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INTRODUCTION

The Two Cultures

> Whoever is happy will make others happy too . . . How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.
>
> — Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl*

There is a wind of change in our society. People are talking about feelings. Even men are doing it. Quite recently Prince William and Prince Harry talked for the first time about their mother's death and how it affected their own mental health. There is a new undercurrent of concern with our own inner life and with how other people feel. Despite appearances, a new gentler culture is emerging.

By contrast, the older culture, which still dominates, is altogether harsher. It is more focused on externals. It encourages people to aim above all at personal success: good grades, a good job, a good income and a desirable partner. This culture of striving has brought many blessings, and life today is probably as good as it has ever been in human history. But that culture also involves a lot of stress, and people wonder why – if we are now so much richer than previous generations – we are not a lot happier?

The answer is surely the ultra-competitive nature of the dominant culture. The objective it offers is success compared with other people. But, if I succeed, someone else has to fail. So we have set ourselves up for a zero-sum game: however hard we all try to succeed, there can be no increase in overall happiness. An alternative, gentler culture offers a different aim, which can lead to a win–win outcome. It says that we should of course take care of ourselves, but we should get as much happiness as possible from contributing to the happiness of others.

Competition, it argues, is valuable in the right context – and that context is competition between organizations. This has been a major engine of progress. But what we need between individuals is mostly cooperation, not competition.[1] We want people who will act for the greater good – at work, at home and in the community. This produces better results for everyone. But, above all, it makes life more enjoyable. For people long to relate well to each other – as an end in itself and not just as a means to something else.

So the basic proposal in this book is that we should each of us, in all our choices, aim to produce the greatest happiness that we can – and especially the least misery. This noble vision does not go against basic human nature. For all of us have two inherited traits – one selfish and one altruistic. The selfish side believes that I am the centre of the universe and my needs come first. This trait was important for our survival as a race, and we should indeed take good care of ourselves and of our own inner equilibrium.

But the altruistic side enables us to feel what others feel and to strive for their good. This is vital for a happy society. It is a fallacy to think that reputation is a sufficient motivation for good behaviour. We need people with an inner desire to live good lives, even without reward. A happy society requires a lot of altruism, and so it needs a culture which supports our altruistic side.[2]

This gentler culture has always been around, in some form or other. It is there in all the great religions. Yet for many people these religions have lost their ability to convince. As religious belief has declined, a void has been created and into that void has rushed egotism, by default. We have told our young people that their chief duty is to themselves – to get on. What a terrible responsibility. No wonder that anxiety and depression are rising amongst the young.[3] Instead, people need to get out of themselves – to escape the misery of self-absorption. So there has to be a new, secular ethic, based on human need and not divine command.

The political crisis

A secular ethic is also vital if our democracies are to thrive. There is massive discontent with the world's elite, and with the atomistic neo-liberalism which it often espouses. According to that philosophy, all will go well if individuals are free to negotiate their own way through life; selfishness is not a problem provided people can choose their own friends and trading partners. But this ignores one key fact – that we would all be better off if the pool of possible friends and traders were nicer and more honest. For all of us the attitude of other people is crucial.

For this reason there is now a strong push back against extreme liberalism. People are calling for a society based on 'reciprocal obligation'.[4] In this view, we do not enter this world as independent, fully fledged adults, but as people highly dependent on support from our family, our government and the whole of our society. In return for this, we should ourselves feel bound to help others when we can. We want a free society, but one where people feel a duty to help.

But help in what way? There needs to be a clear content to our obligation to others. I think this is best expressed in terms of happiness: our obligation is to create the most happiness that we can in the society around us. This is the ideology we need for the twenty-first century. It is the vision of society that politicians should champion, and it is the principle that should guide their priorities in government. It is also, as we shall see, the principle that will get them re-elected. So the aim of politicians, as of private individuals, should be to create as much happiness in the world as possible and as little misery.

