible importance to long-run happiness, then it is hard to see how one can reconcile it with the bulk of population survey evidence on either marriage or health.

Let me briefly mention two other pieces of survey evidence that are difficult to square with the setpoint model. First, throughout the life cycle, blacks in the United States are, on average, consistently less happy than whites. One would be hard put, I believe, to argue that this difference is due simply to different setpoints given by genetics and personality, and that differences in the life circumstances of the two races are of little importance. Second, beyond age sixty the life-cycle excess of female over male happiness is reversed. Clearly, this cannot be explained by genetic and personality factors; rather an important life event – the much higher incidence of widowed women than widowed men – is chiefly responsible.

I'd like to turn now to the source of happiness that is mentioned most often by people – one's material living level, or standard of living. Does more money make people happier? To judge from survey responses, most people certainly think so, although there is a limit. When asked how much more money they would need to be completely happy, people typically name a figure greater than their current income by about 20 percent. Indeed, if happiness and income are compared at any point in time, those with more income are, on average, happier than those with less.

But what happens to happiness as income goes up over the life cycle – does happiness go up too? The answer is no; on average there is no change. Consider, for example, Americans born in the 1940s. Between the years 1972 and 2000, as their average age increased from about twenty-six to fifty-four years, their average income per person – adjusted for the change in the price of goods and services – more than doubled, increasing by 116 percent. Yet their reported happiness in the year 2000 was no different from that of twenty-eight years earlier. They had a lot more money and a considerably higher standard of living at the later date, but these did not make them feel any happier.

Consider, further, two subgroups of persons born in the 1940s – those with at least some college education and those with only a secondary education or less. At any given age, the more educated subgroup is happier than the less educated. This is consistent with the point-of-time relation between happiness and income just mentioned – the more educated being, on average, more affluent and happier.

But what happens over the life course to the two educational groups? As one might expect, the income of the more educated increases more than that of the less educated. If happiness were moving in accordance with the income of each group, then the happiness of both groups should increase, with that of the more educated increasing more, and the difference between the two groups widening. In fact, over the life course happiness remains constant for both educational groups, and the happiness differential is unchanged. Although those fortunate enough to start out with higher income and education remain, on average, happier than those of lower socioeconomic status, there is no evidence that happiness increases with income growth for either group.

These results – both point-of-time and life cycle – hold as well for people born in the 1950s, 1930s, and 1920s. Although the point-of-time result seemingly confirms the economists' assumption that more money makes you happier, the life cycle result contradicts it.

Why this paradoxical pattern? A simple thought experiment brings out the basic reason. Imagine your income increases substantially while everyone else's stays the same – would you feel better off? The answer most people give is yes. But now, let's turn the example around. Think about a situation in which your real income stays the same but everyone else's increases substantially – then how would you feel? Most people say that they would feel less well-off, even though their real level of living hasn't, in fact, changed at all.

This thought experiment demonstrates that, as far as material things are concerned, one's satisfaction with life depends not simply on one's objective condition, but also on a comparison between one's objective condition and a subjective (or 'internalized') living level norm – and this norm is significantly affected by the average living level of the people around us. Over time, as everyone's income increases, so too do the internal norms by which we are making our judgments about happiness. The increase in internal norms is greater for those with higher income because over the life cycle we increasingly compare ourselves against those with whom we come in closest contact, and contacts are more and more limited to those of similar income. The increase over time in one's internal living level norm, however, undercuts the effect of increased actual income on well-being.

The subversive effect of rising internal norms also explains why most people think that over the life course more

money will make them happier when, in fact, it doesn't. What actually happens, of course, is that when their own income increases, so too does everyone else's. This means the internal living level norms used to evaluate happiness also increase, offsetting the effect of growth in their actual income, and so their happiness stays the same. Here, at last, we seemingly have a validation of the psychologists' model: in the material goods domain there does appear to be complete hedonic adaptation.

The survey evidence indicates that over the life cycle, family and health circumstances typically have lasting effects on happiness, but that more money does not. What do these empirical results imply for the possibility of increasing one's happiness?

Each of us has only a fixed amount of time available for family life, health activities, and work. Do we distribute our time in the way that maximizes our happiness? The answer, I believe, is no, for a reason that has already been suggested: we decide how to use our time based on the false belief that more money will make us happier. Because of this 'money illusion,' we allocate an excessive amount of time to monetary goals, and shortchange nonpecuniary ends such as family life and health.

As evidence of the perverse effect of the money illusion, let me cite a survey reported by sociologist Norval Glenn. In this survey Americans were asked about the likelihood of their taking a more rewarding job that would take away family time, because it would require both more hours at the office and more time on the road. Choosing from four response options, not one of the twelve hundred respondents said it was "very unlikely" that he or she would take the job, and only about one in three said it

was "somewhat unlikely." The large majority of respondents said it was either "very likely" or "somewhat likely" – each of these categories accounting for about one-third of the respondents. Most Americans, it seems, would readily sacrifice family life for what they think will be greater rewards from their working life – not knowing that these prospective rewards are likely illusory.

Some may feel that I have given too little attention here to the genetic and personality determinants of happiness. This is so, but there is a reason. There is nothing one can do, at least at present, about one's genes – and very little that most of us can do about our personalities (except, perhaps, to consult a psychologist). But all of us have the potential for managing our lives more efficiently to achieve greater happiness.

In my discussion of life events, I have focused on the three – money, family, and health – that people cite most often as important for their happiness. I have tried to summarize here what social surveys have to say about these principal sources of personal happiness. Could we make our lives happier? The tentative answer, based on the evidence at hand, I suggest, is this. Most people could increase their happiness by devoting less time to making money, and more time to nonpecuniary goals such as family life and health.

Anna Wierzbicka

'Happiness' in cross-linguistic & cross-cultural perspective

The psychologists David Myers and Ed Diener start their frequently cited article "Who is Happy" with the observation that "Books, books and more books have analyzed human misery. During its first century, psychology focused far more on negative emotions, such as depression and anxiety, than on positive emotions, such as happiness and satisfaction." They note with approval that this is now changing quite dramatically.[1]

There is of course a good reason why books, books, and more books have been written about human misery. Misery and suffering are part and parcel of most lives, whereas happiness is not – or so it has appeared to most people at most times. In the autobiographical novel by the Egyptian-born British writer Ahdaf Soueif, the Egyptian aunt of the Westernized heroine asks her niece why she left her husband. "We were not happy together," she replies. The aunt raises her eyebrows: "Not happy? Is this sane talk?…Who's happy, child?"[2] This exchange is, I think, a characteristic clash of culturally informed thought patterns, values, and expectations.

The first century of psychology, which, as Myers and Diener point out, focused to a far greater extent on negative emotions than on positive ones, was also the century of, inter alia, the two world wars, the Holocaust, the Gulag Archipelago, the millions deliberately or recklessly starved to death in the Ukraine and elsewhere under Stalin and in China under Mao Ze Dong, and the horrors of Pol Pot's Cambodia. By the end of the twentieth century, Hitler, Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot were all gone, but few of those who watch the evening news on television would say that the human condition has radically changed since the time of their rule.

Anna Wierzbicka is professor of linguistics at the Australian National University. Her work spans anthropology, psychology, cognitive science, philosophy, and religious studies as well as linguistics. She is the author of numerous books, including "Cross-Cultural Pragmatics" (1991), "Semantics: Primes and Universals" (1996), "Emotions Across Languages and Cultures: Diversity and Universals" (1999), and "What Did Jesus Mean? Explaining the Sermon on the Mount and the Parables in Simple and Universal Human Concepts" (2001).

1 David G. Myers and Ed Diener, "Who is Happy?" *Psychological Science* (January 1995): 10.

2 Ahdaf Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), 747.

Against such a background, the claim of Myers and Diener that "most people are reasonably happy, but that some people are happier than others" seems rather startling. Most people are reasonably happy? Who *are* those reportedly happy people?

According to the studies they cite, North America has the greatest concentration of happy people in the world. "[I]n national surveys," writes Myers, "a third of Americans say that they are *very* happy. Only one in ten say 'not too happy.' The remainder – the majority – describe themselves as 'pretty happy.'" Europeans, Myers adds, "by and large report a lower sense of well-being than North Americans," but they too "typically assess themselves positively. Four in five say they are 'fairly' or 'very' satisfied with their everyday lives."[3]

By Myers and Diener's account, "nations differ strikingly in happiness, ranging from Portugal, where about 10% of people say they are very happy, to the Netherlands, where about 40% of people say the same." They emphasize that "nations differ markedly in happiness even when income differences are controlled for."[4] Is it true that nations differ in happiness? Or do they differ, rather, in what they are prepared to report about the state of their happiness?

In addressing these questions, political scientist Ronald Inglehart is more cautious than Myers and Diener, in that he speaks only of differences in reported happiness rather than in happiness as such. He also seems less willing simply to take his results at face value. For example, he asks:

But exactly what is it that underlies these large and rather stable cross-national dif-

ferences? Can it be true that Italians, French, Germans, and Greeks really are a great deal less happy and more dissatisfied with their lives than the Danes, Swiss, Dutch, and Irish? Could fate be so unkind as to doom entire nationalities to unhappiness, simply because they happened to be born in the wrong place?[5]

Trying to answer such questions, one has to address, at some point, the linguistic problem. For example, if 14 percent of Germans declare themselves to be *sehr glücklich* whereas 31 percent of Americans declare themselves to be *very happy*, can these reports be meaningfully compared if *glücklich* does not mean the same thing as *happy*?[6]

Inglehart considers the possibility that the words used in other languages to translate the English words *happy* and *satisfied* may not exactly match, but then he confidently dismisses the matter. His main argument for dismissing it rests on the Swiss case: regardless of the language they use – whether German, French, or Italian – the Swiss "rank very highly in life satisfaction" and "express higher levels of satisfaction than the Germans, French and Italians with whom they share a language." But however convincing the Swiss case may be, it is hard to see how it can justify the sweeping conclusion that Inglehart draws from it: "These Swiss results alone devastate any attempt to explain the cross-national differences as artifacts of language."[7]

3 David G. Myers, *The Pursuit of Happiness* (New York: Avon Books, 1992), 25.

4 Myers and Diener, "Who is Happy?" 4.

5 Ronald Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), 79.

6 See Anna Wierzbicka, *Emotions Across Languages and Cultures: Diversity and Universals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

7 Inglehart, *Culture Shift*, 78.

It is true that the differences in self-reported *bonheur* (and its adjective, *heureux*) between the French and the French-speaking Swiss cannot be attributed directly to any linguistic differences.[8] But surely it doesn't follow from this that the differences in self-reporting between the French and the Americans couldn't possibly have anything to do with the semantic differences between the French word *heureux* and the English word *happy*.

The glibness with which linguistic differences are at times denied in the current literature on happiness can be quite astonishing. The economist Richard Layard, for example, writes, "Of course one could question whether the word *happy* means the same thing in different languages. If it does not, we can learn nothing by comparing different countries." The problem is dismissed as soon as it is raised; the reader is assured that "there is direct evidence, for a number of languages, that the words do have the same meaning in different languages."

In support of this claim, Layard reports that "a group of Chinese students were asked to answer the happiness question, once in Chinese and once in English ....The students reported almost exactly the same average level of happiness in both Chinese and English." Instead of inquiring into the possible reasons for such results, Layard concludes that "since the English and Chinese languages are very far apart, this finding is highly reassuring," and that "the concept of happiness seems equally familiar in all cultures."[9]

In fact, the linguist Zhengdao Ye's detailed study of Chinese positive-emotion concepts shows clearly that while there are two happiness-like concepts in the traditional list of Chinese basic emotions, both are different from the English *happiness*. The terms in question are *xi*, which Ye defines as "festive joy," and *le*, which she defines as "attainable enjoyment/contentment." Of *xi* Ye says, inter alia, that "the positive cognitive evaluation, the personal character, and the unexpectedness of the event all contribute to the sudden, intense good feeling ..., which is usually outwardly shown via facial expressions and bodily gestures." On the other hand, *le* "seems to have a gamut of components from many 'happy-like' words in English. It is like a hybrid of *pleased*, *enjoyment*, *contented* and *having fun*." In particular, she emphasizes the active attitude of *le*, which "results in a wish to do something to keep the current situation going." Ye concludes her discussion of the differences between the ethnotheories of emotion reflected in Chinese and English as follows:

It seems that in Chinese people's perception and conceptualisation of human emotional experience in relation to good events there are two quite opposite aspects: one is due to a somewhat mysterious external force, to which the experiencer "actively" responds, experiencing a momentary, intense feeling "stirred" by external stimuli, and the other is due to human effort. Each aspect is equally important and culturally salient, and each term occupies a place in the small set of the "basic emotions."[10]

---

8 Surely, the first hypothesis about the Swiss must be that, unlike their neighbors, they were spared the catastrophe of World War II. Frequently, happiness studies are lacking a historical as well as a linguistic and a cultural dimension.

9 Richard Layard, *Happiness: Has Social Science*

a Clue?" Lionel Robbins Memorial Lectures, London School of Economics, March 2003, 17.

10 Zhengdao Ye, "Why Are There Two 'Joy-like' 'Basic' Emotions in Chinese? Semantic

The lack of equivalence between the Chinese and English words does not mean that Chinese and Anglo attitudes toward life cannot be meaningfully compared at all. They can be, but every comparison requires a common measure. In this case such a measure is provided by the mini-language of simple and universal human concepts that can be found in all languages. These simple and universal concepts include GOOD, BAD, KNOW, THINK, WANT, FEEL, LIVE, and fifty or so others. They do not include, however, complex culture-specific words like *happy*, *satisfied*, or *well-being*.[11]

It is an illusion, then, to think that the English words *happy* and *happiness* have exact semantic equivalents in Chinese, or, for that matter, in other European languages. The differences, it turns out, are particularly striking in the case of the adjective.

In the language of simple and universal human concepts, the meaning of *happiness* can be linked with the following cognitive scenarios: a) some very good things happened to me; b) I wanted things like this to happen; and c) I can't want anything else now. By contrast, the cognitive scenario of *happy* can be represented as follows: a) some good things happened to me; b) I wanted things like this to happen; and c) I don't want anything else now. The main differences between *happiness* and *happy*, then, lie in the contrast between "*very* good" and

"good" (component a) and between "I *can't* want anything else now" and "I *don't* want anything else now" (component c). In happiness one's heart is filled to overflowing and there seems to be no room left for any further (unfulfilled) desires or wishes.

Happiness can be compared, roughly, to the French *bonheur*, the German *Glück*, the Italian *felicità*, and the Russian *sčastie*, because like these words it can be used to refer to an existential condition seen as a certain absolute. The adjective *happy*, however, does not necessarily imply a state of happiness. For example, if I say that "I'm happy with the present arrangements," I do not mean that I either experience or am in a state of happiness. Thus, *happy* is, so to speak, weaker than *happiness*, whereas *heureux*, *felice*, *glücklich*, and *sčastlivyj* are not similarly weaker than *bonheur*, *Glück*, *felicità*, and *sčastie*, respectively.

The semantic differences between *happy* and its putative counterparts in European languages are often flagged in bilingual dictionaries, which instruct users not to translate *happy* as, for instance, *heureux*, but to use some weaker word instead. Here are some examples from the *Collins-Robert English-French Dictionary*:

I'll be quite happy to do it. →

> Je le ferai volontiers. / Ça ne me derange pas de le faire. (I'll gladly do it. / It doesn't bother me to do it.)

I'm happy here reading. →

> Je suis très bien ici à lire. (I'm very well here reading.)

I'm not happy about leaving him alone. →

> Je ne suis pas tranquille de le laisser seul. (I'm not at ease about leaving him alone.)

The very fact that *happy*, in contrast to those other words, has developed such

Theory and Empirical Findings," in *Love, Hatred and Other Passions: Questions and Themes on Emotions in Chinese Civilisation,* ed. Paolo Santangelo (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, in press).

11 Cliff Goddard and Anna Wierzbicka, eds., *Meaning* and *Universal Grammar,* 2 vols. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2002) and Anna Wierzbicka, *Semantics: Primes and Universals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

a weaker second meaning highlights a semantic shift that has no doubt contributed to the expansion of the term's use in English, at the expense of words with more intense meanings like *rejoice* and *joy*. *Happy* – unlike *heureux*, *sčastlivyj*, and *glücklich* – is not restricted to exceptional states (like *bliss*), but rather is seen as referring to states within everyone's reach. There is nothing exceptional about being *happy*, and this is why one can be *quite happy*, *reasonably happy*, *pretty happy*, *not at all happy*, and so on.

As I have argued in my book *Emotions Across Languages and Cultures: Diversity and Universals*, the very notion that a person can be pretty happy is, so to speak, a modern invention. At the time when the adjective *happy* was close semantically to the noun *happiness*, collocations like *pretty happy* did not exist in the English language, and being happy was regarded by speakers of English as something very rare, as witnessed, for example, by the following line from George Herbert's "Jacula Prudentium": "There is an hour where a man might be happy all his like, could he find it."

To some extent, *happiness* can still be seen as something rare and exclusive, as can *bonheur* and *felicità*. But *happy* has drifted away from *happiness* so far that it can almost be said to be halfway between *happiness* and *okay*; syntactic frames such as "I'm happy with the present arrangements" reflect this semantic weakening. This weakening, in turn, can be seen as a manifestation of an overall process of the dampening of the emotions – modern Anglo-American culture's trend against emotional intensity.[12]

The remarkable expansion of the word *happy* has gone hand in hand with the decline of negative words like *woes*, *sorrows*, and *griefs*.[13] As I have tried to show in my *Emotions Across Languages and Cultures*, modern English has, so to speak, exorcised woes, sorrows, and griefs from the fabric of 'normal' life. In older English, *woes*, *sorrows*, and *griefs* (in the plural) were commonly used to refer to everyday life, whereas in present-day English, *grief* is restricted, by and large, to the exceptional event of the death of a loved person. At the same time happiness has come to be seen not as something rare and unusual, but as altogether ordinary; and the word *happy* has become one of the most widely used English emotion adjectives – perhaps the most widely used one of all. According to the data in the COBUILD corpus of contemporary English, *happy* is not only uttered much more frequently than *sad* (roughly 3:1) and *joyful* (roughly 36:1), but also much more frequently than, for example, *heureux* is in comparable French listings (roughly 5:2).

Stanisław Barańczak, a Polish poet who emigrated to America, gives a particularly astute account of the semantic clash between the English word *happy* and its nearest equivalents in some other European languages – an account based on his personal experience:

> Take the word "happy," perhaps one of the most frequently used words in Basic American. It's easy to open an English-Polish or English-Russian dictionary and find an equivalent adjective. In fact, however, it will not be equivalent. The Polish word for "happy" (and I believe this also holds for other Slavic languages) has much more restricted meaning; it is generally reserved for rare states of profound

---

12 Peter N. Stearns, *American Cool: Constructing a Twentieth-Century Emotional Style* (New York: New York University Press, 1994).

13 Anna Wierzbicka, "Emotion and Culture: Arguing with Martha Nussbaum," *Ethos* (in press).

bliss, or total satisfaction with serious things such as love, family, the meaning of life, and so on. Accordingly, it is not used as often as "happy" is in American common parlance ….Incidentally, it is also interesting that Slavic languages don't have an exact equivalent for the verb "to enjoy." I don't mean to say that Americans are a nation of superficial, backslapping enjoyers and happy-makers, as opposed to our suffering Slavic souls. What I'm trying to point out is only one example of the semantic incompatibilities which are so firmly ingrained in languages and cultures that they sometimes make mutual communication impossible.[14]

In the book entitled *The Pursuit of Happiness*, the American David Myers asks: "How happy are people?" Given the widespread assumption that the word *happy* can be readily translated without any change of meaning into other European languages, it is interesting to note that the question raised in the title of that chapter cannot be translated into many other languages at all. One simply can't ask in these languages the equivalent of "How happy are people?":

*Comment (*combien) heureux sont les gens?

*Come felici sono gli uomini?

*Kak sčastlivy ljudi?

The reason why all of the above sentences are infelicitous is that unlike the word *happy*, the words *heureux*, *felice*, and *sčastlivyj* are not gradable. They all refer to something absolute, to a peak experience or condition that is not considered a matter of degree. To be asked to measure one's *bonheur* or one's *sčastie* on a scale from one to ten is like being

asked to measure one's bliss on such a scale.

Inglehart, speaking of research into reported happiness carried out in Europe and based on the so-called Eurobarometer Survey, has maintained that the questions adapted from American research – e.g., How are things going these days? Would you say you are very happy, fairly happy or not too happy? – have "been found effective in measuring feelings of happiness [in Europe]." The phrase "feelings of happiness" is as problematic here as the idea that such feelings can be effectively measured.

Using French and Russian again as examples, I will note that *bonheur* and *sčastie* suggest, roughly speaking, an existential condition rather than a momentary feeling, and that the phrase "feelings of happiness" cannot be translated literally into French or Russian (**les sentiments de bonheur*; *čuvstva sčastia). Incidentally, for this reason, the economist Daniel Kahneman's idea that happiness can be studied more effectively by focusing people's attention on the subjective quality of their current circumstances, rather than on any overall assessment of their lives, may be more applicable to English than to other languages.[15] For example, in French, momentary good feelings occurring in the course of an ordinary day would normally be linked with *plaisir* (pleasure) rather than with *bonheur*; and in Russian, they would be linked with *udovol'stvie* (roughly, pleasure) rather than with *sčastie*.

In happiness studies, it is often assumed that people's subjective well-being can be reliably estimated on the

14 Stanisław Barańczak, *Breathing Under Water and Other East European Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 12.

15 Daniel Kahneman, "Objective Happiness," in Daniel Kahneman, Ed Diener, and Norbert Schwarz, eds., *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology* (New York: The Russell Sage Foundation, 1999).

basis of their self-reports. Doubts about the reliability of such reports are sometimes acknowledged, but they tend to be minimized.

For example, Layard, having dismissed the question "whether the word 'happy' means the same in different languages," writes, "But again, might not people in some countries feel more impelled to report high or low levels of happiness, because of local cultural norms? There is no evidence of this – for example no clear tendency for individualistic countries to report high or collectivist cultures to report low."[16]

Strikingly, the reliability of the classification of countries as either individualist or collectivist is taken for granted here, and since there emerges no clear correlation between individualism (as measured by such classifications) and self-reported happiness, it is assumed that self-reports can reliably measure the actual well-being of people across languages and cultures.

Myers strikes a more cautious note about self-reports, but his caution does not include any cross-cultural perspective. He begins by stating that everyone is the best judge of his or her own happiness: "if *you* can't tell someone whether you're happy or miserable, who can?" He continues as follows: "Still, even if people are the best judges of their own experiences, can we trust them to be candid? People's self-reports are susceptible to two biases that limit, but do not eliminate, their authenticity."[17] One of the biases, according to Myers, has to do with people's momentary moods: "By coloring people's assessments of the overall quality of their lives, temporary moods do reduce the reliability of their self-pronouncements. Their happiness

thermometers are admittedly imperfect." The other bias is people's "tendency to be agreeable, to put on a good face." People, Myers says, "overreport good things" – they "are all a bit Pollyannish." However, "this poses no real problem for research," because "we could downplay people's happiness reports by, say, 20 percent and still assume that our 'happiness thermometers' are valid as relative scales."[18]

I do not wish to question Myers's assumption or conclusions as far as the subjective well-being of Americans is concerned. One should be careful, however, to distinguish between all Americans and all people. It may indeed be reasonable to assume that our "happiness thermometers" are valid as relative scales – if one is comparing individuals who speak the same language and share, or are familiar with, the same cultural norms. When it comes to cross-cultural comparisons, however, the situation is very different.

Thus, when Myers and Diener state that "nations differ strikingly in happiness, ranging from Portugal, where about 10% of people say they are very happy, to the Netherlands, where about 40% of people say the same," a move is made, imperceptibly, from differences in self-reports to differences in actual well-being. In fact, Myers and Diener themselves acknowledge that in some societies "norms more strongly support experiencing and expressing positive emotions."[19] But if so, then how can cross-national and cross-cultural differences in self-reports be equated with differences in happiness?

Somewhat disconcertingly, Myers and Diener state that "collectivist cultures report lower SWB [subjective well-

16 Layard, *Happiness*, 19.

17 Myers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 27.

18 Ibid., 28.

19 Myers and Diener, "Who is Happy?" 12.

being] than do individualist cultures," whereas Layard claims, as we have seen, that there is no clear difference in this regard between so-called individualist and collectivist countries. Even more disconcerting, however, is Layard's confident rejection of the possibility that "people in some countries [might] feel more impelled to report high or low levels of happiness because of local cultural norms."

There is plenty of evidence that local cultural norms do produce different attitudes to expressing happiness or, more generally, good feelings. Evidence of this kind cannot be elicited through surveys based on self-reports; it can, however, be gained by other methods. In particular, there is a growing body of evidence emerging from cross-cultural autobiographies, and there is extensive linguistic evidence.

In her memoir *Lost in Translation: Life in a New Country*, the Polish-born writer Eva Hoffman, who emigrated with her parents to North America at the age of thirteen, contrasts two cultural scripts by describing two different rituals of farewell, as experienced first in Poland and then, two years later, in America:

> But as the time of our departure approaches, Basia…makes me promise that I won't forget her. Of course I won't! She passes a journal with a pretty, embroidered cloth cover to my fellow classmates, in which they are to write appropriate words of good-bye. Most of them choose melancholy verses in which life is figured as a vale of tears or a river of suffering, or a journey of pain on which we are embarking. This tone of sadness is something we all enjoy. It makes us feel the gravity of life, and it is gratifying to have a truly tragic event – a parting forever – to give vent to such romantic feelings.

> It's only two years later that I go on a month-long bus trip across Canada and the United States with a group of teenagers, who at parting inscribe sentences in each other's notebooks to be remembered by. "It was great fun knowing you!" they exclaim in the pages of my little notebook. "Don't ever lose your friendly personality!" "Keep cheerful, and nothing can harm you!" they enjoin, and as I compare my two sets of mementos, I know that, even though they're so close to each other in time, I've indeed come to another country.[20]

A similar autobiographical account of a clash between Polish and American cultural scripts comes from Laura Klos Sokol, an American woman who married a Pole and settled with him in Warsaw:

> To some extent, Poles enjoy the upbeat American pom-pom skating cheer. Who would dare claim that cheerfulness is bad? However, sometimes Poles balk at American-style frothy enthusiasm. Ask a Pole to imitate American behavior and chances are the result will include a wide smile, an elongated "Wooooow!" and "Everything is fine!" with a thumbs-up.

> One Pole said, "My first impression was how happy Americans must be." But like many Poles she cracked the code: "Poles have different expectations. Something 'fantastic' for Americans would not be 'fantastic' in my way of thinking." Another Pole says, "When Americans say it was great, I know it was good. When they say it was good, I know it was okay. When they say it was okay, I know it was bad."[21]

20 Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1989), 78. For discussion, see Mary Besemeres, *Translating One's Self: Language and Selfhood in Cross-Cultural Autobiography* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002).

21 Laura Klos Sokol, *Shortcuts to Poland* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IPS, 1997), 176.

Looking at her native American culture from a newly acquired Polish point of view, Klos Sokol satirizes: "Wow! Great! How nice! That's fantastic! I had a terrific time! It was wonderful! Have a nice day! Americans. So damned cheerful."

In addition to verbal routines like those mentioned above, and to the frequent use of untranslatable key cultural words like *fun* and *enjoy*, the differences between the two sets of cultural scripts are also reflected in nonverbal communication, particularly in smiling:

> A Pole who lived in the States for six years recently returned to Poland for a visit. During a round of introductions to some people in a café, she immediately spotted the American by his smile. "There's a lack of smiling here…" says the Pole. Another Pole says, "Americans, in general, smile all the time. Here, people in the streets look worried."[22]

Noting that "Americans smile more in situations where Poles tend not to," Klos Sokol observes: "In American culture, you don't advertise your daily headaches; it's bad form; so you turn up the corners of the mouth – or at least try – according to the Smile Code."

Observations of this kind cast doubt on the validity of statements like the following: "When self-reports of well-being are correlated with other methods of measurement, they show adequate convergent validity. They covary… with the amount of smiling in an interview."[23] Statements of this kind don't take into account that the amount of smiling, too, is governed to some extent

by cultural norms, and that the norms for smiling are closely related to the norms for verbal behavior (including verbal self-reports).

From the perspective of immigrant writers it seems clear that Anglo-American culture fosters and encourages cheerfulness, positive thinking, and staying in control. To quote Eva Hoffman's memoir again:

> If all neurosis is a form of repression, then surely, the denial of suffering, and of helplessness, is also a form of neurosis. Surely, all our attempts to escape sorrow twist themselves into the specific, acrid pain of self-suppression. And if that is so, then a culture that insists on cheerfulness and staying in control is a culture that – in one of those ironies that prevails in the unruly realm of the inner life – propagates its own kind of pain.[24]

Such assessments of the psychological costs of "obligatory" cheerfulness may or may not be correct, but few commentators would disagree with the basic idea that something like cheerfulness is encouraged by American culture.

Let me adduce here one more autobiographical testimony to the perceived differences between Polish and Anglo-American cultural scripts concerning happiness and good feelings – a fragment of Stanisław Barańczak's poem "Small talk" (translated from the Polish by the poet):

> How Are You, I'm Just Fine; who says
>   there is no chance
> for any conversation between us, who says
> there's no communication between the
>   grey stone wall,
> or the trembling of a window frame, or
>   the rainbow-hued oil
> spilled on the asphalt, and myself; how on
>   earth could

22 Ibid., 117.

23 Ed Diener and Eunkook M. Suh, "National Differences in Subjective Well-Being," in Kahneman, Diener, and Schwarz, eds., *Well-Being*, 437.

24 Hoffman, *Lost in Translation*, 271.

my dialogue with them be a lie, how could
   it be mute,
this talk between the hydrant, fog, stairs,
   bough, screech of tires
and me, whom they approach – on every
   path, in every passing
always the same and invariably friendly
   inquiry,
What's The News, Everything's OK.[25]

For immigrants like Barańczak, English conversational routines like "How are you, I'm just fine" constitute barriers to genuine heart-to-heart communication – and, as we have seen earlier, so does the wide use of the word *happy*. From this perspective, the tendency of Americans to declare themselves as happy in the surveys that aim to assess their subjective well-being must be seen as linked, to some extent, with the same norms that encourage the social smile, the cheerfulness, the use of *Great!* and so on.[26]

In conclusion, progress in cross-cultural investigations of happiness and subjective well-being requires a greater linguistic and cross-cultural sophistication than that evident in much of the existing literature on the subject. To compare meanings across languages one needs a well-founded semantic metalanguage; and to be able to interpret self-reports across cultures one needs a methodology for exploring cultural norms that may guide the interviewees in their responses. I believe that the natural semantic metalanguage, based on universal human concepts, can solve the first problem and that the methodology of cultural scripts can solve the second – and that together they can bring significant advances to the intriguing and controversial field of happiness studies.

25 Stanisław Barańczak, *The Weight of the Body: Selected Poems* (Evanston, Ill.: Triquarterly Books, 1989).

26 While I have looked at Anglo-American norms from a Polish perspective, other perspectives yield comparable outcomes. For example, see Eunkook M. Suh, "Self: The Hyphen Between Culture and Subjective Well-Being," in Ed Diener and Eunkook M. Suh, eds., *Culture and Subjective Well-Being* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000). In his contribution to this important recent volume, Suh, a Korean American scholar, notes "dramatic differences between North Americans and East Asians in their levels of SWB [subjective well-being] and positive self-views." He elaborates that "North Americans report significantly higher levels of SWB than East Asians. For instance, compared to 36 percent of Japanese and 49 percent of Korean men, 83 percent of American men and 78 percent of Canadian men reported above neutral levels of life satisfaction in Diener and Diener's study [Ed Diener and Marissa Diener, "Cross-Cultural Correlates of Life Satisfaction and Self-Esteem," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 68 (1995): 653 – 663]."

Julia Annas

Happiness as achievement

Ten years ago, shortly after publishing a book called *The Morality of Happiness* about the structure of ancient ethical theory, I received an email informing me that I had been added to a bibliography of "happiness researchers" on a website called the World Database of Happiness. I explored this site with interest, only to find that this was not a research program that I felt myself to be part of.

The website assumes, without discussion, that happiness is "subjective," that it is enjoyment or pleasure, and that it should be studied "empirically." Philosophy is then derided for failing to "operationalize" happiness and to produce "measures" of it. (Philosophy has a meager 88 entries in the bibliography, compared to 2,927 for the social sciences.) Empirical studies are lauded for their measures of happiness, while the website claims that "preliminary questions about conceptualization and measurement are now fairly well solved."

The website, however, gives off a definite air of disappointment. No sound body of knowledge on happiness, it admits, has yet been achieved. In the present state of research, we can claim only that "there are obviously several universal requirements for a happy life (such as food and possibly meaning)."

Philosophers (and some psychologists, too) will find it unsurprising that if you rush to look for empirical measures of an unanalyzed 'subjective' phenomenon, the result will be confusion and banality.[1] After all, what is it that the social scientists on the World Database of Happiness are actually measuring? Here is the heart of the problem. Is happiness really something subjective? Is it simply a matter of pleasure, a positive feeling? We can at least hope that it is not, and that we can come to conclusions better than the claim that what anyone needs to be happy is food and possibly meaning.

Julia Annas, a Fellow of the American Academy since 1992, is Regents Professor of Philosophy at the University of Arizona. She is the author of numerous articles and of eight books on ancient philosophy and ethics, including "The Morality of Happiness" (1993) and "Platonic Ethics, Old and New" (1999). She is writing a book on virtue ethics.

1 For an amusing example, see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/2630869.stm>, where "scientists" claim to have solved "one of the greatest mysteries plaguing mankind" by actually giving us a mathematical formula: $P + (5 \times E) + (3 \times H) =$ happiness, where $P =$ personal characteristics, $E =$ existence, and $H =$ higher-order needs. You compute your formula by answering four questions.

For many years I have taught, discussed, and written on ancient ethical theories, whose basic concepts are those of happiness and virtue. During this time, philosophical interest in these theories has grown rapidly and has in turn produced a crop of modern 'virtue ethics' theories, a fair number of which are eudaimonist – that is, theories which take happiness and virtue to be basic concepts. Philosophers are now taking virtue and happiness more seriously than they had for some time, and realizing the importance of clarifying and deepening our understanding of these before rushing into empirical studies. (Judging by recent publications, this concern is shared in some areas of psychology.)

As a result, one of the best places to seek understanding of happiness is the study of ancient ethical theories and of those modern theories which share their eudaimonist concerns. For these recognize, and build on, some of our thoughts about happiness that have become overwhelmed by the kind of consideration that emerges in the claim that happiness is obviously subjective. Given the systematically disappointing results of the database approach, it is time to look seriously at our alternatives.

When it is asked what happiness is, a first answer may well be that it is some kind of feeling. Being happy is easily taken to be feeling happy – as when I wake up in the morning – a kind of smiley-face feeling. This line of thought takes us rapidly to the idea that I can be happy doing any old thing. Some people feel happy when helping old ladies across streets; others feel happy when torturing puppies: happiness comes down to whatever you happen to like.

But this line of thought cannot stay up for long. It is immediately obvious that when we talk about feelings we are talking about *episodes*; I wake up feeling happy but am depressed by the time I get to work, never mind lunchtime. Getting a smiley-face feeling from good deeds or bad deeds lasts only as long as the deeds do. And this kind of happiness does not matter to us all that much once we start to think in a serious way about our lives. As we bring up our children, what we aim for is not that they have episodes of smiley-face feeling, but that their lives go well as wholes: we come to think of happiness as the way a life as a whole goes well, and see that episodes of happiness are not what we build our lives around.

This point can produce a variety of responses. One is to say that when we are thinking of our lives as wholes, we should think in terms of flourishing or welfare or well-being rather than happiness. These terms may be useful in some circumstances to avoid misunderstanding, but we should not yield talk of happiness without further discussion to its most trivial contexts of use. In my experience, discussion rapidly reveals that we do talk about happiness over our lives as wholes, or at least over long stretches of them. We should not, then, restrict talk of happiness at the start to contexts of short-term feeling.

The point that these are the contexts which first occur to many people when they are asked about happiness indicates that our notion of happiness has indeed been affected by the notion of smiley faces, feeling good, and pleasant episodes. Doubtless this is the source of some of the empirical researcher's problems in trying to measure it. For if we try to measure the happiness of lives in terms of smiley-face feelings, the results will be grotesque. I have seen a survey that asks people to measure the happiness of their lives by assigning it a face

from a spectrum with a very smiley face at one end and a very frowny face at the other. Suppose that you have just won the Nobel Prize; this surely merits the smiliest face. But suppose also that you have just lost your family in a car crash; this surely warrants the frowniest face. So, how happy are you? There is no coherent answer – unless you are supposed to combine these points by picking the indifferent face in the middle!

So, even if episodes first come to mind, we do think, centrally, of *living* happy lives. And this is because we think of our lives as wholes when we are thinking of how to live, what kind of people we are to aspire to be.

At this point, another characteristically modern, and more reasonable sounding, idea tends to come in. Surely having a happy life has something to do with getting what you want, rather than being frustrated and deprived of what you want? We all have desires; the happy person will be the person whose desires are fulfilled. The philosopher's term for this is the 'desire-satisfaction' account, which appeals to more thoughtful ideas about happiness than our initial ones.

Why wouldn't a happy life be one of getting what you want? People, after all, can live happy lives in many different ways. We feel that there is something wrong in trying to build any particular content into our notion of happiness such that only people living certain kinds of life could be happy. The idea that happiness is desire-satisfaction seems suitably neutral on the content of happy lives, allowing happiness to the intellectual and the incurious alike as long as they are getting what they desire.

It is possible to think of happiness as desire-satisfaction if we are prepared to think of happiness – in the spirit of the suggestion that it is subjective – as something on which each of us is the authority. I am happy if I think I am, since I am getting what I want. For who could be a better authority than I am on the issue of whether I am getting what I want? Perhaps the idea that happiness is desire-satisfaction does justice to the initial thought that it is something subjective – without the obvious problems of the smiley-face-feeling interpretation.

Why might we be dissatisfied with this result? We would have to hold that anyone getting what he or she wants is happy, whatever the nature of the desire. Happiness would thus lose any purchase as an idea that could serve to rank or judge lives; Nelson Mandela, Bill Gates, and Madonna, if they are all getting what they want, are all happy, so any comparative judgments about their lives cannot involve the idea of happiness. We might accept this, thinking that there must be something else about lives which can be compared – perhaps well-being or some other kind of value on which the agent is not necessarily the best authority.

One thing the desire-satisfaction account disables us from doing is making judgments about the happiness of people whose desires are in obvious ways defective. Notoriously, some desires are based on radically faulty information or reasoning. Some desires are unresponsive to the agent's reasoning powers because of the force of addiction or obsession. At a deeper level, some desires are themselves deformed by social pressures. Girls who desire less for themselves than for their brothers, poor people who see desire for self-betterment as unimaginable – these are just two of many kinds of desires that are open to criticism, despite being honestly expressed and open to modification in the light of reason and information, because they spring from the internalization of

ideas that deny the agents themselves proper respect.

Once again, the idea that happiness is desire-satisfaction can absorb these points and even deny their faults, at the cost of shrinking happiness to something where only I am authoritative. Suppose, however, that I am happy if I think I am, because I am happy if I am getting what I want, and I am the authority on whether I am getting what I want. If we take this point seriously, we can see that we have not really moved forward from the smiley-face-feeling conception of happiness. Happiness is still just a state I am in that I report on: getting what I want, rather than feeling good, but still a state, namely a state of having my desires fulfilled.

Both the smiley-face and desire-satisfaction accounts of happiness, despite their current popularity, especially among social scientists, turn out to conflict with two other surprisingly deep and far-reaching convictions about the meaning of happiness, convictions which emerge readily in simple discussion. These are the thought that happiness has an essential connection with my life as a whole and the thought that happiness is an *achievement* on my part.

Why should I even bother thinking about my life as a whole? It can seem, from a modern point of view, like an excessively cautious thing to do – prudential in the way that people are prudential who save and buy life insurance. But it is actually rather different, and it is something we all do all the time, since there are two perspectives which we take on our lives.

One is the linear perspective, from which we think of our lives as proceeding through time, one action being followed by another as we slowly get older.

The other perspective opens up as soon as we ask of any action, *Why* I am doing it. Why am I getting up? A number of different kinds of answers suggest themselves, but we readily recognize one kind that is *purposive*: I get up *in order to* get to my classes. Why am I going to my classes? In order to major in Spanish. Why am I majoring in Spanish? In order to get a job as a translator. The answers collected by this question will not all be on the same level of generality. Taking a course is a particular goal that gets its salience from some more general goal, such as having a satisfying career. Our goals are in this way *nested*.

One feature of this way of thinking that soon becomes clear is its capacity to *unify*. I cannot have as concurrent aims the ambition to be a great ballet dancer *and* the ambition to be a lieutenant in the Marines; I have to find a way to sequence these aims coherently. As this way of thinking reveals to me what my aims are, I realize that they are constrained by considerations of consistency, available time, resources, and energy. These constraints come from the fact that *my* aims are the aims I have in the only life I have to live. Confused or self-undermining aims force me to get clearer about my priorities and to sort out competing claims on my time and energy.

So thinking about the way one action is done for the sake of another leads seamlessly into thinking about my life in a nonlinear way, one we can call *global*. I may not leap right away into thinking of my life as a whole; I might start by considering smaller units circumscribing various phases of my life, such as my twenties or my life at university. But when large aims, typically associated with careers or self-fulfillment, come in, I have to move to thinking of my life as a whole – a whole given in terms of my

goals and the way they fit together over-all – rather than as mere duration through time.

This way of thinking, we should notice, strikingly refutes the initial supposition of a timid, over-prudent way of thinking about my life. Such a perspective would come from assuming that I already know, at least in outline, what will happen in my life, and respond to this cautiously. What we are concerned with here, by contrast, is an exploratory way of thinking about my life in which my plans are *shaping* and actively *organizing* what is going to happen in it.

Suppose I recognize this perspective and realize that what faces me is not just a series of actions trailing into the future, but a task, namely the task of forming my life as a whole in and by the way I act. I then have, even if in a vague and muddled way, a conception of my life as a whole and of the overall way my endeavors are shaping it – my *telos* as the ancients put it.

Does this get us to happiness? Aristotle famously said that everybody agrees that our *telos* is happiness. We, however, do not so readily come to this conclusion. Some respond at this point by denying that happiness is our overarching aim in life. Others accept Aristotle's point verbally, but trivialize it by taking happiness just to be whatever you want, thereby expelling from discussions of happiness serious concern with the formation of our lives.

It is important, however, to note that Aristotle at once goes on to add that agreement that our final or overarching end is happiness does not settle anything, since people disagree as to what happiness is. Some think it is pleasure, others virtue; unreflective people think it is money or status.

We can now see that we have made progress after all; for once we recognize, even if at an indeterminate level, that we have a final end, questions and problems about happiness now occupy exactly the right place. Coming up with the proper specification of our overall goal in living will make us happy. But before this is helpful for us, we need to know what happiness is.

Is it pleasure? We now know that the right answer to this question must recognize that happiness specifies not a transient feeling, but our final end in a way that makes sense for us of the aims we pursue. Am I studying Spanish, ultimately, to get pleasure? We can see right away that if the answer is to be yes, then pleasure has to be explicated in a way that makes sense of its role as an aim I could have in studying Spanish as one way to shape my life. If this can be done, it will turn out to have little to do with smiley-face feeling; it will turn out to be a blander, Epicurean kind of pleasure.

We are on the right track, then, in looking for happiness in the search for the best way to live, the best way to understand our *telos*. Once we follow through this train of thought, we can see why the smiley-face-feeling and desire-satisfaction accounts were so hopeless. The issues that matter are issues about the living of our lives, not about feelings or desires. Once this is clear, we can avoid verbal disputes about whether happiness properly applies to feelings or to lives as a whole. We talk in terms of both; but the issues about happiness that concern us most are those that are formulated once we think about our lives in a global as well as a linear way.

Do we actually think about happiness in this way? Certainly a lot of our discourse implies it. When I wonder

whether winning the lottery will make me really happy, this is the point in mind; I am not wondering whether it will produce smiley-face feeling or give me what I want.

Discussion and debate about others' lives also makes clear to us that we are disputing about what happiness really is, and that this is a point about our lives and the ways these have been shaped. Two people may dispute whether their colleague ruined her life or not when she lost her job as a result of acting in accordance with her values. (She blew the whistle on corrupt practices, say.) One onlooker may say that she has ruined her prospects for happiness; now she is unemployable, and all her training and ambition will go to waste. The other may say that she would never have been happy had she not acted as she did; had she failed to live up to her values, her life would have been infected by hypocrisy. This is a dispute about happiness that could not be settled by reports about her feelings or desire-satisfaction. It is a substantive dispute about what we are seeking overall in life, and resolving it requires substantive discussion of our values and priorities.

Why does this sort of discourse not spring more prominently to the minds of social scientists when they embark on happiness research? It seems to be at least as prominent in the way people think and talk about happiness as are thoughts about feelings. It does not, of course, fit into the framework that conceives of happiness as subjective – and perhaps this should lead us to doubt the assumption that we have a well-grounded idea of 'subjective' happiness and that that assumption is the proper place to start our investigation of happiness. For, as we have seen, we do think of happiness as something to be achieved, or not, by living a life of one kind or another;

and we do think of this issue as one to be discussed in terms of values and ideals. And this does not look 'subjective' in any of the many ways in which that term is understood.

Is happiness really an achievement, though, in the way suggested? Suppose we agree that I aim at happiness by specifying my aims in life overall, and agree, further, that this is something for which competing accounts are available, so requiring choice and direction on my part. Still, is happiness itself aptly to be thought of as a matter of the direction I give my life?

We are used to theories that take happiness to be a *state* – a positive one, of course. On this view, shared by consequentialists of all kinds, aiming to be happy just is aiming to get myself into this positive state. In principle, somebody else could do the work for me, and if the work is laborious it is hard to see why I would insist on doing it myself.

But could happiness be a state of myself that I (or if I am lucky, others) bring about in myself? Here it is relevant to mention a discussion with students that I have had many times, but which I first borrowed from a former student, Kurt Meyers.

Kurt asked the students in his business ethics class, mostly business school students, what they thought a happy life consisted of. All mentioned material things like a large salary, a nice house, an SUV, and so on. Well, he said, suppose you find in the mail tomorrow that an unknown benefactor has left you lots of money, so that these material things are now yours for the having. Would this make you happy? Overwhelmingly they said no (and this is uniformly what I have found also).

What this little thought experiment shows is that it was not really the materi-

al things, the stuff, that they imagined would make their lives happy. Rather, they thought of a happy life as one in which they *earned* the money, *made* something of their lives so that these things were an appropriate reward for their effort, ambition, and achievement. Just having the stuff was not all they wanted.

This is a mundane enough example, yet it is surprisingly powerful when we take it seriously. How many people really think that stuff alone will make them happy, regardless of how they obtain it? That you could be made happy by money or an SUV, regardless of how you got them? The thought extends readily to other things that have been taken to be objective measures of happiness in numerous studies. Am I made happy by being strong, healthy, intelligent, beautiful? By having an income at or above the average in my society? By having a reasonably high status in my society? Once we bear in mind the importance to us not just of having these things but of having them in one kind of life rather than another, we can see that these questions cannot sensibly be thought of as having yes or no answers. They open the discussion rather than tell us what we need to know to close it.

So we are not so far as we might think from the ancient thought that happiness is an achievement, even given the fact that our thoughts have got confused by the association of happiness with feelings. We do have the thought that happiness comes from living in some ways and not others, that it is not something that others can give you, either by giving you stuff or by getting you into a particular state. Too often these reflections have been ignored by the social sciences, and this has been something to regret, and the source of much of the disappointing state of happiness studies in that area.

One final objection is worth mentioning: it is that the idea of happiness as achievement is unrealistically high-minded.

We see all around us, it is claimed, people who do think of happiness as some kind of positive state, and who seem not to care greatly whether it is their own efforts which produce this state for them, or those of others. If this is a common way of thinking, is it not too idealistic to think of happiness as achievement?

To this the right response is, I think, that low expectations should not automatically lead us to lower our ideals. People have low expectations for a number of reasons – prominently, social conditions that have discouraged them from having higher ones. If someone does not think of himself as having much control over the shape his life can take, it is natural that he should not readily think of happiness as something *he* can achieve, and he may rest content with the notion that happiness is a state that others can just as well bestow. But this example does not show that happiness as achievement is a hopelessly ideal notion. As I have indicated, it does not take a lot of reflection to find it.

To show that eudaimonism is the right form for ethical theory to take would require more argument than I can provide here, but I hope to have shown at least that the notion of happiness as achievement which forms the center of such theories is already a part of our reflective lives.

In the meantime, it is worth redirecting our attention to what we actually think about happiness. We are faced with the point that we do think of happiness as an achievement in the way we live our lives: one subject to dispute and disagreement that we will need theories to clarify, never mind settle. And even this much shows us that philosophy has

more to contribute than social science has allowed, both in refocusing the study on the proper data and in giving it fruitful direction.

Smiley faces are fun as reward stickers in children's books, but they are no help in serious thought about happy lives. It is a pity that we need philosophers to point this out.

Bernard Reginster

Happiness as a Faustian bargain

In the original version of the legend, Faust gives Mephistopheles disposal of his soul in exchange for twenty-four years of pleasure. In Christopher Marlowe's version, he becomes more demanding – he now asks for twenty-four years of pleasure plus power and knowledge.

In contrast to these rather predictable demands, Goethe's Faust makes a deeply strange series of requests:

> Poor sorry Devil, what could you deliver?
> Was human mind in lofty aspiration ever
> Comprehended by the likes of you?
> Do you have food that does not satisfy? Or do
> You have red gold that will run through
> The hand like quicksilver and away?
> A game that none may win who play?
> A girl who in my very arms
> Will pledge love to my neighbor with her eyes?
> Or honor with its godlike charms

Which like a shooting star flashes and dies?
> Show me the fruit that rots right on the tree,
> And trees that every day leaf out anew!

Though ready to oblige, Mephistopheles is incredulous:

> Such a demand does not daunt me,
> Such treasures I can furnish you.
> But still the time will come around, good friend,
> When we shall want to relish things in peace.

But Faust is implacable:

> If I ever lie down upon a bed of ease,
> Then let that be my final end!
> If you can cozen me with lies
> Into a self-complacency,
> Or can beguile me with pleasures you devise,
> Let that be the last day for me! [...]
> If I to any moment say:
> Linger on! You are so fair!
> Put me in fetters straightaway,
> Then I can die for all I care![1]

What Faust wants most of all, that for which he is ready to sell his soul to the devil, is not, according to Goethe, a life

Bernard Reginster is assistant professor of philosophy at Brown University. The author of the forthcoming "The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism," he has published a number of articles on Nietzsche and nineteenth-century ethics.

1 J. W. Goethe, *Faust*, trans. C. E. Passage (New York: McMillan, 1965), v. 1675 – 1702.

of ease, complacency, and pleasure – a life "so fair" that it leaves nothing to be desired. On the contrary, Goethe's Faust above all wants to pursue desires that can never be satiated.

By and large, he does not demand desires that are, strictly speaking, unsatisfiable. He does want to get the gold, the girl, and the honors – but he only wants momentary possession of them. He wants, in other words, never to be satisfied *once and for all*, but to be moved by desires that are perpetually rekindled, like "trees that every day leaf out anew."

This remarkable idea lies at the heart of a dispute over the nature of happiness that took place in the nineteenth century. It began with the view that, under the circumstances of our life in this world, happiness is impossible. This view, developed by Arthur Schopenhauer, became very influential toward the end of that century under the name 'pessimism.' Schopenhauer saw in the "lofty aspiration" that Faust attributes to the human mind no less than the cause of the impossibility of happiness. As pessimism was gaining acceptance, however, Friedrich Nietzsche, an erstwhile admirer of Schopenhauer, was already developing a powerful philosophical remedy against it. In contrast to his predecessor, Nietzsche found in Faust's strange request an essential clue to the true nature of human happiness.

The dispute between these two philosophers remains largely ignored to this day. Perhaps this must be chalked up to the assumption, still widespread among professional philosophers, that serious study of happiness is the almost exclusive province of ancient philosophy. Although I am not interested here in a scholarly study of the details of the confrontation between Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, I believe we should examine with some care the key elements

of their distinctive and contrasting conceptions of happiness. For the conflict between them continues to polarize our contemporary ethical sensibilities. Or so I hope to show.

Schopenhauer argues that happiness is impossible : "Everything in life proclaims that earthly happiness is destined to be frustrated or recognized as an illusion. The grounds for this lie deep in the very nature of things."[2] This claim rests on a certain conception of happiness that Schopenhauer defines in opposition to suffering: "We call its [the will's] hindrance through an obstacle placed between it and its temporary goal, *suffering*; its attainment of the goal, on the other hand, we call *satisfaction*, well-being, happiness."[3] Happiness is defined in terms of the satisfaction of desires ("the will" is Schopenhauer's name for our faculty of desire), whereas suffering is caused by resistance to that satisfaction.

Contemporary philosophers usually distinguish between a conception of happiness as desire satisfaction and a conception that sees it as essentially hedonistic. On the first view, getting what we want makes us happy even if it provides little or no pleasure. And even if we derive pleasure from the sole fact of getting what we want, this pleasure is not essential to happiness. On the second conception, all we want, when we want to be happy, is pleasure.

Although he ostensibly characterizes it in terms of desire satisfaction, Schopenhauer's conception of happiness is ultimately hedonistic : true happiness for

2 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York : Dover Publications, 1958), vol. II, chap. xlvi, p. 573.

3 Ibid., I, § 56, p. 309.

him requires a permanent absence of pain and, by extension, a lasting satisfaction of desires, because "of its nature, desire is pain."[4] As Schopenhauer sees it, the mere occurrence of a desire creates a kind of affective dissonance in the agent's psyche: the desire is a source of pain because it induces the agent to experience his actual condition as dissatisfying or lacking – and the resulting psychological tension is a source of pain. So if unsatisfied desires are inherently painful, then happiness must be "a final satisfaction of the will, after which no fresh willing would occur, . . . an imperishable satisfaction of the will."[5]

Schopenhauer's pessimism rests on his view that it is impossible to satisfy all of our desires. He defends this view in the following passage:

> The basis of all willing, however, is need, lack, and hence pain, and by its very nature and origin, it is therefore destined to pain. If, on the other hand, it lacks objects of willing, because it is at once deprived of them again by too easy a satisfaction, a fearful emptiness and boredom come over it; in other words, its being and its existence itself become an intolerable burden for it. Hence its life swings like a pendulum to and fro between pain and boredom, and these two are in fact its ultimate constituents.[6]

The crux of this argument lies in the observation that human beings are susceptible to boredom and in the subsequent claim that human life "swings like a pendulum to and fro between pain and boredom." To appreciate the significance of this, we must ask what kind of

state boredom is, and what our susceptibility to it shows about us.

Boredom sets in, Schopenhauer observes, when all our desires for determinate objects (fame, fortune, a new car, finishing this paper, and so on) are satisfied and no new desire comes to agitate us. And yet when we are bored, we feel as though something is lacking or left to be desired. Thus, Schopenhauer describes boredom as an "empty longing" – as a state in which the will, having attained some particular goal, continues to will, this time without any determinate intentional focus. Why does the attainment of a determinate goal not suffice to fulfill the will, so that it persists in the form of an empty longing? Schopenhauer offers this lapidary answer: "The goal was only apparent; possession takes away its charm."[7]

This answer is ambiguous. Suppose, first, that I am convinced that I really want to earn a medical degree, but that I experience a feeling of diffuse dissatisfaction or emptiness when I actually reach that goal. A natural, if complex, explanation for this feeling goes as follows: Earning the medical degree is not what I really want after all; it is not my *real* goal. My real goal, let us suppose, is to secure the esteem of my parents. This goal, however, remains unconscious: I could not admit it to myself, for example, because it would mean acknowledging the distressing fact that I do not have the esteem of my parents *already*. If earning the medical degree leaves my parents indifferent, I will find little satisfaction in it because my parents' esteem, not the degree itself, is my real goal. But, unaware as I am that this is my real goal, my dissatisfaction will remain diffuse and unintelligible to me.

Yet the feeling of emptiness described in this example cannot plausibly be char-

4 Ibid., § 57, p. 313 – 314.

5 Ibid., § 65, p. 360.

6 Ibid., § 57, p. 312; cf. § 38, p. 196.

7 Ibid., p. 313.

acterized as boredom. There is a subtle phenomenological difference between boredom and the feeling of emptiness I just described. The diffuse dissatisfaction I experience at obtaining the medical degree when this does not secure my parents' esteem involves a sense that something is still lacking – something of a *determinate*, if unknown, nature. In contrast, when I am bored I have all the determinate objects I want, and although I have the sense that something is lacking, it is not the sense that something determinate is lacking.

An adequate account of boredom, then, must explain in one sense that only something *indeterminate* is lacking. Schopenhauer's suggestion, ultimately, is that we have, in addition to desires for determinate ends and objects, a desire to have desires, which is frustrated by the satisfaction of all our (occurrent) determinate desires. Boredom results from the frustration of this peculiar desire: we are bored, Schopenhauer declares, when we "lack objects of willing" – when we lack not the determinate objects of particular desires, but rather objects to desire.

This account of boredom is borne out by the distinctive phenomenology of this state. A bored individual will complain that he has nothing to do. Obviously, he does not mean that he is under no *obligation* to do anything; this would be a condition of leisure, not a state of boredom. He means rather that he has no *inclination* or *desire* to do anything. Nothing arouses his interest; nothing engages his will. He is in the grip of an empty longing, for he does not desire anything determinate: he desires something to desire, but nothing in particular. He only wants to desire again.

From Schopenhauer's reflections on the susceptibility to boredom emerges the following picture of human willing.

Human beings obviously have many *first-order* desires for determinate objects (e.g., fame, wealth, food and shelter, and so on). But their susceptibility to boredom reveals that they also have a *second-order* desire, i.e., a desire whose object is, or includes, another desire. This structure of human willing in first-order and second-order desires shows why a final and complete satisfaction of all desires – happiness – is impossible. The satisfaction of first-order desires for determinate objects, which eliminates ordinary pain, necessarily implies the frustration of the second-order desire to have (first-order) desires, and therefore boredom. The satisfaction of this second-order desire meanwhile implies the frustration of first-order desires, and the ordinary pain it causes. And so human life indeed swings like a pendulum to and fro between pain and boredom.

Nietzsche does not deny that we have a second-order desire to desire. In fact, he appropriates and refines Schopenhauer's idea. For one thing, he claims, the bare desire to have desires does not adequately account for our susceptibility to boredom. When we are bored, we do not complain that we have nothing to desire, but rather that we have nothing to *do*. The desire whose frustration is a source of boredom is therefore more specifically a desire not just to have but also to *pursue* desires. We want desires, in other words, because they give us something to do. We can also be bored, however, even when we are engaged in the pursuit of desires, namely when this pursuit consists only of unchallenging activities. And so the desire on which the susceptibility to boredom depends is a desire to confront challenges, or resistance, in the pursuit of a determinate desire. To these qualifications, Nietzsche adds another: Although we might occasionally want

desires we are powerless to satisfy, most commonly we want not only to confront resistance, but also to *overcome* it. Hence, he calls this desire for the overcoming of resistance in the pursuit of determinate desires "the will to power."

Two features of this peculiar desire require our attention. First, defined as the overcoming of resistance, the concept of power is, in and of itself, devoid of any determinate content; it acquires such content only from its relation to some determinate desire. For example, a recalcitrant puzzle is an obstacle to the desire to understand, and the strength of an opposing player is resistance against the desire to win a game. Accordingly, the will to power cannot be satisfied unless the agent has a desire for something other than power. It is, specifically, the second-order desire for the overcoming of resistance in the pursuit of some determinate first-order desire.

Second, insofar as it is a desire for "striving against something that resists," this will to power contrasts starkly with the desire for happiness (understood as pleasure), because "that which is here the driving force must in any event desire something else [than happiness] if it desires displeasure in this way and continually looks for it."[8] This peculiar desire is not for a state in which resistance to the satisfaction of desires *has been overcome* (happiness in Schopenhauer's sense), but for the *process of overcoming* resistance. So against the backdrop of Schopenhauer's conception of suffering as resistance to the satisfaction of desires, the will to power implies a desire for displeasure:

> Human beings do not seek pleasure and avoid displeasure....What human beings want, what every smallest organism wants, is an increase of power; driven by that will they seek resistance, they need something that opposes it. Displeasure, as an obstacle to their will to power, is therefore a normal fact...; human beings do not avoid it, they are rather in continual need of it....[9]

The two features of the will to power that I have been describing – that its satisfaction requires that the agent desire something other than power and that its satisfaction entails displeasure – combine to give the will to power its complex structure. The will to power implies a desire for resistance to overcome, which cannot be satisfied unless the agent also desires some determinate ends in terms of which this resistance can be defined; yet, in desiring the overcoming of resistance, the agent must also desire resistance to the realization of those ends. As Nietzsche puts it:

> That I must be struggle and a becoming and *an end and an opposition to ends* – ah, whoever guesses what is my will should also guess on what *crooked* paths it must proceed. Whatever I create and however much I love it, soon I must oppose it and my love; thus my will wills it.[10]

The pursuit of the will to power is, therefore, eminently paradoxical, for "the will is not satisfied unless it has opponents and resistance" – unless, that is, it is dissatisfied. By contraposition, this amounts to the claim that the satisfaction of the will implies dissatisfaction.

In attempting to elucidate the significance of this paradox, I want to proceed carefully. I shall begin by distinguishing two versions of the paradox. On the

9 Ibid., § 702.

8 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (Vintage Books: New York, 1968), § 704.

10 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), II, § 12, first emphasis mine.

weaker version, the claim is that the satisfaction of the will to power implies *some* dissatisfaction in the agent. On the stronger version, the claim is that the satisfaction of the will to power implies *its own* dissatisfaction.

Let us begin with the weaker version of the paradox: The satisfaction of the will to power implies *some* dissatisfaction. This follows from the definition of the will to power as the desire for the overcoming of resistance. Willing power implies willing to have determinate desires *and* resistance to their satisfaction. Thus, an agent's will to power is satisfied when he has determinate desires that are dissatisfied, i.e., when there is resistance against their satisfaction.

On this reading, the paradox involved in the claim that the satisfaction of the will implies dissatisfaction is resolved simply by assuming that the terms in opposition have different referents. Thus we assume that in the first instance satisfaction is of the second-order desire to pursue determinate first-order desires, while in the second instance, dissatisfaction is of some determinate first-order desire. Still, it is a crucial characteristic of the will to power that it involves the stronger version of the paradox as well: The satisfaction of the will to power implies *its own* dissatisfaction.

To make sense of this, we must first remember that the will to power is not a bare desire to desire, which would amount to a desire for some determinate end and for *resistance* to its realization. It is rather the desire for the *overcoming* of resistance in the pursuit of a determinate desire. The will to power will not be satisfied unless there is some first-order desire for a determinate end, unless there is resistance to the realization of this determinate end, *and* unless there is actual success in overcoming this resistance. But then, the conditions of the satisfaction of the will to power do indeed imply its dissatisfaction. For the satisfaction of the will to power requires actual overcoming, i.e., it induces the agent to break down the resistance against the realization of some determinate end. But the presence of such resistance is a necessary condition of the satisfaction of the will to power. Hence, this satisfaction implies its own dissatisfaction, in the sense that it necessarily brings it about.

I may put the same point in yet another way. We can distinguish between the desire for the *activity* of pursuing a determinate end and the desire for the *determinate end* of that activity. The crucial observation is that to be genuinely engaged in an activity implies actually caring about realizing its determinate end. The activity itself consists of the pursuit of this end, which once achieved brings the activity to a close. Hence, the desire for activity is satisfied only by a successful effort to bring this activity to a close, that is to say, to bring about its own frustration. If we suppose the activity to be a game, for example, the paradox assumes the following form: Even though it is the taking part that matters, rather than the winning itself, we cannot really take part unless winning actually matters to us. But once victory is achieved, and the game thus ended, we find ourselves frustrated, since we are deprived of a game in which to take part.

What is the implication of this paradox for the pursuit of power? Nietzsche, remember, described it in the following terms: "Whatever I create and however much I love it – soon I must oppose it and my love; thus my will wills it." He who wills power must not, strictly speaking, hate what he creates and loves. He must rather overcome it. But he cannot simply undo what he has done and do it again: since the obstacles to doing

it have already been overcome, doing it again would no longer count as genuine overcoming; living according to the will to power is not living the life of a Sisyphus. His will to power demands *new* challenges to meet, *new* resistance to overcome. And this explains why the pursuit of power assumes the form of indefinite *self-overcoming*.

Consider, as an example, the will to power as it relates to the desire to know. It motivates us to solve problems, discover new worlds, and the like. When we are moved by it, however, we would hardly find satisfaction in going again and again over problems that have already been solved, or traveling once more through worlds already discovered. What we need, rather, is new problems to solve and worlds as yet unknown to discover. Thus, the satisfaction of the will to power in the pursuit of knowledge necessarily produces a continuous *self-overcoming* in knowledge, i.e., the movement whereby as soon as we attain a certain level of achievement, we proceed to outdo ourselves.

To say that the conditions of the satisfaction of the will to power bring about its dissatisfaction, then, is not to say that the pursuit of the will to power is self-defeating or self-undermining. It is plainly possible to satisfy the desire for the overcoming of resistance – one only has to engage in the successful overcoming of resistance. What I have called the strong paradox of the will to power reveals one of its most distinctive features, namely that it is a kind of desire that does not allow for *permanent* – once and for all – satisfaction. Its pursuit, on the contrary, necessarily assumes the form of an indefinite, perpetually renewed striving.

Nietzsche describes the appeal of this pursuit in the following terms:

A tablet of the good hangs over every people. Behold, it is the tablet of their over-

comings; behold, it is the voice of their will to power. Praiseworthy is whatever seems difficult to a people; whatever seems indispensable and difficult is called good; and whatever liberates even out of the deepest need, the rarest, the most difficult – that they call holy.[11]

We take the difficulty of an achievement to contribute to its value. At its core, the ethics of power is intended to reflect the value we place on what is difficult or, as we might prefer to say, challenging.[12] This view raises a number of questions, for example about the nature of the relevant difficulty and the exact role it plays in our evaluation of an achievement. Whatever the answers to such questions may be, the idea that we find value in the confrontation of difficulty for its own sake enables us to appreciate the appeal of Faust's strange request for a life without ease, self-complacency, and pleasure.

I began with the promise to show that the nineteenth-century dispute between Schopenhauer and Nietzsche exposes a conflict between two conceptions of happiness that continues to polarize our own ethical sensibilities. We found that the heart of this dispute concerns the role and significance of the Faustian desire to desire. We may now conclude with a general intuitive characterization of these two conceptions.

On the one hand, Schopenhauer defines happiness in terms of the permanent absence of pain, which requires a "a final satisfaction of the will, after which no fresh willing would occur."

11 Ibid., I, § 15.

12 That we do find happiness in the confrontation of difficulty has been established by some well-publicized empirical research. See, in particular, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), esp. chap. 4.

On this view, happiness is a final resting point, a permanent *state* of peace and contentment, free once and for all from any form of agitation and worry. It is a state in which, quite literally, nothing is left to be desired. As a paradigm for this conception of happiness, Schopenhauer has prominently in mind the Christian eternal life in heaven.[13] As we are prone to imagine it, the eternal life represents a condition in which all of our desires are satisfied once and for all. The very desire to desire, which Faust describes as "human mind in lofty aspiration," precisely precludes the possibility of such complete and permanent contentment. In demanding satisfaction for it, Faust is therefore not only selling his soul to the devil, but also, quite literally, depriving himself of the eternal bliss of heaven.

On the other hand, in *The Anti-Christ*, Nietzsche declares: "What is happiness? – The feeling that power *increases* – that a resistance is overcome. *Not* contentment, but more power; *not* peace at all, but war…."[14] On this conception, happiness is not a state, but a *process* – the activity of confronting resistance in the pursuit of some goal. This conception of happiness conflicts with the previous one in two important respects. First, far from excluding suffering, it actually presupposes it as an essential ingredient of happiness. Second, it precludes the possibility of a final state of rest or contentment: it is of the essence of Nietzsche's new happiness that it cannot be achieved once and for all.

In the Christian myth of the Fall, Adam and Eve begin their lives in the Garden of Eden, a place in which we imagine their needs and desires are satisfied easily, as soon as they arise. Expelled from the Garden, they now have to work – i.e., they have to overcome resistance – to fulfill their needs and desires: "you shall gain your bread by the sweat of your brow."[15] In claiming to find in this punishment the very essence of human happiness, Nietzsche assumes a radically 'anti-Christian' posture. In this, indeed, very much like Faust, he might be thought to be striking a bargain with the devil.

15 Genesis, 3 : 17 – 19.

13 Another version of this conception of happiness that Schopenhauer considers is the Buddhistic Nirvana. This is not a state in which all desires have been satisfied once and for all, as is presumably the Christian heaven, but a state of detachment from all desires and therefore of indifference to their frustration. Schopenhauer argues that Buddhistic detachment is the only way in which we can hope to achieve complete deliverance from suffering, and even suggests that Christian ethics is best understood from that perspective.

14 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (New York : Penguin Books, 1968), § 2.

Martha C. Nussbaum

Mill between Aristotle & Bentham

Who is the happy Warrior? Who is he
That every man in arms should wish to
  be?

> – William Wordsworth, "Character of
>   the Happy Warrior"

Man does not strive after happiness; only
the Englishman does that.

> – Friedrich Nietzsche, "Maxims and
>   Arrows"

Powerful philosophical conceptions
conceal, even while they reveal. By shin-
ing a strong light on some genuinely im-
portant aspects of human life, Jeremy

---

*Martha C. Nussbaum, Ernst Freund Distin-
guished Service Professor of Law and Ethics at
the University of Chicago, is appointed in the Phi-
losophy Department, Law School, and Divinity
School. A Fellow of the American Academy since
1988, Nussbaum is the author of numerous
books, including "The Fragility of Goodness:
Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philoso-
phy" (1986), "Women and Human Develop-
ment" (2000), "Upheavals of Thought: The
Intelligence of Emotions" (2001), and "Hiding
from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law"
(2004).*

Bentham's Utilitarianism concealed oth-
ers. His concern with aggregating the
interests of each and every person ob-
scured, for a time, the fact that some
issues of justice cannot be well handled
through mere summing of the interests
of all. His radical abhorrence of suffering
and his admirable ambition to bring all
sentient beings to a state of well-being
and satisfaction obscured, for a time,
the fact that well-being and satisfaction
might not be all there is to the human
good, or even all there is to happiness.
Other things – such as activity, loving,
fullness of commitment – might also be
involved.

Indeed, so powerful was the obscuring
power of Bentham's insights that a ques-
tion that Wordsworth took to be alto-
gether askable, and which, indeed, he
spent eighty-five lines answering – the
question what happiness really is – soon
looked to philosophers under Bentham's
influence like a question whose answer
was so obvious that it could not be asked
in earnest.

Thus Henry Prichard, albeit a foe of
Utilitarianism, was so influenced by
Bentham's conception in his thinking
about happiness that he simply assumed
that any philosopher who talked about
happiness must have been identifying it
with pleasure or satisfaction. When Ar-
istotle asked what happiness is, Prichard

argued, he could not really have been asking the question he appears to have been asking, since its answer was so obvious: happiness is contentment or satisfaction. Instead of asking what happiness consists in, then, he must really have been asking about the instrumental means to the production of happiness.[1]

Nietzsche, similarly, understood happiness to be a state of pleasure and contentment, and expressed his scorn for Englishmen who pursued that goal rather than richer goals involving suffering for a noble end, continued striving, activities that put contentment at risk, and so forth. Unaware of the richer English tradition concerning happiness that Wordsworth's poem embodied, he simply took English 'happiness' to be what Bentham said it was.

But Wordsworth's poem, indeed, represented an older and longer tradition of thinking about happiness – derived from ancient Greek thought about *eudaimonia* and its parts, and inherited via the usual English translation of *eudaimonia* as 'happiness.' According to this tradition, represented most fully in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, happiness is generally agreed to be a kind of living that is active, inclusive of all that has intrinsic value, and complete, lacking nothing that would make it richer or better. Aristotle then proceeded to argue for a more specific conception of happiness that identified it with a specific plurality of valuable activities – for example, activities in accordance with ethical, intellectual,

and political excellences,[2] and activities involved in love and friendship. Pleasure, he believed, is not identical with happiness, but usually accompanies the unimpeded performance of the activities that constitute happiness.

Wordsworth was relying on a conception like this when he asked what the character and demeanor of the happy Warrior would be in each of the many areas of life. As J. L. Austin memorably wrote in a devastating critique of Prichard on Aristotle, "I do not think Wordsworth meant . . . : 'This is the warrior who feels *pleased*.' Indeed, he is 'Doomed to go in company with Pain / And fear and bloodshed, miserable train.'" As Austin saw, the important thing about the happy Warrior is that he has traits that make him capable of performing all of life's many activities in an exemplary way, and that he acts in accordance with those traits. He is moderate, kind, courageous, loving, a good friend, concerned for the community, honest,[3] not excessively attached to honor or worldly ambition, a lover of reason, an equal lover of home and family. His life is happy because it is full and rich, even though it sometimes may involve pain and loss.

John Stuart Mill knew both the Benthamite and the Aristotelian/Wordsworthian conceptions of happiness and was torn between them. Despite his many

1 Henry A. Prichard, "The Meaning of *Agathon* in the *Ethics* of Aristotle," *Philosophy* 10 (1935): 27 – 39, famously discussed and criticized in J. L. Austin, "*Agathon* and *Eudaimonia* in the *Ethics* of Aristotle," in Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, ed. J. O. Urmson and G. J. Warnock (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 1 – 31. My account of Prichard follows Austin's, including his (fair) account of Prichard's implicit premises.

2 I thus render the Greek *aretê*, usually translated as 'virtue.' *Aretê* need not be ethical; indeed it need not even be a trait of a person. It is a trait of anything, whatever that thing is, that makes it good at doing what that sort of thing characteristically does. Thus Plato can speak of the *aretê* of a pruning knife.

3 Here we see the one major departure from Aristotle that apparently seemed to Wordsworth required by British morality. Aristotle does not make much of honesty. In other respects, Wordsworth is remarkably close to Aristotle, whether he knew it or not.

criticisms of Bentham, he never stopped representing himself as a defender of Bentham's general line. Meanwhile, he was a lover of the Greeks and a lover of Wordsworth, the poet whom he credited with curing his depression. Mill seems never to have fully realized the extent of the tension between the two conceptions; thus he never described the conflict between them, nor argued for the importance of the pieces he appropriated from each one.

The unkind way of characterizing the result would be to say that Mill was deeply confused and had no coherent conception of happiness. The kinder and, I believe, more accurate thing to say is that, despite Mill's unfortunate lack of clarity about how he combined the two conceptions, he really did have a more or less coherent idea of how to integrate them – giving richness of life and complexity of activity a place they do not have in Bentham, and giving pleasure and the absence of pain and of depression a role that Aristotle never sufficiently mapped out. The result is the basis, at least, for a conception of happiness that is richer than both of its sources – more capable of doing justice to all the elements that thoughtful people have associated with that elusive idea.

Bentham has a way of making life seem simpler than it is. He asserts that the only thing good in itself is pleasure, and the only thing bad in itself is pain. From the assertion that these two "masters" have a very powerful influence on human conduct, he passes without argument to the normative claim that the proper goal of conduct is to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. The principle of utility, as he puts it, is "that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or

diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question: or, what is the same thing in other words, to promote or to oppose that happiness." In turn, he defines utility in a manner that shows his characteristic disregard of distinctions that have mattered greatly to philosophers:

> By utility is meant that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness, (all this in the present case comes to the same thing) or (what comes again to the same thing) to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness to the party whose interest is considered.

Ignoring or flouting the long Western philosophical tradition that had debated whether happiness could be identified with pleasure – a tradition in which the negative answer greatly predominated, the positive answer being endorsed by few apart from the Epicureans – Bentham simply declares that pleasure, good, and happiness are all the same thing, and goes on from there.

An equally long philosophical tradition before Bentham had debated how we should understand the nature of pleasure. We speak of pleasure as a type of experience, but we also say things like, "My greatest pleasures are listening to Mahler and eating steak." Such ways of talking raise several questions, for instance: Is pleasure a single unitary thing, or many things? Is it a feeling, or a way of being active, or, perhaps, activity itself? Is it a sensation at all, if such very different experiences count as pleasures? Could there be any one feeling or sensation that both listening to Mahler's Tenth and eating a steak have in common?

Plato, Aristotle, and a whole line of subsequent philosophers discussed such questions with great subtlety. Bentham

simply ignores them. As Mill writes, "Bentham failed in deriving light from other minds." For him, pleasure is a single homogeneous sensation containing no qualitative differences. The only variations in pleasure are quantitative: it can vary in intensity, duration, certainty or uncertainty, propinquity or remoteness, and, finally, in causal properties (tendency to produce more pleasure, etc.). Perhaps Bentham's deep concern with pain – which can somewhat plausibly be considered as a unitary sensation varying only in intensity and duration – is the source of his feeling that various pleasures do not meaningfully differ in quality. But this conclusion, Mill says, is the result of "the empiricism of one who has had little experience" – either external, he adds, or internal, through the imagination.

Activity, at the same time, plays no special role in Bentham's system. The goal of right action is to maximize pleasure, understood as a sensation. That is the only good thing there is in the world. So, in effect, people and animals are large containers of sensations of pleasure or satisfaction. Their capacity for agency is of interest only in the sense that it makes them capable of choosing actions that produce utility. A person who gets pleasure by being hooked up to an experience machine – the famous example of the late Robert Nozick – is just as well off as the person who gets pleasure by loving and eating and listening. Even in the context of nonhuman animals, this is a very reduced picture of what is valuable in life. Where human beings are concerned, it leaves out more or less everything.

Nor is Bentham worried about interpersonal comparisons, a problem on which economists in the Utilitarian tradition have labored greatly. For Bentham there is no such problem: when we en-

large our scope of consideration from one person to many people, we simply just add a new dimension of quantity. Right action is ultimately defined as that which produces the greatest pleasure for the greatest number. Moreover, Bentham sees no problem in extending the comparison class to the entire world of sentient animals.

Another problem that has troubled economists in the Benthamite tradition is that of evil pleasures. If people get pleasure from inflicting harm on others, as so often they do, should that count as a pleasure that makes society better? Most economists who follow Bentham have tried to draw some lines here, in order to rule out the most sadistic and malicious pleasures. In so doing, they complicate the Utilitarian system in a way that Bentham would not have approved, introducing an ethical value that is not itself reducible to pleasure or pain.

What is most attractive about Bentham's program is its focus on the urgent needs of sentient beings for relief from suffering. Indeed, one of the most appealing aspects of his thought is its great compassion for the suffering of animals, which he takes to be unproblematically comparable to human suffering.[4] But Bentham cannot be said to have developed anything like a convincing account of pleasure and pain, of happiness, or of social utility. Because of his attachment to a dogmatic simplicity, his view cries out for adequate philosophical development.

Unlike Bentham, Aristotle sees that the nature of happiness is very difficult to pin down. In book 1 of the *Nicomachean*

4 It should be noted, however, that he denied that animals suffered at the very thought of death, and thus he argued that the painless killing of an animal should sometimes be permitted.

Ethics, he sets about that task. He argues that there is general agreement on several formal characteristics of happiness: It must be *most final*, that is, inclusive of all that has intrinsic value. It must be *self-sufficient*, by which he means that there is nothing that can be added to it that would increase its value. (He immediately makes clear that self-sufficiency does not imply solitariness: the sort of self-sufficiency he is after is one that includes relationships with family, friends, and fellow citizens.) It must be *active*, since we all agree that happiness is equivalent to "living well and doing well." It must be *generally available*, to anyone who makes the right sort of effort, since we don't want to define happiness as something only a few can enjoy. And it must be relatively *stable*, not something that can be removed by any chance misfortune.

Aristotle concludes this apparently uncontroversial part of his argument by suggesting that there is a further deep agreement: happiness is made up of activity that is in accordance with excellence, either one excellence, or, if there are more than one, then the greatest and most complete. Scholars argue a lot about the precise meaning of this passage, but let me simply assert. He must mean, whatever the excellent activities of a human life turn out to be, happiness involves all of these in some suitable combination, and the way all the activities fit together to make up a whole life is itself an element in the value of that life.

In the remainder of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle considers the areas of human life in which we characteristically act and make choices, trying to identify the excellent way of acting in each of these areas. He seems to think that there is relatively little controversy about the fact that courage, moderation, justice, etc. are worth pursuing; the controversy pertains to the more precise definition of these excellences – presumably because in each of these spheres we all have to make some choice or another: we have to devise some way of facing the risk of death, some way of coping with our bodily appetites, etc.

Where in all of this does pleasure figure? Early in the work, Aristotle dismisses the claim that pleasure is identical with happiness, saying that living for pleasure only would be "to choose the life of dumb grazing animals." Later he advances some further arguments against the identification. First of all, it is by no means easy to say exactly what pleasure is. Aristotle himself offers two very different conceptions of pleasure, one in book 7 and one in book 10. The first identifies pleasure with unimpeded activity (not so odd if we remember that we speak of "my pleasures" and "enjoyments"). The second, and probably better, account holds that pleasure is something that comes along with, that necessarily supervenes on, activity, "like the bloom on the cheek of youth"; one gets it by doing the relevant activity in a certain, apparently unimpeded or complete way. In any case, Aristotle does not regard pleasure as a single thing that varies only in intensity and duration; it contains qualitative differences related to the activities to which it attaches.

Furthermore, by his account, pleasure is just not the right thing to focus on in a normative account of the good life for a human being. Some pleasures are bad; evil people take pleasure in their evil behavior. Happiness, by contrast, *is* a normative notion: since it is constitutive of what we understand as "the human good life," or "a flourishing life for a human being," we cannot include evil pleasures in it.

Another problem, and a revealing one for Mill, is that some valuable activities

are not accompanied by pleasure. Aristotle's example is the courageous warrior (perhaps a source for Wordsworth's poem) who faces death in battle for the sake of a noble end. It is absurd to say that this warrior is pleased at the prospect of death, says Aristotle. Indeed, the better his life is, the more he thinks he has to lose and the more pain he is likely to feel at the prospect of death. Nonetheless, he is acting in accordance with excellence, and is aware of that; and so he is happy. This just goes to show, says Aristotle, that pleasure does not always accompany the activities that constitute happiness.

Meanwhile, according to Aristotle, there are people whose circumstances, by depriving them of activity, deprive them of happiness. He names the imprisoned and tortured as examples. If one has the unfortunate "luck of Priam" – whose friends, children, and way of life were suddenly snatched away from him by defeat and capture – here too one can be "dislodged from happiness."

Mill's *Utilitarianism* is organized as an extended defense of Bentham's program against the most common objections that had been raised against it. Mill defends both the idea that pleasure is identical with happiness and the idea that right action consists in producing the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Along the way, however, without open defection from the Benthamite camp, he introduces a number of crucial modifications.

First of all, he admits that "To give a clear view of the moral standard set up by ... [Bentham's] theory, much more requires to be said; in particular, what things it includes in the ideas of pain and pleasure; and to what extent this is left an open question." Shortly afterward, Mill makes it plain that, for him,

"Neither pains nor pleasures are homogenous": there are differences "*in kind*, apart from the question of intensity," that are evident to any competent judge. We cannot avoid recognizing qualitative differences, particularly between "higher" and "lower" pleasures. How, then, to judge between them?

Like Plato in book 9 of the *Republic*, Mill refers the choice to a competent judge who has experienced both alternatives. This famous passage shows Mill thinking of pleasures as very like activities, or, with Aristotle, as experiences so closely linked to activities that they cannot be pursued apart from them. In a later text, he counts music, virtue, and health as major pleasures. Elsewhere he shows that he has not left sensation utterly out of account: he asks "which of two modes of existence is the most grateful to the feelings." Clearly the unity of the Benthamite calculus – its reliance on quantity as the only source of variation in pleasures – has been thrown out, replaced here by an idea of competent judgment as to what "manner of existence" is most "worth having." This talk suggests that Mill, like Aristotle, imagines this judge as planning for a whole life, which should be complete as a whole and inclusive of all the major sources of value.

When Mill describes the way in which his judge makes choices, things get still more complicated. The reason an experienced judge will not choose the lower pleasures is "a sense of dignity, which all human beings possess in one form or other, ... and which is so essential a part of the happiness of those in whom it is strong, that nothing which conflicts with it could be, otherwise than momentarily, an object of desire to them." So a sense of dignity is a part of what happiness is for many people: it acts as a gatekeeper, preventing the choice of a life de-

voted to mere sensation. Nozick's experience machine would clearly be rejected by this judge. Moreover, Mill continues, anyone who supposes that this sense of dignity will cause people to forfeit some of their happiness "confoun[ds] two very different ideas, of happiness, and content." Mill has thus rejected one more of Bentham's equivalences.

Summarizing his discussion, Mill writes that the happiness which the ancient philosophers "meant was not a life of rapture; but moments of such, in an existence made up of few and transitory pains, many and varied pleasures, with a decided predominance of the active over the passive." At this point Mill appears to have jettisoned the equivalence of happiness with pleasure: for happiness is now "made up of" pleasures, some pains, and activity; and its "parts" include virtue and the all-important sense of dignity. Even though pleasure itself is complex and heterogeneous, standing in a close relation to activity, it is here said to be but one part of happiness. And yet an emphasis on pleasure persists throughout Mill's work; he cannot utterly leave it aside.

Meanwhile, in one crucial passage, he shows us that his attitude toward pained virtue is subtly different from that of Aristotle and Wordsworth. Imagining a virtuous man in the present "imperfect state of the world's arrangements," he concludes that this man must sacrifice his own happiness if he wishes to promote the happiness of others. But Mill does not tell us enough about this man. If his sacrifice is very great, so that his life is deprived of activity, Mill's position may be Aristotelian: for Aristotle, we recall, judges that Priam is "dislodged from happiness" by his many and great misfortunes. But if this man is more like the happy Warrior who endures pain for a noble cause, then Mill, in judging him

to be unhappy, is at variance with Aristotle and Wordsworth.

We might put this point by saying that Mill sets the bar of fortune higher than Aristotle does. Aristotle thinks that fortune dislodges a person from happiness only when it impedes activity so severely that a person cannot execute his chosen plan of life at all. The pained warrior is happy because he can still live in his own chosen way, and that is a good way. For Mill, the presence of a great deal of pain seems significant beyond its potential for inhibiting activity. A life full of ethical and intellectual excellences and activity according to those excellences does not suffice for happiness if pleasure is insufficiently present, or if too much pain is present.

Why did Mill think this? Well, as he tells us, he had experienced such a life – not, like Wordsworth's warrior, in a moment of courageous risk-taking, but during a long period of depression. This life was the result of an upbringing that emphasized excellent activity to the exclusion of emotional satisfactions, including feelings of contentment, pleasure, and comfort.

Mill, as he famously records, and as much other evidence demonstrates, was brought up by his father to be able to display prodigious mastery of many intellectual skills, and to share his father's shame at powerful emotions. Nor did he receive elsewhere any successful or stable care for the emotional parts of his personality. Mill's mother was evidently a woman of no marked intellectual interests or accomplishments; she soon became very exhausted by bearing so many children. Her son experienced this as a lack of warmth. In a passage from an early draft of the *Autobiography* (he deleted the passage prior to publication at the urging of his wife Harriet)

Mill speaks of his mother with remarkable harshness:

> That rarity in England, a really warm-hearted mother, would in the first place have made my father a totally different being, and in the second would have made his children grow up loving and being loved. But my mother, with the very best of intentions, only knew how to pass her life in drudging for them. Whatever she could do for them she did, and they liked her, because she was kind to them, but to make herself loved, looked up to, or even obeyed, required qualities which she unfortunately did not possess. I thus grew up in the absence of love and in the presence of fear; and many and indelible are the effects of this bringing up in the stunting of my moral growth.

In his early twenties, Mill encountered a crisis of depression. He remained active and carried out his plans, but he was aware of a deep inner void. He tried to relieve his melancholy through dedication to the general social welfare, but the blackness did not abate. The crucial turning point was a very mysterious incident that has been much discussed:

> I was reading, accidentally, Marmontel's *Memoirs*, and came to the passage which relates his father's death, the distressed position of the family, and the sudden inspiration by which he, then a mere boy, felt and made them feel that he would be everything to them – would supply the place of all that they had lost. A vivid conception of the scene and its feelings came over me, and I was moved to tears. From this moment my burthen grew lighter. The oppression of the thought that all feeling was dead within me, was gone. I was no longer hopeless: I was not a stock or a stone...

M̲ill's Marmontel episode has typically been analyzed in terms of an alleged

death wish toward his father. The assumption is that Mill is identifying himself with Marmontel, and so expressing the desire to care for his family by displacing the father he feared. No doubt this interpretation is not altogether misguided, for hostility toward his father is a palpable emotion in the narrative, if counterbalanced by a great deal of love and admiration. The problem with this account, however, is that Mill does not seem particularly keen on caring for others, either before or after this episode. Indeed, he tells us that he tried to lift his depression by being actively concerned with the well-being of others, but that this effort did no good. Instead, the focus of his search is on finding care for himself, and in particular for the emotions and subjective feelings that his father had treated as shameful. It seems to me much more likely that Mill above all identifies with the orphaned family who were now going to receive the care they needed. He imagines someone saying to him, Your needs, your feelings of pain, deadness, and loneliness, will be recognized and fulfilled, you will have the care that you need. Your distress will be seen with love, and you will find someone who will be everything to you.

If we now examine the original Marmontel passage, as interpreters of the *Autobiography* usually do not bother to do, we see that it strongly confirms this reading. Marmontel makes it clear that his consolation of his family is accomplished through the aid of a difficult control over his own emotions, as he delivers his speech "without a single tear." But at his words of comfort, streams of tears are suddenly released in his mother and younger siblings: tears no longer of bitter mourning, he says, but of relief at receiving comfort.[5] So Mill is clearly in

5 Jean François Marmontel, *Mémoires* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1999), 63: "'Ma mère, mes

the emotional position not of the self-composed son, but of the weeping mother and children as they are relieved to find a comfort that assuages sorrow.

In part, as the *Autobiography* makes clear, Mill's wish for care is fulfilled when he becomes able to accept, care for, nourish, and value the previously hidden aspects of himself. In part, too, he shortly discovers in Harriet Taylor – as her letters show, an extremely emotional person who is very skilled at circumnavigating John's intellectual defenses – the person who would care for him as his mother, he felt, did not.

To relate the *Autobiography* to the complexities of Mill's relation to Bentham and Aristotle is conjectural. But it is the sort of conjecture that makes sense, and, moreover, the sort that Mill invites.

For Mill, then, we may suppose, the Aristotelian conception of happiness is too cold. It places too much weight on 'correct' activity – not enough on the receptive and childlike parts of the personality. One might act correctly and yet feel like "a stock or a stone." Here the childlike nature of Bentham's approach to life, which Mill often stresses, proves valuable : for Bentham understood how powerful pain and pleasure are for children, and for the child in us. Bentham did not value the emotional elements of the personality in the right way ; he oversimplified them, lacking all understanding of poetry (as Mill insists) and of love (as we might add). But perhaps it was

the very childlike character of Bentham, the man who loved the pleasures of small creatures, who allowed the mice in his study to sit on his lap, that made him able to see something Aristotle did not see : the need that we all have to be held and comforted, the need to escape a terrible loneliness and deadness.

Mill's *Utilitarianism* is not a fully developed work. It frustrates philosophers who look for a tidy resolution to the many tensions it introduces into the Utilitarian system. But it has proved compelling over the ages because it contains a subtle awareness of human complexity that few philosophical works can rival. Here, as in his surprising writings on women, Mill stands out – an adult among the children, an empiricist with experience, a man who painfully attained the kind of self-knowledge that his great teacher lacked, and who turned that self-knowledge into philosophy.

---

frères, mes soeurs, nous éprouvons, leur dis-je, la plus grande des afflictions ; ne nous y laissons point abattre. Mes enfants, vous perdez un père ; vous en retrouvez un ; je vous en servirai ; je le suis, je veux l'être ; j'en embrasse tous les devoirs ; et vous n'êtes plus orphelins.' À ces mots, des ruisseaux de larmes, mais de larmes bien moins amères, coulèrent de leurs yeux. 'Ah !' s'écria ma mère, en me pressant contre son coeur, 'mon fils ! mon cher enfant ! que je t'ai bien connu !'"

Robert H. Frank

How not to buy happiness

An enduring paradox in the literature on human happiness is that although the rich are significantly happier than the poor within any country at any moment, average happiness levels change very little as people's incomes rise in tandem over time.[1] Richard Easterlin and others have interpreted these observations to mean that happiness depends on relative rather than absolute income.[2]

In this essay I offer a slightly different interpretation of the evidence – namely, that gains in happiness that might have been expected to result from growth in absolute income have not materialized because of the ways in which people in affluent societies have generally spent their incomes.

In effect, I wish to propose two different answers to the question "Does money buy happiness?" Considerable evidence suggests that if we use an increase in our incomes, as many of us do, simply to buy bigger houses and more expensive cars, then we do not end up any happier than before. But if we use an increase in our incomes to buy more of certain *inconspicuous* goods – such as freedom from a long commute or a stressful job – then the evidence paints a very different picture. The less we spend on conspicuous consumption goods, the better we can afford to alleviate congestion; and the more time we can devote to family and friends, to exercise, sleep, travel, and other restorative activities. On the best available evidence, reallocating our time and money in these and similar ways would result in healthier, longer – and happier – lives.

The main method that psychologists have used to measure human well-being has been to conduct surveys in which they ask people whether they are: a) very

Robert H. Frank is H. J. Louis Professor of Economics at the Johnson Graduate School of Management, Cornell University. His books include "Choosing the Right Pond" (1985), "Passions Within Reason," (1988), and "Luxury Fever" (1999).

1 This paper draws heavily on chapters 5 and 6 of my book *Luxury Fever* (New York: The Free Press, 1999).

2 Richard Easterlin, "Does Economic Growth Improve the Human Lot?" in *Nations and Households in Economic Growth: Essays in Honor of Moses Abramovitz*, ed. Paul David and Melvin Reder (New York: Academic Press, 1974), and Richard Easterlin, "Will Raising the Incomes of All Increase the Happiness of All?" *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 27 (1995): 35–47.

happy; b) fairly happy; or c) not happy.[3] Most respondents are willing to answer the question, and not all of them respond "very happy," even in the United States, where one might think it advantageous to portray oneself as being very happy. Many people describe themselves as fairly happy, and others confess to being not happy. A given person's response tends to be consistent from one survey to the next.

Happiness surveys and a variety of other measures employed by psychologists are strongly correlated with observable behaviors that we associate with well-being.[4] If you're happy, for example, you're more likely to initiate social contact with friends. You're more likely to respond positively when others ask you for help. You're less likely to suffer from psychosomatic illnesses – digestive disorders, other stress disorders, headaches, vascular stress. You're less likely to be absent from work or to get involved in disputes at work. And you're less likely to attempt suicide – the ultimate behavioral measure of unhappiness. In sum, it appears that human happiness is a real phenomenon that we can measure.[5]

How does happiness vary with income? As noted earlier, studies show

that when incomes rise for everybody, well-being doesn't change much. Consider the example of Japan, which was a very poor country in 1960. Between then and the late 1980s, its per capita income rose almost four-fold, placing it among the highest in the industrialized world. Yet the average happiness level reported by the Japanese was no higher in 1987 than in 1960.[6] They had many more washing machines, cars, cameras, and other things than they used to, but they did not register significant gains on the happiness scale.

The same pattern consistently shows up in other countries as well, and that's a puzzle for economists. If getting more income doesn't make people happier, why do they go to such lengths to get more income? Why, for example, do tobacco company CEOs endure the public humiliation of testifying before Congress that there's no evidence that smoking causes serious illnesses?

It turns out that if we measure the income-happiness relationship in another way, we get just what the economists suspected all along. When we plot average happiness versus average income for clusters of people in a given country at a given time, we see that rich people are in fact much happier than poor people. In one study based on U.S. data, for example, people in the top decile of the income distribution averaged more than five points higher on a ten-point happiness scale than people in the bottom decile.[7]

The evidence thus suggests that if income affects happiness, it is relative, not

3 See Easterlin, "Does Economic Growth Improve the Human Lot?"

4 For surveys of this evidence, see chapter 2 of Robert H. Frank, *Choosing the Right Pond* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985) and Andrew Clark and Andrew Oswald, "Satisfaction and Comparison Income," *Journal of Public Economics* 61 (1996): 359 – 381.

5 Ed Diener and Richard E. Lucas, "Personality and Subjective Well-Being," in *Understanding Well-Being: Scientific Perspectives on Enjoyment and Suffering*, ed. Daniel Kahneman, Ed Diener, and Norbert Schwartz (New York: The Russell Sage Foundation, 1998).

6 Ruut Veenhoven, *Happiness in Nations* (Rotterdam: Erasmus University, 1993).

7 Ed Diener, Ed Sandvik, Larry Seidlitz, and Marissa Diener, "The Relationship Between Income and Subjective Well-Being: Relative or Absolute?" *Social Indicators Research* 28 (1993): 195 – 223.

absolute, income that matters. Some social scientists who have pondered the significance of these patterns have concluded that, at least for people in the world's richest countries, no useful purpose is served by further accumulations of wealth.[8]

On its face, this should be a surprising conclusion, since there are so many seemingly useful things that having additional wealth would enable us to do. Would we really not be any happier if, say, the environment were a little cleaner, or if we could take a little more time off, or even just eliminate a few of the hassles of everyday life? In principle at least, people in wealthier countries have these additional options, and it should surprise us that this seems to have no measurable effect on their overall well-being.

There is indeed independent evidence that having more wealth *would* be a good thing, provided it were spent in certain ways. The key insight supported by this evidence is that even though we appear to adapt quickly to across-the-board increases in our stocks of most material goods, there are specific categories in which our capacity to adapt is more limited. Additional spending in these categories appears to have the greatest capacity to produce significant improvements in well-being.

The human capacity to adapt to dramatic changes in life circumstances is impressive. Asked to choose, most people state confidently that they would rather be killed in an automobile accident than to survive as a quadriplegic. And so we are not surprised to learn that severely disabled people experience a period of devastating depression and disorientation in the wake of their accidents. What we do not expect, however, are the speed and extent to which many of these victims accommodate to their new circumstances. Within a year's time, many quadriplegics report roughly the same mix of moods and emotions as able-bodied people do.[9] There is also evidence that the blind, the retarded, and the malformed are far better adapted to the limitations imposed by their conditions than most of us might imagine.[10]

We adapt swiftly not just to losses but also to gains. Ads for the New York State Lottery show participants fantasizing about how their lives would change if they won. ("I'd buy the company and fire my boss.") People who actually win the lottery typically report the anticipated rush of euphoria in the weeks after their good fortune. Follow-up studies done after several years, however, indicate that these people are often no happier – and indeed, are in some ways less happy – than before.[11]

In short, our extraordinary powers of adaptation appear to help explain why absolute living standards simply may not matter much once we escape the physical deprivations of abject poverty. This interpretation is consistent with the impressions of people who have lived or

8 See, for example, Peter Townsend, "The Development of Research on Poverty," in *Social Security Research : The Definition and Measurement of Poverty* (London : HMSO, 1979).

9 R. J. Bulman and C. B. Wortman, "Attributes of Blame and 'Coping' in the 'Real World' : Severe Accident Victims React to Their Lot," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 35 (May 1977) : 351 – 363.

10 P. Cameron, "Stereotypes About Generational Fun and Happiness vs. Self-Appraised Fun and Happiness," *The Gerontologist* 12 (Summer 1972) : 120 – 123.

11 P. Brickman, D. Coates, and R. Janoff-Bulman, "Lottery Winners and Accident Victims : Is Happiness Relative ?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 36 (August 1978) : 917 – 927.

traveled extensively abroad, who report that the struggle to get ahead seems to play out with much the same psychological effects in rich societies as in those with more modest levels of wealth.[12]

These observations provide grist for the mills of social critics who are offended by the apparent wastefulness of the recent luxury-consumption boom in the United States. What many of these critics typically overlook, however, is that the power to adapt is a two-edged sword. It may indeed explain why having bigger houses and faster cars doesn't make us any happier; but if we can also adapt fully to the seemingly unpleasant things we often have to endure to get more money, then what's the problem? Perhaps social critics are simply barking up the wrong tree.

I believe, however, that to conclude that absolute living standards do not matter is a serious misreading of the evidence. What the data seem to say is that as national income grows, people do not spend their extra money in ways that yield significant and lasting increases in measured satisfaction. But this still leaves two possible ways that absolute income might matter. One is that people might have been able to spend their money in other ways that would have made them happier, yet for various reasons they did not, or could not, do so. I will describe presently some evidence that strongly supports this possibility.

The second possibility is that although measures of subjective well-being may do a reasonably good job of tracking our experiences as we are consciously aware of them, that may not be all that matters to us. For example, imagine two parallel universes, one just like the one we live in

now and another in which everyone's income is twice what it is now. Suppose that in both cases you would be the median earner, with an annual income of $100,000 in one case and $200,000 in the other. Suppose further that you would feel equally happy in the two universes – an assumption that is consistent with the evidence discussed thus far. And suppose, finally, that you know that people in the richer universe would spend more to protect the environment from toxic waste, and that this would result in healthier and longer, even if not happier, lives for all. Can there be any question that it would be better to live in the richer universe?

My point is that although the emerging science of subjective well-being has much to tell us about the factors that contribute to human satisfaction, not even its most ardent practitioners would insist that it offers the final word. Whether growth in national income is, or could be, a generally good thing is a question that will have to be settled by the evidence.

And there is in fact a rich body of evidence that bears on this question. One clear message of this evidence is that, beyond some point, across-the-board increases in spending on many types of material goods do not produce any lasting increment in subjective well-being. Sticking with the parallel-universes metaphor, let us imagine people from two societies, identical in every respect save one: in society A everyone lives in a house with 4,000 square feet of floor space, whereas in society B each house has only 3,000 square feet. If the two societies were completely isolated from one another, there is no evidence to suggest that psychologists and neuroscientists would be able to discern any significant difference in their respective average levels of subjective well-being. Rath-

12 David G. Myers, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Who is Happy and Why?* (New York: Avon, 1993).

er, we would expect each society to have developed its own local norm for what constitutes adequate housing, and that people in each society would therefore be equally satisfied with their houses and other aspects of their lives.

Moreover, we have no reason to suppose that there would be other important respects in which it might be preferable to be a member of society A rather than society B. Thus the larger houses in society A would not contribute to longer lives, more freedom from illness, or indeed any other significant advantage over the members of society B. Once house size achieves a given threshold, the human capacity to adapt to further across-the-board changes in house size would appear to be virtually complete.

Of course, it takes real resources to build larger houses. A society that built 4,000-square-foot houses for everyone could have built 3,000-square-foot houses instead, freeing up considerable resources that could have been used to produce something else. Hence this central question : Are there alternative ways of spending these resources that could have produced lasting gains in human welfare ?

An affirmative answer would be logically impossible if our capacity to adapt to every other possible change were as great as our capacity to adapt to larger houses. As it turns out, however, our capacity to adapt varies considerably across domains. There are some stimuli, such as environmental noise, to which we may adapt relatively quickly at a conscious level, yet to which our bodies continue to respond in measurable ways even after many years of exposure. And there are stimuli to which we never adapt over time but rather become sensitized ; various biochemical allergens are examples, but we also see instances on a more macro scale. Thus, after several

months' exposure, the office boor who initially took two weeks to annoy you can accomplish the same feat in only seconds.

The observation that we adapt more fully to some stimuli than to others opens the possibility that moving resources from one category to another might yield lasting changes in well-being. Considerable evidence bears on this possibility.

A convenient way to examine this evidence is to consider a sequence of thought experiments in which you must choose between two hypothetical societies. The two societies have equal wealth levels but different spending patterns. In each case, let us again suppose that residents of society A live in 4,000-square-foot houses while those of society B live in 3,000-square-foot houses.

In each case, the residents of society B use the resources saved by building smaller houses to bring about some other specific change in their living conditions. In the first thought experiment, I will review in detail what the evidence says about how that change would affect the quality of their lives. In the succeeding examples, I will simply state the relevant conclusions and refer to supporting evidence published elsewhere.

Which would you choose : society A, whose residents have 4,000-square-foot houses and a one-hour automobile commute to work through heavy traffic ; or society B, whose residents have 3,000-square-foot houses and a fifteen-minute commute by rapid transit ?

Let us suppose that the cost savings from building smaller houses are sufficient to fund not only the construction of high-speed public transit, but also to make the added flexibility of the automobile available on an as-needed basis. Thus, as a resident of society B, you need

not give up your car. You can drive it to work on those days when you need extra flexibility, or you can come and go when needed by taxi. The *only* thing you and others must sacrifice to achieve the shorter daily commute of society B is additional floor space in your houses.

A rational person faced with this choice will want to consider the available evidence on the costs and benefits of each alternative. As concerns the psychological cost of living in smaller houses, the evidence provides no reason to believe that if you and all others live in 3,000-square-foot houses, your subjective well-being will be any lower than if you and all others live in 4,000-square-foot houses. Of course, if you moved from society B to society A, you might be pleased, even excited, at first to experience the additional living space. But we can predict that in time you would adapt and simply consider the larger house the norm.

Someone who moved from society B to society A would also initially experience stress from the extended commute through heavy traffic. Over time, his consciousness of this stress might diminish. But there is an important distinction: unlike his essentially complete adaptation to the larger house, his adaptation to his new commuting pattern will be only partial. Available evidence clearly shows that, even after long periods of adjustment, most people experience the task of navigating through heavy commuter traffic as stressful.[13]

In this respect, the effect of exposure to heavy traffic is similar to the effect of exposure to noise and other irritants. Thus, even though a large increase in background noise at a constant, steady level is experienced as less intrusive as

time passes, prolonged exposure nonetheless produces lasting elevations in blood pressure.[14] If the noise is not only loud but intermittent, people remain conscious of their heightened irritability even after extended periods of adaptation, and their symptoms of central nervous system distress become more pronounced.[15] This pattern was seen, for example, in a study of people living next to a newly opened noisy highway. Four months after the highway opened, 21 percent of residents interviewed said they were not annoyed by the noise, but that figure dropped to 16 percent when the same residents were interviewed a year later.[16]

Among the various types of noise exposure, worst of all is exposure to sounds that are not only loud and intermittent, but also unpredictably so. Subjects exposed to such noise in the laboratory experience not only physiological symptoms of stress, but also behavioral symptoms. They become less persistent in their attempts to cope with frustrating tasks, and suffer measurable impairments in performing tasks requiring care and attention.[17]

Unpredictable noise may be particularly stressful because it confronts the subject with a loss of control. David Glass and his collaborators confirmed this hypothesis in an ingenious experi-

13 Meni Koslowsky, Avraham N. Kluger, and Mordechai Reich, *Commuting Stress* (New York: Plenum, 1995).

14 David C. Glass, Jerome Singer, and James Pennegaker, "Behavioral and Physiological Effects of Uncontrollable Environmental Events," in *Perspectives on Environment and Behavior*, ed. Daniel Stokols (New York: Plenum, 1977).

15 Ibid.

16 N. D. Weinstein, "Community Noise Problems: Evidence Against Adaptation," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 2 (1982): 82 – 97.

17 Glass et al., "Behavioral and Physiological Effects of Uncontrollable Environmental Events."

ment that exposed two groups of sub-jects to a recording of loud unpredict-able noises. Whereas subjects in one group had no control over the recording, subjects in the other group could stop the tape at any time by flipping a switch. These subjects were told, however, that the experimenters would prefer that they not stop the tape, and most subjects honored this preference. Following ex-posure to the noise, subjects with access to the control switch made almost 60 percent fewer errors than the other sub-jects on a proofreading task and made more than four times as many attempts to solve a difficult puzzle.[18]

Commuting through heavy traffic is in many ways more like exposure to loud unpredictable noise than to constant background noise. Delays are difficult to predict, much less control, and one nev-er quite gets used to being cut off by drivers who think their time is more valuable than anyone else's. A large sci-entific literature documents a multitude of stress symptoms that result from pro-tracted driving through heavy traffic.

One strand in this literature focuses on the experience of urban bus drivers, whose exposure to the stresses of heavy traffic is higher than that of most com-muters, but who have also had greater opportunity to adapt to those stresses. A disproportionate share of the absen-teeism of urban bus drivers stems from stress-related illnesses such as gastroin-testinal problems, headaches, and anxi-ety.[19] Many studies have found sharply elevated rates of hypertension among bus drivers relative to those of a variety of control groups, including a control

group of bus drivers pre-employment.[20] Additional studies have found elevations of stress hormones such as adrenaline, noradrenaline, and cortisol in urban bus drivers.[21] And one study found eleva-tions of adrenaline and noradrenaline to be strongly positively correlated with the density of the traffic with which the bus drivers had to contend.[22] More than half of all urban bus drivers retire pre-maturely with some form of medical dis-ability.[23]

A one-hour daily commute through heavy traffic is presumably less stressful than operating a bus all day in an urban area. Yet this difference is one of degree rather than of kind. Studies have shown that the demands of commuting through heavy traffic often result in emotional and behavioral deficits upon arrival at home or work.[24] Compared to drivers

18 Ibid., figures 5 and 6.

19 L. Long and J. Perry, "Economic and Occu-pational Causes of Transit Operator Absentee-ism: A Review of Research," *Transport Reviews* 5 (1985): 247–267.

20 D. Ragland, M. Winkleby, J. Schwalbe, B. Holman, L. Morse, L. Syme, and J. Fisher, "Prevalence of Hypertension in Bus Drivers," *International Journal of Epidemiology* 16 (1987): 208–214; W. Pikus and W. Tarranikova, "The Frequency of Hypertensive Diseases in Public Transportation," *Terapevischeskii Archives* 47 (1975): 135–137; and G. Evans, M. Palsane, and S. Carrere, "Type A Behavior and Occupational Stress: A Cross-Cultural Study of Blue-Collar Workers," *Journal of Personality and Social Psy-chology* 52 (1987): 1002–1007.

21 Ibid.

22 G. Evans and S. Carrere, "Traffic Conges-tion, Perceived Control, and Psychophysiologi-cal Stress Among Urban Bus Drivers," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 76 (1991): 658–663.

23 Gary W. Evans, "Working on the Hot Seat: Urban Bus Drivers," *Accident Analysis and Pre-vention* 26 (1994): 181–193.

24 David C. Glass and Jerome Singer, *Urban Stressors: Experiments on Noise and Social Stres-sors* (New York: Academic Press, 1972); D. R. Sherrod, "Crowding, Perceived Control, and Behavioral Aftereffects," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 4 (1974): 171–186.

who commute through low-density traf-
fic, those who commute through heavy
traffic are more likely to report feelings
of annoyance.[25] And higher levels of
commuting distance, time, and speed
are significantly positively correlated
with increased systolic and diastolic
blood pressure.[26]

The prolonged experience of commut-
ing stress is also known to suppress im-
mune function and shorten longevity.[27]
Even daily spells in traffic as brief as fif-
teen minutes have been linked to signif-
icant elevations of blood glucose and
cholesterol, and to declines in blood co-
agulation time – all factors that are posi-
tively associated with cardiovascular dis-
ease. Commuting by automobile is also
positively linked with the incidence of
various cancers, especially cancer of the
lung, possibly because of heavier expo-
sure to exhaust fumes.[28] The incidence
of these and other illnesses rises with the
length of commute,[29] and is significant-
ly lower among those who commute by
bus or rail,[30] and lower still among non-

commuters.[31] Finally, the risk of death
and injury from accidents varies posi-
tively with the length of commute and
is higher for those who commute by car
than for those who commute by public
transport.

In sum, there appear to be persistent
and significant costs associated with a
long commute through heavy traffic. We
can be confident that neurophysiologists
would find higher levels of cortisol, nor-
epinephrine, adrenaline, noradrenaline,
and other stress hormones in the resi-
dents of society A. No one has done the
experiment to discover whether people
from society A would report lower levels
of life satisfaction than people from soci-
ety B, but since we know that drivers of-
ten report being consciously aware of
the frustration and stress they experi-
ence during commuting, it is a plausible
conjecture that subjective well-being, as
conventionally measured, would be low-
er in society A. Even if the negative ef-
fects of commuting stress never broke
through into conscious awareness, how-
ever, we would still have powerful rea-
sons for wishing to escape them.

On the strength of the available evi-
dence, then, it appears that a rational
person would have powerful reasons
to choose society B, and no reasons to
avoid it. And yet, despite this evidence,
the United States is moving steadily in
the direction of society A. Even as our
houses continue to grow in size, the av-
erage length of our commute to work

25 Daniel Stokols, Raymond W. Novaco, Jean-
nette Stokols, and Joan Campbell, "Traffic Con-
gestion, Type A Behavior, and Stress," *Journal of
Applied Psychology* 63 (1978): 467 – 480.

26 Ibid., table 3.

27 Anita DeLongis, Susan Folkman, and Rich-
ard S. Lazarus, "The Impact of Daily Stress on
Health and Mood : Psychological and Social
Resources as Mediators," *Journal of Personality
and Social Psychology* 54 (1988): 486 – 495.

28 Koslowsky et al., *Commuting Stress*, chap. 4.

29 Koslowsky et al., *Commuting Stress*.

30 P. Taylor and C. Pocock, "Commuter Travel
and Sickness : Absence of London Office Work-
ers," *British Journal of Preventive and Social Medi-
cine* 26 (1972): 165 – 172 ; Meni Koslowsky and
Moshe Krausz, "On the Relationship Between
Commuting, Stress Symptoms, and Attitudinal

Measures," *Journal of Applied Behavioral Sci-
ences* (December 1993): 485 – 492.

31 European Foundation for the Improvement
of Living and Working Conditions, "The Jour-
ney from Home to the Workplace : The Impact
on the Safety and Health of the Community/
Workers" (Dublin : European Foundation for
the Improvement of Living and Working Con-
ditions, 1984).

Table 1
Four thought experiments : the conspicuous consumption of society A versus the inconspicuous consumption of society B

Society A	Society B
1 Everyone lives in 4,000-square-foot houses and has no free time for exercise each day.	1 Everyone lives in 3,000-square-foot houses and has 45 minutes available for exercise each day.
2 Everyone lives in 4,000-square-foot houses and has time to get together with friends one evening each month.	2 Everyone lives in 3,000-square-foot houses and has time to get together with friends four evenings each month.
3 Everyone lives in 4,000-square-foot houses and has one week of vacation each year.	3 Everyone lives in 3,000-square-foot houses and has four weeks of vacation each year.
4 Everyone lives in 4,000-square-foot houses and has a relatively low level of personal autonomy in the workplace.	4 Everyone lives in 3,000-square-foot houses and has a relatively high level of personal autonomy in the workplace.

continues to grow longer. Between 1982 and 2000, for example, the time penalty for peak-period travelers increased from 16 to 62 hours per year ; the daily window of time during which travelers might experience congestion increased from 4.5 to 7 hours ; and the volume of roadways where travel is congested grew from 34 to 58 percent.[32] The Federal Highway Administration predicts that the extra time spent driving because of delays will rise from 2.7 billion vehicle hours in 1985 to 11.9 billion in 2005.[33]

Table 1 lists four similar thought experiments that ask you to choose between societies that offer different combinations of material goods and free time to pursue other activities. Each case assumes a specific use of the free time and asks that you imagine it to be one that appeals to you (if not, feel free to substitute some other activity that does).

32 David Schrank and Tim Lomax, *The 2002 Urban Mobility Report*, Texas Transportation Institute, <http://mobility.tamu. edu/>.

33 Charles S. Clark, "Traffic Congestion," *The CQ Researcher*, 6 May 1994, 387 – 404.

The choice in each of these thought experiments is one between conspicuous consumption (in the form of larger houses) and what, for want of a better term, I shall call inconspicuous consumption – freedom from traffic congestion, time with family and friends, vacation time, and a variety of favorable job characteristics. In each case the evidence suggests that subjective well-being will be higher in the society with a greater balance of inconspicuous consumption.[34] And yet in each case the actual trend in U.S. consumption patterns has been in the reverse direction.

The list of inconspicuous consumption items could be extended considerably. Thus we could ask whether living in slightly smaller houses would be a reasonable price to pay for higher air quality, for more urban parkland, for cleaner drinking water, for a reduction in violent crime, or for medical research that would reduce premature death. And in each case the answer would be the same as in the cases we have considered thus far.

34 For a detailed survey of the supporting studies, see Frank, *Luxury Fever*, chap. 6.

My point in the thought experiments is not that inconspicuous consumption is always preferable to conspicuous consumption. Indeed, in each case we might envision a minority of rational individuals who might choose society A over society B. Some people may simply dislike autonomy on the job, or dislike exercise, or dislike spending time with family and friends. But if we accept that there is little sacrifice in subjective well-being when all have slightly smaller houses, the real question is whether a rational person could find *some* more productive use for the resources thus saved. Given the absolute sizes of the houses involved in the thought experiments, the answer to this question would seem to be yes.

It might seem natural to suppose that when per capita income rises sharply, as it has in most countries since at least the end of World War II, most people would spend more on both conspicuous and inconspicuous consumption. In many instances, this is in fact what seems to have happened. Thus the cars we buy today are not only faster and more luxuriously equipped, but also safer and more reliable. If both forms of consumption have been rising, however, and if inconspicuous consumption boosts subjective well-being, then why has subjective well-being not increased during the last several decades?

A plausible answer is that whereas some forms of inconspicuous consumption have been rising, others have been declining, often sharply. There have been increases in the annual number of hours spent at work in the United States during the last two decades; traffic has grown considerably more congested; savings rates have fallen precipitously; personal bankruptcy filings are at an all-time high; and there is at least a widespread perception that employment se-

curity and autonomy have fallen sharply. Declines in these and other forms of inconspicuous consumption may well have offset the effects of increases in others.

The more troubling question is *why* we have not used our resources more wisely. If we could all live healthier, longer, and more satisfying lives by simply changing our spending patterns, why haven't we done that?

As even the most ardent free-market economists have long recognized, the invisible hand cannot be expected to deliver the greatest good for all in cases in which each individual's well-being depends on the actions taken by others with whom he does not interact directly. This qualification was once thought important in only a limited number of arenas – most importantly, activities that generate environmental pollution. We now recognize, however, that the interdependencies among us are considerably more pervasive. For present purposes, chief among them are the ways in which the spending decisions of some individuals affect the frames of reference within which others make important choices.

Many important rewards in life – access to the best schools, to the most desirable mates, and even, in times of famine, to the food needed for survival – depend critically on how the choices we make compare to the choices made by others. In most cases, the person who stays at the office two hours longer each day to be able to afford a house in a better school district has no conscious intention to make it more difficult for others to achieve the same goal. Yet that is an inescapable consequence of his action. The best response available to others may be to work longer hours as well, thereby to preserve their current positions. Yet the ineluctable mathematical logic of musical chairs assures that only 10 percent of all children can occupy

top-decile school seats, no matter how many hours their parents work.

That many purchases become more attractive to us when others make them means that consumption spending has much in common with a military arms race. A family can choose how much of its own money to spend, but it cannot choose how much others spend. Buying a smaller-than-average vehicle means greater risk of dying in an accident. Spending less on an interview suit means a greater risk of not landing the best job. Yet when all spend more on heavier cars and more finely tailored suits, the results tend to be mutually offsetting, just as when all nations spend more on armaments. Spending less – on bombs or on personal consumption – frees up money for other pressing uses, but only if everyone does it.

What, exactly, is the incentive problem that leads nations to spend too much on armaments? It is not sufficient merely that each nation's payoff from spending on arms depends on how its spending compares with that of rival nations. Suppose, for example, that each nation's payoff from spending on nonmilitary goods also depended, to the same extent as for military goods, on the amounts spent on nonmilitary goods by other nations. The tendency of military spending to siphon off resources from other spending categories would then be offset by an equal tendency in the opposite direction. That is, if each nation had a fixed amount of national income to allocate between military and nonmilitary goods, and if the payoffs in each category were equally context sensitive, then we would expect no imbalance across the categories.

For an imbalance to occur in favor of armaments, the reward from armaments spending must be *more* context sensitive than the reward from nonmilitary

spending. And since this is precisely the case, the generally assumed imbalance occurs. After all, to be second best in a military arms race often means a loss of political autonomy – clearly a much higher cost than the discomfort of having toasters with fewer slots.

In brief, we expect an imbalance in the choice between two activities if the individual rewards from one are more context sensitive than the individual rewards from the other. The evidence described earlier suggests that the satisfaction provided by many conspicuous forms of consumption is more context sensitive than the satisfaction provided by many less conspicuous forms of consumption. If so, this would help explain why the absolute income and consumption increases of recent decades have failed to translate into corresponding increases in measured well-being.

Martin E. P. Seligman

Can happiness be taught?

Since World War II, the field of psychology has largely focused on suffering. Psychologists now measure such formerly fuzzy concepts as depression, schizophrenia, and anger with respectable precision. We have discovered a fair amount about how these disorders develop across life, about their genetics, their neurochemistry, and their psychological underpinnings. Best of all, we can relieve some of the disorders. By my last count fourteen of the several dozen major mental illnesses could be effectively treated – and two of them cured – with medications or specific psychotherapies.[1]

Unfortunately, for many years interest in relieving the states that make life miserable has overshadowed efforts to enhance the states that make life worth living. This disciplinary bias has not preempted the public's concern with what is best in life, however. Most people want more positive emotion in their lives. Most people want to build their strengths, not just to minimize their weaknesses. Most people want lives imbued with meaning.

What I have called Positive Psychology concerns the scientific study of the three different happy lives that correspond to these three desires: the Pleasant Life, the Good Life, and the Meaningful Life. The Pleasant Life is about positive emotions. The Good Life is about positive traits – foremost among them the strengths and the virtues, but also the talents, such as intelligence and athleticism. The Meaningful Life is about positive institutions, such as democracy, strong families, and free inquiry. Positive institutions support the virtues, which in turn support the positive emotions.[2] In its scope, then, Positive Psychology diverges markedly from the traditional subject matter of psychology: mental disorders, developmental stunting, troubled lives, violence, criminality, prejudice, trauma, anger, depression, and therapy.

But can a science of Positive Psychology lead us to happiness? Five years ago, in an effort to answer that question, I

Martin E. P. Seligman is Fox Leadership Professor of Psychology and director of the Center for Positive Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania. Former president of the American Psychological Association, he is the author of "Helplessness" (1975), "Learned Optimism" (1990), and "Authentic Happiness" (2002).

1 Martin E. P. Seligman, *What You Can Change & What You Can't* (New York: Knopf, 1993).

2 Martin E. P. Seligman, *Authentic Happiness* (New York: Free Press, 2002).

started to teach an annual seminar to undergraduates at the University of Pennsylvania.

This seminar is similar to the other courses I have taught for the last forty years: we read and discuss the primary scientific literature in the field. It differs, however, in an important way: there is a real-world homework exercise to do and write up every week. When one teaches a traditional seminar on helplessness or on depression, there is no experiential homework to assign; students can't very well be told to be depressed or to be alcoholic for the week. But in Positive Psychology, students can be assigned to make a Gratitude Visit, or to transform a boring task by using a signature strength, or to give the gift of time to someone they care for. The workload is heavy: two essays per week, one on the extensive readings and the other on the homework exercises.

The course begins with personal introductions that are not perfunctory. I introduce myself by narrating an incident in which my then five-year-old daughter, Nikki, told me that she had given up whining and if she could do that ("It was the hardest thing I've ever done, Daddy"), I could "stop being such a grouch." I then ask all of the students to tell stories about themselves at their best, stories that display their highest virtues. The listening skills taught in traditional clinical psychology center around detecting hidden, underlying troubles, but here I encourage the opposite: listening for underlying positive motivations, strengths, and virtues. The introductions are moving and rapport building, and they easily fill the entire three hours.

The course then spends four meetings on what is scientifically documented about positive emotion: about the past (contentment, satisfaction, serenity), about the future (optimism, hope, trust, faith), and about the present (joy, ebullience, comfort, ecstasy, mirth, pleasure). We read and discuss the literature on depressive realism (happy people may be less accurate than miserable people[3]), on set ranges for weight and for positive emotion (lottery winners and paraplegics revert to their average preexisting level of happiness or misery within a year, because the capacity for pleasure, 'positive affectivity,' is about 50 percent heritable and therefore quite resistant to change[4]), on wealth and life satisfaction (the one hundred fifty richest Americans are no happier than the average American[5]), on education, climate, and life satisfaction (there is no impact[6]), on optimism and presidential elections (80 percent of the elections have been won by the more optimistic candidate – partialing out standing in the polls, vigor of the campaign, and funding[7]), on longevity and positive emotion (novitiates who at age twenty included positive-emotion words in their brief biographies live about a decade longer than more deadpan

3 Lauren B. Alloy and Lyn Y. Abramson, "Judgment of Contingency in Depressed and Nondepressed Students: Sadder but Wiser," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 108 (1979): 441–485.

4 Phil Brickman, D. Coates, and Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, "Lottery Winners and Accident Victims: Is Happiness Relative?" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 36 (1978): 917–927.

5 Ed Diener, Jeff Horwitz, and Robert Emmons, "Happiness of the Very Wealthy," *Social Indicators* 16 (1985): 263–274.

6 Chapter 4 of my book *Authentic Happiness* reviews these data.

7 Harold Zullow and Martin E. P. Seligman, "Pessimistic Rumination Predicts Defeat of Presidential Candidates: 1900–1984," *Psychological Inquiry* 1 (1990): 52–61.

nuns[8]), and on the brain and positive emotion (positive emotion correlates well with activity in left-frontal regions of the cortex[9]).

The scientific literature bears on interventions. In parallel to the techniques that therapists have developed for reducing misery, there exist empirically validated techniques that we have developed for enhancing the positive emotions. In our discussion of the positive emotions about the future, we focus on optimism and how it lowers vulnerability to depression and how it enhances productivity, physical health, and immune activity. We practice the skill of disputing unrealistic catastrophic thoughts, the main tool for increasing optimism.[10] One student wrote a long letter to her future self from her graduating-senior self, outlining her advice about optimism and sticking to her values.

Gratitude, meanwhile, is a skill, too little practiced, that amplifies satisfaction about the past. Gratitude Night is a highlight of the course.

An evening is set aside, and class members invite guests – mothers, close friends, roommates, fathers, teachers, and even younger sisters – who have contributed importantly to their well-being, but whom they have never properly thanked. The exact purpose of the gathering is a surprise to the guests, who are honored with testimonials of gratitude from their hosts. For instance, Patty to her mom:

> How do we value a person? Can we measure her worth like a piece of gold, with the purest 24-karat nugget shining more brightly than the rest? If a person's inner-worth were this apparent to everyone, I would not need to make this speech. As it is not, I would like to describe the purest soul I know: my mom … You are, however, the most genuine and pure-of-heart person I have ever met ….
>
> When complete strangers will call you to talk about the loss of their dearest pet, I am truly taken aback. Each time you speak with a bereaved person, you begin crying yourself, just as if your own pet had died. You provide comfort in a time of great loss for these people. As a child, this confused me, but I realize now that it is simply your genuine heart, reaching out in a time of need ….
>
> There is nothing but joy in my heart as I talk about the most wonderful person I know. I can only dream of becoming the pure piece of gold I believe stands before me. It is with the utmost humility that you travel through life, never *once* asking for thanks, simply hoping along the way people have enjoyed their time with you.

There was not a dry eye in the room as Patty read her testimonial and then her mom choked out, "You will always be my Peppermint Patty." In their evaluations of the course at the end of the semester, "Friday, October 27 was one of the greatest nights of my life" was not untypical. Crying in any class is extraordinary, and when everyone is crying, something has happened that touches the great rhizome underneath us all.

We then turn to the knotty subject of happiness in the present. The pleasures have clear sensory and feeling compo-

8 Deborah D. Danner, David A. Snowdon, and Wallace V. Friesen, "Positive Emotions in Early Life and Longevity: Findings from the Nun Study," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 80 (5) (2001): 804 – 813.

9 Richard Davidson, "Biological Basis of Personality," in Valerian J. Derlega, Warren H. Jones, and Barbara A. Winstead, eds., *Personality: Contemporary Theory and Research* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1999).

10 Martin E. P. Seligman, *Learned Optimism* (New York: Knopf, 1990).

nents; they are evanescent and they involve little if any thinking. To enhance the pleasures, we practice in homework the skills of savoring (sharing experiences with others, taking mental photographs, collecting physical mementos) and of mindfulness (looking at experiences afresh from new angles, slowing down, and taking another's perspective).[11] One of the homework assignments is to design and carry out a Pleasurable Day. Experiencing many of these pleasures and having the skills of savoring that amplify them constitute what I call the Pleasant Life.

In ordinary English we fail to distinguish the gratifications from the pleasures. This is a costly confusion because it muddles together two different classes of the best things in life, and it deceives us into thinking they can each be had in the same way. We casually say that we *like* caviar, that we *like* a back rub, and that we *like* the sound of rain on a tin roof – all pleasures – as well as say that we *like* playing volleyball, that we *like* reading Andrea Barrett, and that we *like* helping the homeless – all gratifications.

Like is the operative confusion. *Like*'s primary meaning in all these cases is that we *choose* to do these things; we *prefer* them to many other possibilities. Because we use the same verb to characterize what pleases and what gratifies us, we are inclined to expect, erroneously, that the liking comes from the same source. And so we slip into saying, "Caviar gives me pleasure" and "Andrea Barrett gives me pleasure" – as if the same positive feeling exists underneath both sentiments and that commensurability is the basis of our choosing one or the other.

When I press people about the positive emotion underlying their experience of

pleasure, they tend to describe a felt, conscious, positive feeling. Great food, a back rub, perfume, a hot shower – all produce what Gilbert Ryle in *The Concept of Mind* calls "raw feels": salient, felt, articulable emotion. In contrast, when I press people about the positive emotion they feel when serving coffee to the homeless, reading Nozick, playing bridge, or rock climbing, they tend to describe a feeling that is elusive – one they cannot succinctly characterize as a discrete emotion. Total immersion usually blocks consciousness, so thinking and feeling are completely absent except in retrospect ("Wow. That was fun!"). Indeed, it is the total absorption, the suspension of self-consciousness, the blocking of thought and feeling, and the flow that the gratifications produce – not the presence of any felt sensation – that define liking these activities. In short, pleasure is defined by the presence of raw feels, gratification by their absence.

I suggest that the difference between the Good Life and the Pleasant Life resides in this distinction. The great benefit of distinguishing pleasure from gratification is that even the bottom half of the Gaussian distribution of the capacity for positive affect (three billion nonebullient people) is not consigned by psychology to the purgatory of unhappiness. Not remotely. Rather, these people's happiness lies in pursuing the Good Life – in the abundant gratifications that can totally absorb them.

While we moderns have lost the distinction between the pleasures and the gratifications, the ancient Greeks and the Romans of Hellenistic bent were keen on it. For Aristotle, happiness (*eudaimonia*), distinct from the bodily pleasures, is akin to grace in dancing. Grace is not a separable entity that accompanies the dance or that comes at the end

11 Fred Bryant and Joseph Veroff, *Savoring* (Hillside, N.J.: in press).

of the dance; it is part and parcel of a dance well done. To talk about the happiness of contemplation, then, is only to say that contemplation absorbs us and is done for its own sake; it is not intended to refer to any emotion that accompanies contemplation. Eudaimonia, what I call gratification, is part and parcel of right action.[12] For Seneca, pleasure and virtue are wholly separate; the happy life is lived in harmony with its nature, and while it may or may not contain pleasure, it must contain virtue.[13] Unlike pleasure, which can be had by drugs, shopping, masturbation, and television, gratification cannot be had by shortcuts. Gratification can only be had by the exercise of strength and virtue.

"Flow"[14] is the way that Positive Psychology measures gratification empirically. It is the state we enter when our highest strengths meet our highest challenges. The loss of consciousness characterizes such complete immersion: time stops for us, we concentrate, we feel completely at home. The Good Life, in contrast to the Pleasant Life, is about identifying one's strengths and virtues and using them as frequently as possible to obtain gratification.

One of my teachers, Julian Jaynes, was given an exotic Amazonian lizard as a

pet for his laboratory. In the first few weeks after getting the lizard, Julian could not get it to eat. Julian tried everything. It was starving right before his eyes. He offered it lettuce and then mango and then ground pork from the supermarket. He swatted flies and offered them to the lizard. He tried live insects and Chinese takeout. He blended fruit juices. The lizard refused everything and was slipping into torpor.

One day Julian brought in a ham sandwich and proffered it. The lizard showed no interest. Going about his daily routine, Julian picked up *The New York Times* and began to read. When he finished the first section, he tossed it down and it landed inadvertently on top of the ham sandwich. The lizard took one look at this configuration, crept across the floor, leapt onto the newspaper, shredded it, and then gobbled up the sandwich. The lizard needed to stalk and shred before it would eat. So essential was the exercise of this strength to the life of this kind of lizard that its appetite could not be awakened until it had engaged it.

Human beings are much more complex than Amazonian lizards, but all our complexity sits on top of a lizardly brain that has been shaped for hundreds of millions of years by natural selection. Our pleasures, and the appetites they serve, are tied by evolution to a repertoire of action. This repertoire is vastly more elaborate and flexible than stalking, pouncing, and shredding, but it can be ignored only at considerable cost. The belief that we can rely on shortcuts to gratification and bypass the exercise of the strengths and the virtues is folly. It leads to legions of humanity who are depressed in the middle of great wealth, who are starving to death spiritually.

This leads to my formulation of the Good Life: identifying one's signature

---

12 Aristotle, book 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Especially useful is J. O. Urmson, *Aristotle's Ethics* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1988): "But for Aristotle the enjoyment of an activity is not the result of it but something barely distinguishable from the activity itself; for him, doing a thing for the sheer pleasure of doing it is doing it for its own sake." Ibid., 105. For the distinction between the gratifications and the pleasures, see Richard Ryan and Ed Deci, "On Happiness and Human Potential," *Annual Review of Psychology* 51 (2001): 141–166.

13 Seneca, *Moral Essays De Vita Beata,* x–xi.

14 Mihalyi Csikszentmihaly, *Flow* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990).

strengths and virtues and using them in work, love, play, and parenting to produce abundant and authentic gratification.

To identify their signature strengths, the students take the VIA (Values-In-Action Institute of the Mayerson Foundation) questionnaire of strengths and virtues.[15] This instrument picks out the five highest self-rated strengths for each student from a classification (Psychology's UnDSM-1)[16] of twenty-four that includes love of learning, valor, perspective, kindness, optimism, capacity to love and be loved, humor, perseverance, spirituality, fairness, and the like.

The first time I taught my undergraduate seminar on the Good Life, I asked the students after they had identified their five highest strengths if they got to deploy at least one of these strengths every day at college. They all said no.

My class's homework assignments followed from this dismal statistic. We each chose an unavoidable task that we found tedious and invented a way to perform the task using one of our signature strengths. One student transformed data entry into flow. Using his strengths of curiosity and love of learning, he began to look for patterns in the mound of demographic data he had been entering for months as a research assistant. He

15 The VIA questionnaire is available at <www.authentichappiness.org>. This website contains all of the leading tests of positive emotion. As of this writing, two hundred thousand people have taken the VIA on this website. We have found the web collection of psychometric data vastly cheaper and faster than paper questionnaires, and the samples are more representative of our target populations than are college sophomores.

16 Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, *Classification of Strengths and Virtues* (New York: Oxford University Press; Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association Press, 2004).

discovered a pattern: the higher the family income, the more likely the parents remain married. Another student transformed his lonely midnight walk from the library to his apartment using his strength of playfulness by rollerblading home and trying to set a new Olympic record on each run. Another student used her strength of social intelligence to turn waitressing into gratification by setting the goal of making each customer's interaction with her the social highlight of his or her evening.

An assignment that contrasts fun with altruism makes the distinction between pleasure and gratification clearer to my students. We each select an activity that gives us pleasure, and we contrast this with doing something philanthropic that calls upon one of our strengths. There is quite a uniform emotional experience that ensues. The pleasurable activities – hanging out with friends, getting a scalp massage, going to the movies – have a square wave offset. When they are over, they leave almost no trace. The gratification of the altruistic activities, by contrast, lingers. One junior who spontaneously tutored her third-grade nephew in arithmetic on the phone for two hours wrote, "After that, the whole day went better, I could really listen and people liked me more. I was mellow all day." One Wharton student said, "I came to Wharton to make money because I thought money would bring me happiness. I was stunned to find out that I am happier helping another person than I am shopping."

This assignment is the transition to the final part of the course – the study of the third happy life, the Meaningful Life. From the perspective of Positive Psychology, meaning consists in attachment to something larger. So on this account, the Meaningful Life is similar to the

Good Life, but with one further ingredient: identifying and using your highest strengths in order to belong to and serve something larger than you are. We call these larger things Positive Institutions.

In this part of the course we read some of the primary literature on Positive Institutions (e.g., Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* and Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*) and we do a set of exercises designed to connect the students to things larger than their own successes and failures. In one exercise, they create a family tree of strengths and virtues by having their parents, grandparents, and siblings take the VIA test, and by interviewing their parents about dead relatives. In another, they mentor a younger student who is facing the specific issues they faced and solved in high school or college. In another, they write their vision of a positive human future and what their role in bringing it about might be. In another, they write their own obituary from the point of view of their grandchildren, emphasizing their own legacy.

We read George Vaillant's *Aging Well*, which seems to demonstrate that American higher education is not teaching its students the Good Life. In a sixty-year longitudinal study of the lives of 268 top members of the Harvard classes of 1939 – 1942 and 456 Core City men of Boston from the same era, Vaillant came up with a robust and disturbing finding: higher education made little or no difference for "success in life." (I hasten to add that Vaillant, like I, means not champagne and Porsches, but a life well led, a eudaimonic life.) Looking at a panoply of indicators such as life satisfaction, marital happiness, physical vitality, freedom from depression, longevity, lack of alcoholism, job promotions, maturity, and enjoyment, Vaillant found that the Core City men did as well as the Harvard

graduates, save for two variables: higher Harvard incomes and more Harvard entries in *Who's Who*. My students were not at all puzzled by this, although they were discomfited that their parents were paying six figures for such an education. "We are taught the wrong stuff at college," they said. "If college taught the material we've learned in this course, higher education would lead to success in life."

To end the course – having read the literature on memory and hedonics that shows that what people most remember about any endeavor is how it ends[17] – we parallel our serious introductions with serious farewells. Each of us picks our favorite ending – of a movie, poem, or piece of music – explains it and then presents it in a final all-day session.

All in all, teaching this subject has been the most gratifying teaching I have done in my forty years as an instructor. I have seen young lives change before my eyes, and more importantly, I have never before seen such engagement and such mature intellectual performances by undergraduates. So encouraged, I am now teaching this material both at the introductory level in college and at the professional level once a week on the telephone to a massive audience of clinical psychologists, social workers, executive coaches, and life coaches.[18]

Teaching about the Good Life is by no means the unique province of a psychology course. Indeed, if the pursuit of eudaimonia can be taught to psychology students steeped in a century of victim-

17 Daniel Kahneman, Barbara L. Fredrickson, Charles A. Schreiber, and Donald A. Redelmeier, "When More Pain is Preferred to Less: Adding a Better End," *Psychological Science* 4 (6) (November 1993): 401 – 405.

18 <www.authentichappinesscoaching.com>.

ology and shallow hedonics, think how easily this lesson might be taught to students who have previously encountered the better examples of well-led lives found in the humanities. A stance, moreover, that gives the best in life equal footing with the worst, that is as concerned with flourishing as with surviving, that is as interested in building as in repairing, should find a comfortable home in most any discipline. In the end, I believe that we learn more when lighting candles than when cursing the darkness.

Poem by Richard Howard

GEORGE AND ETHEL GAGE WITH MOTHER IDA GAGE
AND THEIR FIRST FIVE CHILDREN:
LORETTA, IDA, BABY IVORY, JESSE, & LEON
photograph from a glass-plate negative
by Mike Disfarmer, 1939

for Dorothy Gallagher

Rubrum, calla, tiger, day –
in the beauty of the lilies I was born
in Arkansas, fifth
of a perished tribe. Others have yet
to arrive, but here and now
I am in the middle, Baby Ivory
speaking, though you might
wonder about words from an infant
evidently sound asleep
if not actually dead. And you'd be right:
the stillness held by
all the other people in the pose
is just the mortal humdrum
of a hot August morning in Heber Springs,
but that baby looks
out of nature for good – could this be
one of those Mourning Pictures,
everyone gussied up for the tiny corpse
to remember them
in heaven in their Sunday best? No,
just a family portrait –
Baptists don't bury their babies barefoot. But
how such a mere *lump*,
even if alive on old Ida's
hardly luxuriant lap,
could be answerable for such palaver …

I suggest two ways
of dealing with the predicament:
either grant my disclosures
the confidence you would lavish upon some
fervent Old Master's
assorted saints and martyrs having
a Sacred Conversation
(which is to say, minister yet again to
the madness of art);
or else, like any good Baptist here
in Heber Springs (there are no
bad Baptists; and besides, in this town of some
thirty-eight hundred
saved souls who every Sunday
rejoice to attend nineteen
Baptist churches, there are *only* Baptists),
you might attribute
the freakishness of my expressive
behavior to the famous
and in fact infallibly invoked notion
that truth will be found
to proceed in all simplicity
and even complexity
"out of the mouths of babes." Therefore listen up,
even if you think
I'm just repeating meaningless sounds
– *rubrum, calla, tiger, day* –
after Mother Ida, who gave me these words
as my own mantra
(whatever the hell a mantra is –
my infantile omniscience
may be capable of anything, but not
of *everything*),
or maybe just a lullaby, though
to look at Mother Eve – oops!
Mother *Ida*. Sorry, I keep doing that.
It's what Miss Bishop,
with neither a child nor a mother
she ever knew, liked to call
"looking our infant sight away"; which for me
means substituting
a grim crone in a black straw halo

for Piero's sacred hag
who alone among her uncomprehending
brood there in Arezzo
surveys the certainty of Adam's
death and her own. Now Ida,
like ancient Eve, might strike you as unlikely
to sing anything.
so comforting as a lullaby.
Look again : can you make out
the way she nestles my minuscule right thumb
in her gnarled left hand?
I'd say there's some sort of cradle-song
in the old ghoul yet. She may
have time on her hands (it won't wash off),
but love abides too,
though seeming nothing more than solace …
Over on my left, Ethel
(our actual mother) is nowhere near so
solicitous of
my brother Leon on *her* lap, and
Leon knows it too ; he looks
as if he suspects she might give him away
to someone – some *man* –
and above all Leon loathes men.
He wants to stay where he is,
secure on Ethel's lap and in Ethel's hands.
Whereas Jesse, squeezed
between Ethel and Mother Ida,
would like nothing better than
for some man to carry him off, any man
except his father.
Jesse abhors his father, and keeps
as far away as he can
from the tall tired farmer who will not touch
either daughter with
hands that slaughtered two hogs yesterday,
or was it just this morning?
Those hands of George Gage's look tired too ;
in fact, each feature –
his eyes (they're Mother Ida's eyes, only
sunk deeper), those fine black strands
unable to shroud his skull, his leaden lips

drawing the spent flesh
too far down the lantern jaw to smile –
surrenders to the same force
which has already had its incisive way
with Mother Ida;
only his big ears seem unwearied,
crisp with incredulous blood –
Jesse has those same ears, but bigger – bat's ears.
You can't see the mouse
(neither can I) that Jesse fondles
in the cage of his fingers,
but he knows George would genially put it
to an efficient
and unprotestable death with those
strong hands of his, the instant
he discovered his oldest son was keeping
vermin for a pet.
George hates vermin: waste offends. Between
takes, he asks if a bigger
photo, one that might include a kid or two
more, would cost extra.
"Unlike you, Gage, I don't enlarge. What
I see is what you get. More
kids or less, a print will run you just the same."
George subsides. No more
questions, just the pose. He concentrates
on managing his daughters,
though everyone knows who is managed here:
pretty Loretta
riding George's right knee, dour Ida
his left, are "with" their father,
of course, while the boys impinge upon Ethel
in appropriate
oedipal array, an alignment
I saluted from the womb;
babies don't need to grow up to recognize
gender in grown-ups –
having one of their own is something
else. That's why they baptized me
Ivory (after the soap: boy *or* girl, I was
pure enough to float).
Of indeterminate sex implies

"available for either",
as that other "marvelous boy" – the French one –
        exulted in his
    immoderate Illumination
        of Dionysus and Co.:
"Graceful son of Pan!" – wonderful, isn't it,
        the way the phrases
    come unwitting to my weanling lips:
        "How your heart beats in those loins
where the double sex slumbers!" *Le double sexe* …
        But what's the good of
    male and female created He them
        if the great god Pan is dead?
Old Mother Ida's out of the running and
        as far as I know
    I'm not in it, but the rest of us
        certainly show no Eros
to spare, past what's needed for staying alive.
        No, wait: Ethel *smiles*,
    ah! the invitation of the flesh:
        rubrum, calla, tiger, day.
Consider how they grow, such lilies as these:
        they toil to the end
    of their days, yet Solomon in all
        his glory was not arrayed
like my mother when she smiled into
        Disfarmer's eyepiece,
    sustaining joy for whatever time
        the sacred pose required –
as if a membrane of jubilation had
        luminously spread
    all across that homely countenance,
        endowing the worn but still-
fertile features with an alerted beauty.
        And now just look where
    our mother's right hand has come to rest,
        cradling her son's genitals:
Ecce homo! Ecce ancilla domini!
        the sex of the Son
    gains an emphasis from the Mother's
        guarding hand which shields (yet shows),
in a gesture worthy of Raphael, her boy's

impotent manhood.
          In twenty years, Loretta will call
               her mother a Jesus-freak,
     and Jesse and Ida will desert the farm,
               charging George with
          "satanic abuses" according
               to *recovered memories*.
     What have I to do with such charges, such blame?
                    Mine the sole Eros
          unpunished and unpunishable,
               for I am like water spilt
     upon a table, which with a finger you
                    may draw or direct
          the way you like. What you see here, now,
               you cannot get; what you get
     will not be seen. *All* families are alike,
               the present pursued
          by the future, driving it into
               the past, pointing at the start
     of life to its end as I, all unknowing,
               have told it to you.
          As we say, out of the mouths of babes …
               rubrum, *calla*, *tiger*, *day*
     In the beauty of the lilies we all died
                    in Arkansas, eight
          of us here, and the two not yet born:
               the present already seen
     in the prospect of the past, which will give us
                    our future at the hands
          of Mr. Disfarmer Funny name …
               I wonder if I'll meet him
     before I grow up and forget … Has it all
               begun already?

Richard Howard is the author of twelve volumes of poetry, including "Trappings" (1999), "Like Most Revelations" (1994), and "Untitled Subjects" (1969), for which he received the Pulitzer Prize. He has published more than one hundred fifty translations from the French, including Baudelaire's "Les Fleurs du Mal," for which he received the 1983 American Book Award for translation. A Fellow of the American Academy since 1988, he teaches in the Writing Division of the School of the Arts, Columbia University.

Fiction by Erin McGraw

Appearance of Scandal

After the screaming and the poisonous accusations, after the broken vase and rib, after the gonorrhea, waking up to find Anthony gone was not the hardest thing. It was not the hardest thing to sleep on the fluffy clown rug between the girls' beds, or to come to school to pick up Stephanie the day a rash bloomed across her chest. It was not even so hard to forward Anthony's mail and to review the bar association's list of divorce lawyers, so many of whom Anthony had gone to law school with, and mocked.

The hardest thing was sitting in church, where the scalding sense of failure shot from Beth's hairline to the soles of her feet. Surrounded by intact families with husbands who looked proud of their wives – Anthony had not looked proud, ever – Beth read the ads for funeral homes and CPAs on the back of the bulletin, leafed through the hymnal, distracted herself in every way she could think of until the hour was over and she could race to the parking lot, always one of the first to gun it out.

"You don't know how hard it is," she said to Father Marino. "If it weren't for the kids, I wouldn't come back here."

"Then thank goodness for the kids," he said.

The easiest thing after Anthony left was Beth's talks with Father Marino. Every week he made room for her in a schedule filled with Social Justice Committee meetings and intramural soccer and the daily hospital visits – needs more legitimate than her small loneliness and sorrow. Every week he opened his office door and produced his cracked-tooth grin, and she saw the sort of boy he must have been, round headed and cocky, sure of the world's affection.

He had long ago captured the affections of everybody at Holy Name. After cranky Father Mestin had retired and nervous Father Torbeiner had been whisked away with so little explanation – people still murmured about him – parishioners recognized their good fortune in Father Marino. He had a friendly habit of snapping off his Roman collar in mid-conversation. "Enough of this. Let's *talk*." People confided in him – guilty teenagers and angry mothers and the whole Men's Club, which took

Father Marino on a trout-fishing trip every June from which they returned sunburned, hung over, and sheepishly low on trout. Beth wondered whom Father Marino confided in, but she recognized her curiosity as the question of a freshly divorced woman half in love with her priest, and kept it to herself.

Instead, she told him about her job at the Women's Services office on the weedy outskirts of town. Now she was working as a receptionist and sometime counselor, but she was planning to become a paralegal and, after that, an attorney. "That would kill Anthony," Father Marino said, and she said, "My point exactly."

Anthony had asked her how she, a Catholic, could work in such a place, a question she thought rich, considering that he had been the one with the girl-friend. "The women who go there need help," she said shortly. She wasn't about to give him details on the sullen, exhausted mothers who edged through the office door needing health care, legal advice, babysitters. Sometimes they needed abortions, and Beth counseled them about facilities, a fact she'd confessed to Father Marino and that he told her didn't need to be confessed. More than anything, they worried about their children, and Beth told them with real compassion, "Children are the fear that steals your heart. I know just what you mean."

When she said this her eyes slid to the desk photo of her two daughters, laughing and proud on their new Rollerblades. They were older now, and laughed less. The divorce had hurt them. Ten-year-old Alison threw tantrums like a first grader, and seven-year-old Stephanie refused to read her colorful schoolbooks. Beth told Father Marino about this, too. "Ali screams until she's blue. Anthony would never have stood for it."

"No kidding. He left." He leaned forward, resting his bony elbows on his thighs. Despite his apple-round face, he had a lean frame, freckled skin stretched over long bones. "Don't you feel like screaming?"

"No more than ten times a day. But for the last six months Anthony was home, I wanted to scream all day long, so I should be grateful."

Father Marino shook his head. "You don't ask for enough."

"I ask for plenty," she said. "I just don't get."

"We'll have to see about that," he said.

Beth understood that she should not take Father Marino's vague promises too seriously. Everybody knew that he liked to make promises. He especially liked to make them on the telephone, at night, when people heard the sound of ice cubes rattling in a glass not far from the phone.

There weren't rumors, exactly, and there had been no incident – unlike with Father Toole at St. Agnes who had been pulled over for DUI and was abusive to the officer, when the whole parish council had had to swing its weight to keep the story out of the paper. Still, so many people had run into Father Marino at the Liquor Barn. At so many parties he had gotten tipsy. Holy Name parishioners were accustomed to a priest who took a drink – if anything, they liked the little touch of worldliness – but sometimes when they called the rectory late, they heard a wildness in Father Marino's voice – too much laughter, too-quick sympathy. He spoke very knowledgeably about wine.

Beth's own mother had drunk too much, and had died of it. Beth knew the signs. Still, she didn't blame Father Marino. Lately, when the girls were at Anthony's condo, Beth had been learn-

Fiction by Erin McGraw

ing about the stillness of an empty house, how a person could wade through loneliness as if through mud. One night she'd sat in front of the blank TV until one in the morning, unwilling to turn it on because eventually she'd have to turn it off again and hear the silence sweep back down. Who could be surprised if Father Marino took a snort too much now and then?

Nevertheless, when the Parish Life Committee started planning Father's birthday party, Beth voted with those who said the only liquor should be jug wine, and not too much of that. Already teens from the youth group were writing a skit, and the Men's Club had planned a roast. It would be the sort of evening that a pastor should enjoy, and Beth meant to make sure Father Marino enjoyed it. "Sorry," she said to Frank Burding, who wanted to bring his special punch. "This is family entertainment."

"What are you, the den mother?"

"That would make you a Boy Scout?" She meant it as a joke. Father Marino would have laughed.

Maybe Frank had a party for Father before the party, or maybe Father had a little party for himself. But as soon as he entered the parish hall, to applause, Beth could see how his eyes wandered and slid. "Happy birthday to me," he said at the door.

"How old are you, Father?" said Amy Burding.

"A gentleman never tells."

"You're not a gentleman. You're a priest."

"And that is where my troubles began."

Amy didn't so much laugh as cough, and Father Marino, companionable, did too. Beth strolled over to the refreshments table. It pained her to watch her pastor pretend to be sober.

The party was moving now. All over the hall people were laughing, and a pile of gifts sat near the door. Beth knew what some of them were – two pounds of smoked trout from the Men's Club, a soft wool cardigan from the Altar Society. From Beth, a card that said only "Happy birthday." She was confident that he would be able to read into it her larger feelings – if not tonight, then tomorrow. For now, she busied herself with refreshments, cutting cake and making sure everyone had a napkin. She spotted Father approaching her but didn't meet his gleaming eyes until he said, "Can a fella get a Sprite around here?"

"I think we can manage that."

He hoisted the can she handed him. "Alcohol zero percent. Do you approve of me?"

Beth glanced up, but no one was standing quite close enough to hear. "For now."

"What a whip cracker you are."

"My ex-husband said the same thing."

"He was a jerk. Forgive me, but I always thought so."

"I forgive you." She ambled toward the end of the table, away from the knot of people beside the wine. If she had been more concerned for his reputation, or her own, she would have led him into the group. Already she could see the flickering glances, parishioners noting how Father Marino spoke so closely to the divorcée.

"You forgive. That's a great virtue."

"I forgive *you*. Anybody else is on a wait-and-see basis."

"I'll bet it's a long line. The only thing people should want is to be forgiven by you. Well, not the only thing." His face was blazing, light pouring out of the skin, and Beth knew exactly how she and the priest looked at that moment.

"Your appearance of scandal is going off the chart," she said.

"'Appearance.' I get the name without the game." In answer to her look, he added, "From *Clever Phrases For All Occasions.* It's a cheat book for priests, to make us look like we've got the common touch."

"As if you needed it. Everybody loves you."

"Beth doesn't love me."

She felt the blush spreading across her face and throat, ignited by dismay and drumming, triumphant joy. "Of course I love you," she murmured. "You know that."

"And what does your love lead you to do? Pour me a Sprite?"

"Hush."

He lowered his voice, which was almost worse; Beth had to lean close to hear him. "I wasn't going to come tonight. I could have called somebody and said that I had the flu or there was a crisis at the hospital. My feet fell off. But I knew you would be here. Knowing I would see you here I got up and put on my clothes. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

"Would you shut *up*?"

"People have to make choices in their lives. Anthony made one when he left you. He found a door in his life and opened it."

"Thanks for the reminder."

"But he opened a door in my life, too. All I have to do is walk through. Should I do that, Beth?"

"You should open your presents, go home and sleep." She was proud of the evenness of her voice over a heart that was clanging like a fire alarm. "You need to get a grip."

"I'm trying." He brushed his hand across his glistening eyes. "I'm trying to hold on. But it's up to you now, not me. Will you hold on to me, too?"

At least those were the words Beth thought she heard. Noise banged through the high-ceilinged, uncarpeted room, matching the din inside her skull. She wanted to ask Father Marino to repeat himself, but it seemed crass to ask a man to declare himself twice. Anthony had hardly done it once.

"Yes," she said.

"Excuse me, you two," said Amy Burding, materializing beside Beth. "Can I steal Father away? The kids are ready to start their skit."

"Of course," he said. "I've been looking forward to it. I've been looking forward to everything tonight."

"We hope so, Father," Amy said, steering him away. "We wanted to give you exactly what you wanted." Not a glance back at Beth. Not one.

Following that night, when she did not sleep, she woke the girls with the promise of chocolate French toast, usually only a special-event breakfast. She saw them onto the bus from the front porch, then called the Women's Services office and told them she had the flu. Waiting for the phone to ring, she took apart and scrubbed the stove hood. She removed the china from the hutch and washed it, piece by piece.

By noon she was polishing the chandelier. The house's silence turned her joyful anticipation into unease and then, as the afternoon lengthened, into panic. Beth could well imagine the guilt Father Marino might be experiencing, the jolting fear – or, worse, the uneasy memory. He mustn't shut her away from him. Not now of all times. At 2:10, before the girls came home, she reached for the phone.

She was prepared for a diminished voice, but he was full of sass. "Thanks for the card. I put it on the mantel, to remind me that I'm getting decrepit."

"Did you enjoy your party?"

*Fiction by
Erin
McGraw*

"I love parties. But I don't think the kids showed me enough respect. At the next Youth Fellowship we're going to have a sensitivity session on the word 'geezer.'"

"That wasn't the part of the evening I paid most attention to."

"Did I miss something?"

"You. Asked me to go away with you."

Though he laughed, the stiffness in his voice was instant. "Every single guy in this parish should want to go away with you."

"You said opportunities make new doors in our lives. All we have to do is walk through."

"Maybe Frank Burding? He was feeling his oats."

"You said you were trying to hold on." She couldn't get her mouth to stop. "You asked me to hold onto you."

"Listen, Beth. Everyone understands how difficult things have been for you."

The hand holding the telephone against Beth's ear began to shake, and her brain was flooded with bright heat. "Do you have any idea what you have done?" she said.

"I haven't done anything," he said.

"You're not listening to me."

After she hung up, Beth sat at the kitchen table for a very long time. She smiled when Ali and Stephanie clattered in. Sensing an advantage, they asked if they could play now and do homework later, and she nodded.

Every inch of her – skin, organs – ached, and her lungs seemed to have narrowed to the circumference of a thread. What she could hardly tolerate was the unfairness.

As a boy, Father Marino – Joseph, the man's name was Joseph – had once won a competition for flying a toy airplane further than any of the other boys. His prize was a movie pass, which he used to see *Carnal Knowledge*. The movie was for-

bidden to every child he knew, but the theater, when he entered, was filled with furtive ten-year-olds. As a teenager, he had driven a violent green Buick and wore his hair down to his shoulders. He liked peanut butter and honey sandwiches, and linguini *con vongole*. All this Father Marino had told her, and every detail she had cherished.

In the end, he had given Beth nothing. She'd been an imbecile to believe otherwise.

For the next two weeks she answered the telephone at Women's Services with tight courtesy, hearing but not able to amend the sharpness in her manner. The clients who came in asked to talk to other counselors.

Her daughters shied away from her, though she spent extra time with them, listening to Stephanie's endless stories and sitting up with Alison to watch the girl's favorite TV show. The handsome doctor saved one life after another, in the operating room and beside a hospital bed and at the scene of a car wreck, where thrilling, photogenic mouth-to-mouth resuscitation was called for. When Alison asked if Beth would volunteer for resuscitation from the doctor, the first question the girl had volunteered in weeks, Beth nodded curtly, and Alison didn't ask anymore.

Had she been able to talk to Father Marino as she used to, Beth could have told him that she was trying to listen to her daughters, to walk a narrow bridge of love and communication through this dark time. She and her priest could have talked about darkness, which always implied, somewhere, the presence of light.

When the girls got home from school they slung their backpacks into the living room and raced back outside to join the other children, sometimes not both-

ering to call out a greeting to her. Standing in the doorway, Beth grew angry, then felt her heart soften painfully at the sound of their squealing laughter, blocks away. Soon, she thought, picking up Alison's backpack, she would have to remind them to take sweaters, as the October afternoons faded. Soon. Not yet.

She shivered. From a distance, she heard a high, long shriek – a child, screaming to be screaming, making noise because she could. Beth listened to the keening for a few moments in furious sympathy. Then she was through the living room, out of her house, running as fast as she could, but not fast enough.

On a neighbor's lawn Alison sprawled under a drooping fir, her neck propped painfully on a root. There was no blood. Her knees jerked, out of rhythm with her screams, and above her the tree stretched like a column, thirty feet at least. No telling how far she had fallen.

"Hush, sweetheart. Hush, baby girl. I'm right here. You're all right." Beth touched her daughter's shoulder while her brain, frosty with terror, ran down the table of contents from the first-aid manual she'd memorized for work: shock, head trauma, neck injury. She looked around for Stephanie, but the littler girl was not in sight – either hiding from her mother or lying at the bottom of her own tree.

"Listen, Ali. Stop crying, baby. I'm going back to the house. I'm going to make a phone call. I'll be right back. Don't cry, angel. You'll see."

A brave girl, Anthony's favorite, Alison tried to stop screaming, though her body shuddered with every racking breath. Smudged across the back of one dirty hand were the remains of a face she had drawn at school, its smile showing a single tooth. Beth bent to kiss that hand. Then she stumbled to the neighbor's house and planned the next hours: first

the ambulance, then the emergency room. Then Anthony. Already, underneath her fear, she felt the stirring of guilt. She understood that it would only grow, a fact that in her terrified eyes seemed natural and right.

Alison had fallen head first, her arms outstretched before her. Both her wrists were snapped, but her back was untouched; she was able to walk out of the emergency room, tapping her casts together. Later, when she could, Beth planned to make jokes about Superman. First she had to stop shaking.

In the emergency room and in X-ray, doctors and technicians and three nurses told Beth how lucky Alison had been. "You should have a party," said the radiology attendant, her Hispanic accent softening her vowels. "You should celebrate." Beth thanked her and turned away. The woman meant well.

Only Anthony understood. "I keep imagining her dropping out of that tree. When I think of what could have happened – " he said.

"Stop," she said. "Save yourself the anguish."

In the pause she could imagine his crooked smile. "I thought you wanted me to have anguish."

"I do. But not about this." She made her own flickering, rueful smile. She had read the articles by women who claimed their ex-husbands had become their best friends. Beth believed those women were deluded, but nevertheless, she saw how intimacy between two people was never quite erased.

"I miss," he said, and cleared his throat. "I miss the girls. I think it's time for us to talk about custody."

"We did that already."

"Circumstances have changed."

"Don't be a jackass, Anthony. It was an accident."

Fiction by
Erin
McGraw

"That's not what I'm talking about."

Through the sudden roaring in her ears, Beth tried to scrutinize Anthony's voice, but, lawyer trained, it revealed nothing. He routinely worked fourteen hours a day. He couldn't think of changing the girls' custody unless he was getting married again.

He said, "It's time to move on."

"I'm not going anywhere." The words were out before she could reel them back, and his laugh was honestly mirthful. "It's a great big world, Beth," he said. "Get out a little."

Predictably, Alison was a handful that night. Holding up her casts, she refused to attempt even the tasks she could manage, bullying Beth into feeding her and brushing her teeth. Stephanie took her sister's cue and tugged at her mother, whining about television and school and a diorama for her reading class until Beth's remaining speck of patience exploded. By nine o'clock both of the girls were in bed, tucked in so hard they couldn't move. The house was filled with their raging resentment, the emotion that would make their lives easier when their father announced his news. What was the name of the girls' stepmother-to-be? Beth had read that men were drawn to sibilant names – Susan, Cheryl. She fixed herself a glass of water with a splash of Dewar's from a bottle Anthony had left. When the doorbell rang at nine-thirty, she was remembering with irritation that two of Anthony's secretaries had been named Sandra.

Father Marino said, "I came as soon as I heard. You should have called me when you got to the hospital."

"She was in good hands," Beth said, barely able to hear herself over the slamming of her heart. "Come in." She went to the kitchen and brought him a Sprite, which he smiled at and set aside. Almost

certainly he had been drinking. He wouldn't be here otherwise.

"People are saying it was a miracle that she fell just right," he said.

"She was lucky," Beth said.

"Same thing." Father Marino leaned toward her. "How are *you*?"

To her horror, she felt her face crumple and tears race to her eyes. "Terrible," she whispered.

"It's too hard," he said. "No one should have to go through what you've been through. You of all people."

"Please stop."

"I should, I know," Father Marino said. "I just want to talk to you. Every day I want to pick up the phone. 'Did you see that sunset? Did you see that double play? Did you see that god-awful hat Louise Skipper wore to Mass?' The second I saw it I thought about how you would laugh. Everything I look at brings me back to you."

"And here I am," Beth said. "The priest's friend. Poor thing, she doesn't get out much."

"What can we do?" he said. "We have no choices left."

His voice lapped happily at its self-pity, like a pet cat given its cup of cream. Angrily, she got up and poured him a scotch. He looked at her hand, not her face, when she gave it to him. "I need you," he said.

"This is hardly the time."

"I need you to talk to someone. A woman I know," he said, and for a moment she was convinced that her heart stopped beating. She had not realized that another disappointment could be so stunning.

He said, "You're the only person I trust. I told her to talk to you at Women's Services, but you won't be there now that Alison's home."

"Is this woman you know pregnant?"

"Yes." The hand that raised his glass

to his mouth was unsteady, and scotch sloshed onto his chin.

"Oh, Joseph," she said, and watched him flinch. "What have you done?" Something, maybe the half-finger of Dewar's, was affecting her ability to focus. Father Marino's face was a watery blur, but the room around him – the green chair, the knife-pleat curtains, the Sunday newspaper that Stephanie had cut into pieces the size of fingernail clippings – was sharp and hard as glass.

"The thing that always drew me to you was your kindness," he was saying. "Even when things were at their worst, you had the impulse for giving and helping. I could turn to you."

She cleared her rippling voice. "Anthony had two names for me: Cupcake and Frau Gestapo. You'd be surprised how early he moved from one to the other."

He looked around at the mostly tidy room. "You've turned my life inside out. You never meant to, I know."

"For Pete's sake, Joseph," she said. "What do you think I am?"

Because he was looking at the photos of the girls on the wall, she couldn't see his face. "People call me Father."

When he turned back nothing had changed – not his watery eyes, or his trembling, swollen mouth. She could see that he was filled with regret and she wished, as she had wished so many times, that she could keep her heart from opening to him like a mollusk. She said, "Your friend might have been pregnant before. I know you don't want to think about it, but that's the pattern with certain women." Seeing Father Marino's wrecked expression, Beth couldn't keep her voice from softening. She hoped he did not take encouragement from that. "What's her name?"

"Cecily. Cessy." He smiled. "I liked playing with her name. Cessation. C-Span."

Cesspool, Beth thought, but said instead, "Adoption services need babies."

"Not this one," he whispered, and then, "Do you want me to pay you for counseling her?"

In the moment before the insult took hold, her uncooperative brain pondered all she was owed. Father Marino could not pay those debts. "Anthony's got a girlfriend," she said. "Talk to him. Tell him that she's endangering his position in the church. Tell him she's got the clap. Tell him you'll withhold communion."

"I don't think anybody's been able to do that since the 1500s."

"It's less than you're asking of me."

The speech hung formally in the air between them. Beth slipped from the fire of her anger into wooly embarrassment, which would probably mean that she would talk to Cessy and draw her a map to the nearest clinic, fifty miles away. Father Marino said slowly, "When did this happen to you? Was it me?" His face looked strangely excited, which Beth thought was the wrong reaction. She was about to tell him so, but Alison cried out, the hoarse squawk that signaled a nightmare. "Please go home now," she said.

"I can go in and talk to her."

Too easily, Beth could imagine her daughter's terror if she woke to the sight of her priest bending over the bed. "It's time to go home."

"You'll help me?"

"I have to talk about adoption. It's the law."

"That's not what she needs to know."

"I'm sure you're right. I'm sorry, Father. My daughter needs me." She steered him toward the door, then hurried to her child, who was crying but not feverish. Beth smoothed back Alison's clumped hair and said, "Father Marino was here. He wants you to get better right away."

"Is he still here?" Alison said.

Fiction by Erin McGraw

"I told him to go home."

"I guess I should feel special that Father came to see me. Even if I didn't see him."

"You don't need to see him," Beth said. "I can tell you everything you missed."

After twelve years, Father Marino mostly remembered Beth in nights of brilliant, corrosive dreams, from which he woke up sizzling. On those nights he rolled out of bed and counted off push-ups until his arms gave out, then drank glass after glass of water. He'd been taught the techniques in rehab, and they helped.

Beth had left the parish not long after Alison's wrists healed, and the bishop had offered Father Marino a sort of vacation – six months at a facility in Mexico, drinking iced tea under swags of purple bougainvillea where green hummingbirds darted as if stitching the air. The other priests talked ceaselessly about margaritas and piña coladas. "Even a beer," muttered Father Spurling, Thad. "Wouldn't you sell your own mother?"

"Don't think about it," said Father Marino.

"If you start talking to me about detachment, I'll take that slice of lemon and shove it up your nose."

Father Marino felt sorry for the other man, who one night at dinner had clenched his water glass so hard he snapped its stem. "I'm lucky, that's all. You wouldn't believe the things I can not think about."

During the sharing sessions, he acknowledged his misdeeds: Cessy; the blurry nights; the inappropriate jokes; and Beth, a misdeed he didn't know how to name. He wished he had more. Other priests described their police records and suspended driver's licenses. Thad Spurling had walked out of a depart-

ment store carrying three silk shirts still on their hangers – one, he recalled wistfully, had been yellow. Of all the men there, only Father Marino had never been transferred to another parish.

He had broken no marriage, created no crisis, not even dented a fender. His whole life nothing had happened, just as nothing was happening now. Like a boy having a tantrum in an empty room, he had struck furiously at the air around him, and hadn't been able to scrape a knuckle. He should have been grateful, but a peevish sense of loss spread through him. At the end of a sharing session, the priests were encouraged to shake hands or embrace, but Father Marino walked stiffly out, stiffening further when he saw Father Spurling's approving face.

He came home after his six months, and a noisy crowd waited for him at the rectory with balloons and cake and sweet punch. Frank Burding offered him a soft drink. This was how it would be from now on, Father Marino realized with a spark of fury, but then the spark winked out, and that was all.

Gradually he understood that Anthony had bankrolled the holiday. Anthony never stopped attending Mass at Holy Name, and he donated handsomely to the Bishop's Annual Appeal. His law firm bought advertising space on the church's weekly bulletin. He passed two years in admirable parish service before making a private appointment with Father Marino, and then he started talking as soon as he sat down. He was ready to marry again. He was ready to make a lifetime commitment, in his own eyes and the eyes of the Church. But first he needed to have his marriage to Beth – never a real marriage, Anthony said – annulled. "I can't do anything about that," Father Marino said. "Do you think I have pull? I don't."

"I know," Anthony said. "I went to the chancery office and read up on procedure. But you can speak for me."

"They want statements from people who knew both parties. Who knew the marriage well."

"Beth talked to you enough," Anthony said. He did not bother to smile, so Father Marino didn't either.

After Anthony left, Father Marino read through the questionnaire Anthony had left – six pages – with mounting dismay. Why had Anthony and Beth decided to marry? it asked. What occurred on their wedding night? Did Father Marino have reason to believe that the marriage had been entered into without proper understanding? He couldn't begin to answer the questions, although he would answer them anyway. To the paragraph asking about his qualification to make such judgments, he wrote, *I was their priest*.

The annulment was granted fourteen months later, and Anthony leased Father Marino a new car. "This will help you get around, Father. It's for the good of the parish."

"Like everything you do," Father Marino said. Anthony looked surprised, but he didn't fire back. Nobody ever did. Sometimes Father Marino lay in bed, appalled at himself for having told Marnie Francis that her son wasn't smart enough to go to medical school, Elaine Williamson that she was drinking too much. But Marnie's son did go to medical school – in the Dominican Republic, yes, but he still came back and passed his boards – and Elaine kept right on drinking. Was there a word for a man whose acts were uniquely useless?

Catching himself, Father Marino poured a glass of water, downed it, and poured another. The parish relied on him to baptize infants and bury the dead. Who could mark life's way stations, if not Father Marino? Now, for in-stance, this steamy morning in July, he was needed to officiate at the wedding of Anthony's oldest daughter.

Alison, Father Marino reminded himself, taking deep breaths of the sacristy's waxy air. He slipped the heavy green vestment over his head and waited for the storm of memories. But he had to strain to recall the girl, her scowl and dual casts, and her mother. Then he remembered Cecily, who had gone away after her abortion – her second, as Beth had guessed. Father Marino had been relieved to learn that, and then ashamed, and then relief had turned to forgetfulness. In the end, nothing had changed.

The rented organist started in on the familiar measures of "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring," and Father Marino strode onto the altar. Anthony's new wife billowed out of the pew beside her three teenage sons. Behind her sat Beth, a slim blur dressed in blue. The night before, at the rehearsal dinner, she had shaken Father Marino's hand. Then she and her new husband had joined her daughter's table, while Father Marino spent the evening in conversation with the groom's great-aunt.

Impatient now, he watched Beth read every word of the wedding program. Nothing would have changed if, the night before, he had pulled up a chair beside her, fingered her bright hair, and whispered to her through the meal. Nothing if he had sipped from her glass of champagne – his first drink in eleven years. Nothing if he had followed her home. Still he would be standing in these hot robes, and still she would drive away with her dull husband after the reception. They were all trapped, every one of them, but he, the priest, was trapped in the smallest room of all.

"Hi," he said when the couple stood before him. "Here's the big day. Did you get any sleep last night?"

Fiction by Erin McGraw

"No," said the groom ruefully, getting a chuckle from the congregation.

"That's all right. You'll sleep from here on in. You might sleep more than you ever meant to."

Hearing his words slip into dangerous waters, Father Marino hurried into the wedding liturgy. He generally riffed a lot at weddings, making warm jokes about pets or the new wedding china. It was one of the reasons couples wanted him. But now he stuck to the succession of formal blessings and invocations. To do so was steadying, and he felt his heart settle down. Before him stood Alison and her groom, their shining eyes impatient. From the pews the congregation looked on with mild affection, perhaps half hearing the weighty words about trust and steadfastness. Beth sat beside her husband and looked at Father Marino, her face like stone. Anthony had been the one to insist that the wedding be held here. Father Marino would not, he knew, have been Beth's choice.

Holding Alison and the groom's hands, Father Marino looked up from his prayer book. "People think weddings are about permanence, but that's not right. Vows change us. In five years you won't be who you are now, or even who you'd meant to be. In twenty years you won't recognize yourselves. Here you are, looking beautiful, standing on the altar. Can you know what comes next?"

"The blessing of the rings," Alison said, her clear voice so like her mother's that Father Marino closed his eyes for a moment. The memories that had eluded him earlier were now showering down. He had loved his office because Beth came there. He had loved his office telephone because he talked to Beth on it.

"You're in a hurry," he said, and the congregation laughed. "That's good. You should be holding your arms wide open. Today is the day to embrace your future." The groom, who had a roguish

side, pulled Alison into a showy clasp, and Father Marino stepped back and led the quick applause for the couple, forestalling the biddies who would later complain that the ceremony had lacked dignity.

"They're examples to us all, these two," he said. "Why don't we follow their lead? There's no better day than a wedding for a hug." In the pews, people relaxed and smiled at one another. This was not so different from the weekly Exchange of Peace at Mass, so no one was surprised to see Father Marino fondly embrace first bride, then groom, then move down from the altar to the first few pews. Working the crowd. He was famous for it.

Even Beth must have been softened. When he rustled to her, she raised her smiling face to his, and he had the sudden, hectic thought that he could kiss her mouth. What could possibly happen? Father Marino hesitated, then lunged, but at the last second Beth turned, and his lips dragged merely across her cheek. Even then he clung to her for a moment past propriety, until he heard Anthony stand. Only then did Father Marino, his heart plunging, let Beth go.

Anthony's big arms were already open. He clasped the priest in a real *abbraccio* that was as much a blow as an embrace, and that whacked the air from Father Marino's lungs. Then Anthony turned to kiss his wife, Beth to her husband, and other members of the congregation murmured and touched cheeks. On the altar, Alison and her groom kissed again, as prettily as dolls. Shaken, Father Marino watched what he had set in motion. All around him people embraced. Happiness sang through the hot church air. He felt it himself. Meanwhile, the feel of Beth's lips dissolved from his face.

S. George H. Philander

*on El Niño & the
uncertain science
of global warming*

Most people first heard of El Niño in 1997 when newspapers and television gave extensive coverage to various disasters associated with that phenomenon: devastating floods in California, severe droughts in Indonesia, and strange weather everywhere. Everybody became familiar with El Niño, but few realized that the phenomenon has been with us for millennia and that, at first, it was welcomed as a blessing. Originally the name was given to a modest, warm current that appears along the shores of Ecuador and northern Peru around

S. George H. Philander is professor of meteorology in the geosciences department at Princeton University. A Fellow of the American Academy since 2003, he is the author of numerous articles and books, including "Is the Temperature Rising? The Uncertain Science of Global Warming" (1998). This essay is based on his book "Our Affair with El Niño: How We Transformed an Enchanting Peruvian Current into a Global Climate Hazard," forthcoming from Princeton University Press.

Christmastime when the accompanying rains transform the barren coastal desert of that region into a garden. (The term is Spanish for 'the boy' and refers to Child Jesus.)

Over the past few decades, even though the phenomenon has remained essentially constant, our perceptions of it have undergone a remarkable transformation. We now regard El Niño as a global hazard that we anticipate with trepidation. It is as if we, temperamental and capricious, have been having a stormy affair with aloof, indifferent El Niño.

Our affair is approaching a critical juncture. By rapidly increasing the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases, we are changing the climate of this planet, and hence El Niño. What have we learnt from our affair that can help us avoid a calamity?

An important lesson learnt thus far amounts to a paradox: as we grow in wealth and in population, so does our vulnerability to natural hazards. Insurance companies find that claims related to damages inflicted by severe storms, hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, etc. are rising steeply even though there is no evidence of an increase in the number and intensity of those hazards. The rains associated with El Niño still turn the desert of Ecuador into a garden, but today few people have time to behold that miracle; they are preoccupied with the roads, bridges, and houses that are washed away by the rains.

In our efforts to cope with natural hazards, we routinely ask scientists to predict those phenomena. Meteorologists have responded by transforming daily weather prediction from an augury into a reliable source of important information – a splendid achievement that nearly everyone takes for granted. Scientists are also making progress with the pre-

*Note by
S. George H.
Philander*

diction of longer-term climate fluctuations that are strongly influenced by oceanic conditions. For a long time, the lack of measurements was a serious handicap. Until recently, oceanographers gathered much of their data from solitary vessels that they navigated by means of stars and sextants. (Asking for a "tall ship, and a star to steer her by" was not simply a romantic wish but a practical necessity.) The measurements thus obtained tell us much about the 'steady' aspects of the oceanic circulation, but not about its variability.

To explore the 'weather' of the ocean requires simultaneous measurements over large areas for extended periods. Such measurements first became available through an international field program in 1957, as, fortuitously, El Niño occurred. It then became clear that the interannual warming of the waters off Ecuador and Peru – the signature of El Niño – extends far westward across the entire ocean basin and affects atmospheric conditions globally. Resources for exploring such climate fluctuations, especially their oceanic aspects, increased significantly in the decades after the launching of Sputnik (also in 1957).

This led to rapid scientific advances that brought oceanographers to the realization that the warming of the eastern equatorial Pacific during El Niño is a consequence of changes in the winds over the ocean. To meteorologists, however, that warming causes the changes in the winds. This circular argument implies that El Niño is neither a strictly atmospheric nor a strictly oceanic phenomenon, but is attributable to interactions between the ocean and atmosphere that give rise to spontaneous oscillations between complementary warm (El Niño) and cold (La Niña) conditions. To ask why El Niño and La Niña occur is equivalent to asking why a pendulum swings back and forth.

Scientific progress was so rapid that, although the exceptionally intense El Niño of 1982 caught everyone by complete surprise, by 1997 oceanographers could anticipate the arrival of the phenomenon several months in advance. This was an impressive achievement, but it had an unfortunate blemish that illustrates how difficult it is to bridge the worlds of science and human affairs.

During the summer of 1997, scientists alerted Californians that a very intense El Niño would probably deliver exceptionally heavy rains to their state during the upcoming winter. Scientists also advised the people of Zimbabwe that rainfall there would probably be below normal. Californians did indeed experience floods, and were prepared, but Zimbabweans had normal rainfall and were unprepared. Because of the expectation that crops would be poor, and thus unprofitable, banks in Zimbabwe declined loans to farmers. The consequences were dire: crop production fell 20 percent below normal in the impoverished country.

The tragedy in Zimbabwe raises many questions. Did the policymakers of that country fail to appreciate the significance of probabilistic forecasts? Or did they cynically welcome the forecast of a mysterious phenomenon that threatens from the remote Pacific as an effective means for diverting attention from serious local political problems? Did the scientists, in their eagerness to demonstrate that their results can be useful, emphasize the large uncertainties insufficiently?

History tells us that accurate scientific information concerning environmental hazards is of enormous value, and also that much can be accomplished even when that information has large uncertainties. Consider, for example, the occasional failure of the Indian monsoons that results in poor harvests. The conse-

El Niño
& the
uncertain
science
of global
warming

quences used to include horrendous famines and the deaths of millions. At first it was assumed that a solution to this problem required accurate forecasts of the monsoons ; but for several decades now, there have been no disasters comparable to the famines of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, even though the monsoons still fail occasionally, and even though the predictions of such failures still have huge uncertainties. India learnt to cope with poor monsoons after it became a democracy and started developing and implementing effective policies that do not require precise scientific information. (Famines are attributable not to a lack of food, but to problems with the distribution of food.) Hurricanes are further examples of hazards whose impact can be minimized, even in the absence of accurate predictions, by implementing appropriate policies – by discouraging the construction of buildings too close to hurricane-prone shorelines.

From our affair with El Niño it is evident that we tend to see ourselves as the innocent victims of natural hazards, and are reluctant to acknowledge that the way we live and conduct our affairs contributes to our vulnerability. In the case of future global warming, our role in creating potential problems is more explicit. But this issue is very complex because the current rapid increase in the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases is an unfortunate byproduct of industrial and agricultural activities that bring us considerable benefits – increasing standards of living for the rich and poor alike. In weighing the costs and benefits, we should keep in mind that the technological advances that have brought the benefits have also brought grave responsibilities. We have become the custodians of Earth because our recently acquired technological prowess is such that we now are geologic agents capable of interfering with the processes that make this a habitable planet. We are capable of inducing global climate changes so that the decisions we make today will affect not only our offspring for many generations to come, but also all of the other forms of life on this planet.

The future of our planet is too serious a matter to be left strictly to scientists and economists. Everyone has to participate in the discussion of environmental policies, which means that everyone should have at least a rudimentary understanding of how our planet maintains the conditions that allow us to prosper. This is a daunting challenge, given the immense complexity of our planet. It is therefore heartening that we have had enormous success in coping with a system even more complex than our planet, namely the human body. We have increased life expectancy by several decades by strongly supporting activities that contribute to the prevention of diseases. Each of us needs to become as informed about Earth, and the effects of our daily activities on the environment, as we are about our own bodies. To live in harmony with nature, a passionate expression of concern about the environment is no substitute for a rudimentary understanding of the way Earth functions and of our impact on the environment.

In the debate about global warming, many people appear to be unaware that, because the growth in the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases over the past century has been exponential, merely reducing the rate at which we burn fossil fuels can amount to a significant mitigation of the potential problems we face. Greater efficiency will make the limited supply of fuels last longer, will make us less dependent on imports from other countries, will reduce the rate at which we emit green-

house gases into the atmosphere, and hence will delay the onset of the kind of global climate changes that are liable to turn El Niño into a serious hazard.

Our affair with El Niño is approaching a critical juncture. Constant El Niño could soon become fickle. Will he grow more intense? Will his brief visits become prolonged? As yet we have no definite answers. But we have learnt that much can be done to avoid calamities by implementing appropriate policies, even when the available scientific information has large uncertainties. Above all, we need to guard against the temptation to defer difficult political decisions because of a perceived need for more accurate information. Much more can be learnt from our affair with El Niño. We need to do so in a hurry, before we succeed in changing him.

Linda Hutcheon

on the art of adaptation

Despite the argument implicit in Spike Jonze's latest film, *Adaptation,* every age can justly claim to be an age of adaptation. The desire to transfer a story from one medium or one genre to another is neither new nor rare in Western culture. It is in fact so common that we might suspect that it is somehow the inclination of the human imagination – and, despite the dismissive tone of some critics, not necessarily a secondary or derivative act. After all, most of Shakespeare's plays were adapted from other literary or historical works, and that does not seem to have damaged the Bard's reputation

Linda Hutcheon, a Fellow of the American Academy since 2003, is professor of English and comparative literature at the University of Toronto. Her theoretical works include "Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox" (1980), "The Politics of Postmodernism" (1989), and "A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction" (1998). Most recently she edited, with Mario J. Valdés, "Rethinking Literary History: A Dialogue on Theory" (2002).

as an inventor. But in recent years, it is true, we have witnessed on our televisions and in our movie theaters enough adaptations – based on everything from comic books to the novels of Jane Austen – to make us wonder if Hollywood has finally run out of new stories.

Although our age might well claim to be the age of adaptation, in part because of the surfeit of new media now available, the act of transposition and what we could call 're-functioning' is as old as art itself. It may have taken T. S. Eliot and Northrop Frye to convince me that all art is derived from other art, but it didn't take those theorists to convince avid adapters across the centuries of what for them – on the dramatic, dance, and operatic stage, and in literature in general – had always been a truism. In this sense, adaptation joins imitation, allusion, parody, travesty, pastiche, and quotation as popular creative ways of deriving art from art.

If this is so, why, then, have so many people lamented the results of the process of moving from the page to the stage or the screen? So often film's relation to literature has been characterized as a tampering, a deformation, a desecration, an infidelity, a betrayal, a perversion. The deeply moralistic rhetoric of such characterizations belies the fact that what is at stake here is really a question of cultural capital. For some people, as cultural theorist Robert Stam has argued, literature will always have "axiomatic superiority" over any cinematic adaptation of it because of its seniority as an art form. This hierarchy also has something to do with what he calls "iconophobia" (the suspicion of the visual) and the concomitant "logophilia" (the love of the word as sacred). From this perspective, adaptations are, by definition, "belated, middlebrow, or culturally inferior." Commenting in 1926

on the fledgling art of cinema, Virginia Woolf deplored the simplification that inevitably occurs in the transposition of literary work to the visual medium, calling film a "parasite," and literature its "prey" and "victim." Still, she conceded that "cinema has within its grasp innumerable symbols for emotions that have so far failed to find expression." And so it did.

Film semiotician Christian Metz has said about cinema that it "tells us continuous stories; it 'says' things that could be conveyed also in the language of words; yet it says them differently. There is a reason for the possibility as well as for the necessity of adaptations." The same could be said of musicals, operas, ballets, songs, and other narrative forms. While no medium is inherently good at doing one thing and not another, each medium (like each genre) has different means of expression and so can aim at certain things better than others. Art theorist E. H. Gombrich offers a useful analogy when he suggests that if an artist stands before a landscape with a pencil in hand, he or she will "look for those aspects which can be rendered in *lines*"; if the artist has a paintbrush, his or her vision of the same landscape will emerge as masses instead. A poet, by the same analogy, will be attracted to representing different aspects of a story than the creator of a musical spectacular; and the linear and single-track medium of language will produce a different version than the multitrack film, with its amalgam of music, sound, and moving visual images.

Perhaps it is the very possibility of telling the same story in many different ways that provokes us to make the attempt. When we adapt, we create using all the tools that creators have always used: we actualize or concretize ideas; we simplify but we also amplify and ex-

*Note by
Linda
Hutcheon*

trapolate; we make analogies; we critique or show our respect. When we do all this, does it matter whether the narrative we are working with is 'new' or adapted? Our postromantic valuing of the originary is, after all, a late addition to a long history of borrowing and stealing – or, more accurately, of *sharing* – stories.

I am just beginning a new research project to try to theorize adaptation, and while my general interest in the questions of adaptability and adaptation is wide and includes all those new forms of 'remediation' that information technology has given us, in this brief note I want to limit my remarks to the move from the page to the stage and the screen, that is, the move from a purely verbal medium to the embodied, enacted forms intended for performance. I would like to focus on how language, sound, music, and visual images together convey a once purely verbal narrative in a new way.

The shift from looking at black marks on a white page to perceiving a direct representation on the stage or the screen is a fraught move. Since it takes longer to sing than to speak (much less read) a line of text, operas and musicals must necessarily distill, often radically, the narrative of a novel or play. This necessary compression means the trimming of expansive plot lines, the removal of much psychological analysis, and the loss of stylistic texture. Characters and events are omitted; colorful slang and expletives are deleted. With literature, we start in the realm of imagination – which is simultaneously controlled by the selected, directing words of the text and unconstrained by the limits of the visual or aural. We can stop reading at any point; we can reread or skip ahead; we can hold the book in our hands and feel (as well as see) how much of the story remains to be read. But with film

and stage adaptations, we are caught in an unrelenting, forward-driving story. And there we have moved from the imagination to the realm of direct perception, with its infinite detail and broad focus.

The move from stage to screen entails yet another medium shift. Opera may have been Richard Wagner's idea of the total work of art (the *Gesamtkunstwerk*) that unites all the arts of music, literature, dance, and the visual, but today it is cinema that fulfills this claim. "A composite language by virtue of its diverse matters of expression – sequential photography, music, phonetic sound, and noise – the cinema," according to Stam, "'inherits' all the art forms associated with these matters of expression" – "the visuals of photography and painting, the movement of dance, the decor of architecture, and the performance of theater." Film clearly has resources that the stage can never have: the power of the close-up that gives the "microdrama of the human countenance" and the separate soundtracks of film that permit voice-overs, music, and the nonvocal to intermingle.

There are clearly many different issues around medium, genre, production, and reception to consider when theorizing adaptation, including a very basic physical one. The private and individual experience of reading is closer to the private visual and domestic spaces of television, radio, DVD, video, and computer than it is to the public and communal viewing experience in the dark of the theater. And, when we sit, quiet and still, in the dark watching real live bodies on the stage, our kind of identification is different from when we sit in front of a screen and have reality mediated for us by technology.

Certainly, new electronic technologies have made what we might call 'fidelity to the imagination' possible in new ways,

well beyond earlier animation techniques and special effects. The many new adaptations of fantasy fiction are, arguably, the result of these technological breakthroughs. One of the central clichés of film adaptation theory is that audiences are more demanding of fidelity when dealing with the classics – with the work of Shakespeare or Dickens, for instance. But a whole new set of what we might call cult popular classics – the classics of fantasy – are now being made visible and audible in the movie theater. And the readers of cult classics are likely to be just as demanding of film adaptations as are the fans of the more traditional classics.

What happens when these readers see their favorite books depicted on-screen according to somebody else's imagination? The answer can be found somewhere in the audience reactions to the recent adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings* and the Harry Potter novels. Now, for instance, that I *know* from the movie version of *The Lord of the Rings* what an orc looks like, I'll never be able to recapture my first imagined version of it. Is this good or bad?

Is there a limit finally to what we'll call an 'adaptation'? In his film *Moulin Rouge*, Baz Luhrmann borrowed Puccini's operatic story of the consumptive heroine and the bohemian artist from *La Bohème*, just as he deployed the conventions of film musicals and MTV music videos. Is his a multiple adaptation? And what about spin-offs? Are DVDs an extension or another aspect of adaptation? What about the toys, t-shirts, board and video games, and the websites? Where does what we are willing to call 'adaptation' stop?

These are the kinds of questions that I am asking myself at this early stage of my research. Of one thing I have already become convinced: that adaptation is not necessarily parasitic. Instead, it is a

fundamental operation of the storytelling imagination. For us in the audience, part of the very real pleasure of watching adaptations lies in recognition and remembrance. But it is equally true that part of the also very real masochistic fear provoked by adaptations lies in recognition and remembrance. This is one of the paradoxes that fascinates me, that makes me want to take on that reductive, negative rhetoric that sees adaptations as inevitably derivative and unfaithful to the adapted works.

Inside back cover: Traffic jam in Mexico City. "Which would you choose: society A, whose residents have 4,000-square-foot houses and a one-hour automobile commute to work through heavy traffic; or society B, whose residents have 3,000-square-foot houses and a fifteen-minute commute by rapid transit?" See Robert H. Frank on *How not to buy happiness,* pages 69–79. Photograph © Nik Wheeler/Corbis.
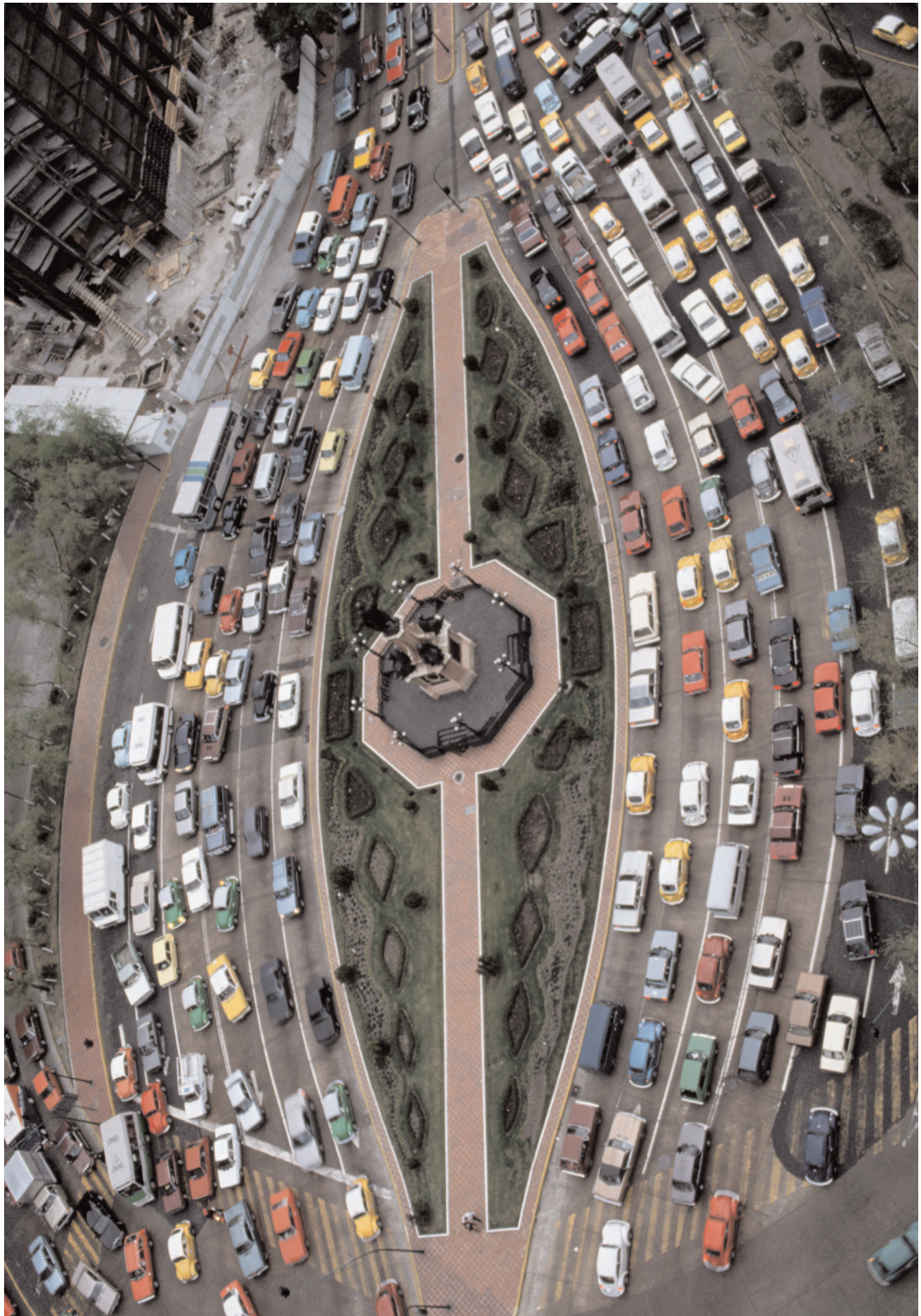
coming up in Dædalus:

on progress   Joseph Stiglitz, John Gray, Charles Larmore, Sakiko Fukuda-Parr,
                   Jagdish Bhagwati, Richard A. Shweder, John Steinbruner &
                   Nancy Gallagher, and Keith Michael Baker

on human nature   Steven Pinker, Richard Rorty, Jerome Kagan, Richard Wrangham,
                   Patrick Bateson, Jonathan Haidt, Donald Brown, Matt Ridley, and
                   Vernon Smith

on race   Kenneth Prewitt, Orlando Patterson, George Fredrickson, Ian
                   Hacking, Jennifer Hochschild, Glenn Loury, David Hollinger,
                   Victoria Hattam, Kwame A. Appiah, Ian Haney-Lopez, Melissa
                   Nobles, and Kim Williams

on imperialism   Niall Ferguson, Kenneth Pomeranz, Anthony Pagden, Jack Snyder,
                   Akira Iriye, Molly Greene, William Easterly, Robin Blackburn, and
                   Henk Wesseling

on professions   Howard Gardner, Lee Shulman, William Sullivan, Geoffrey Galt
& professionals   Harpham, Jeanne Nakamura & Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, William
                   Damon, Anne Colby, Kendall Bronk & Thomas Ehrlich, and
                   Harvey Goldman

                   plus poetry by Richard Wilbur, Franz Wright, Rachel Hadas,
                   W. S. Merwin, Charles Wright &c.; fiction by Roxana Robinson,
                   Victor LaValle, Sigrid Nunez, Margaret Atwood, R. Edmund
                   &c.; and notes by Michael Wood, Alan Boss, Charles Altieri,
                   Donald Green, Shelley Taylor, Robert Nagel, Philip L. Quinn,
                   Michael Kremer, Hue-Tam Ho Tai, Peter Hohendahl, Allan
                   Basbaum, Morris E. Fine, Rita Colwell &c.

                   U.S. $13

                   www.amacad.org