The happiness revolution

This new secular ethics is the basic principle for the happiness revolution – for both individuals and governments. But to implement it we have to know what makes people happy – both other people and ourselves. Two major developments now make this more possible. One is the new 'science of happiness' which gives policy-makers new knowledge about how to improve happiness and reduce misery. And the other is the new psychology of 'mind-training' which enables us all to get a better control over our own inner mental life. So, as Figure 0.1 shows, there are altogether three elements behind the amazing change that is now under way in our society.

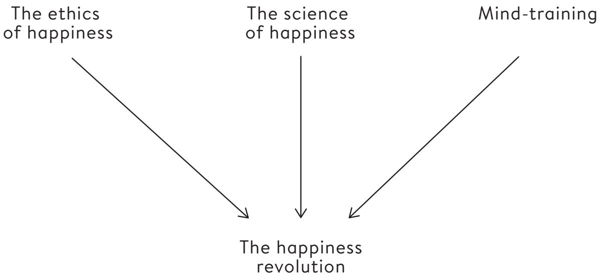


Figure 0.1
Forces behind the happiness revolution

Let us look briefly at each of these elements. The basic **secular ethics** goes back to the eighteenth-century Anglo-Scottish Enlightenment, which proposed a radically new goal for society. The goal, it said, should be the happiness of the people. That Happiness Principle was, I believe, the most important idea of the modern age, with powerful implications for how we should live and how our policy-makers should act on our behalf.

According to this principle, each of us should aim to create the most happiness in the world that we can and the least misery. And policy-makers and governments likewise should aim at the greatest happiness of the people and the least misery. This principle inspired many of the great social reforms of the nineteenth century, but it was soon challenged by philosophies that glorified struggle. Such dreadful philosophies contributed to two world wars and to the ultra-competitive features of today's dominant culture.

But now the Happiness Principle is making a comeback.

There are many reasons for this. One is disillusion with the dominant culture and the stress which people experience at every level of society. But the other reasons are hugely positive. Now, for the first time, we have a **science of happiness**, which gives us real evidence on how to create a happier society. This is relevant to all of us, but it also gives policy-makers new insights into the main causes of misery – and a new understanding of deprivation and how to address it.

At the same time there are new techniques of **mind-training** that enable each of us to improve our own inner mental state. The story began in the 1970s with breakthroughs in the psychological treatment of mental distress, based on scientifically controlled trials. Following on from that has come positive psychology, with evidence-based ways in which all of us can become happier. And, finally, more and more people now use age-old Eastern meditation to achieve greater contentment and calm of mind.

In Chapters 1–3 of the book we discuss each of the three strands in our diagram (see Figure 0.1). They all have one common element – they focus on the inner life as the ultimate reality for every human being. And they offer the prospect of a society where we take care, more than ever, of our own inner contentment and, especially, the happiness of others.

But does this new culture have any chance of replacing the dominant culture? For many people it has already done so. For them this new way of thinking is already fully established: they are members of a growing world happiness movement. These people include:

- millions who use meditation, mindfulness, yoga, positive psychology and other practices that support a contented way of living
- workers in mental health care, counselling and coaching – one of the most rapidly growing professions
- many of their beneficiaries, as well as people using self-help, Alcoholics Anonymous and so on
- educators teaching the skills of living, from primary schools to top universities
- thousands of companies and managers who care about the wellbeing of their workers and not just their performance
- policy-makers worldwide who fight for policies based on human values rather than the maximization of GDP, and
- researchers who provide the evidence-base for these policies.

This movement is affecting people in all walks of life – from rich to poor and from the happiest to those in despair.

Here are some graphs which illustrate the change (see Figure 0.2). The first two are from the media. If we look at *The Guardian* newspaper, the percentage of articles including 'happiness' has doubled since 2010 and the percentage including 'mental health' has risen by a factor of five. There is also a huge increase in the amount of published peer-reviewed research on happiness. From virtually nothing in 2000, this has reached nearly 2,000 articles a year. Even in economics journals there are already 200 articles a year on the subject.

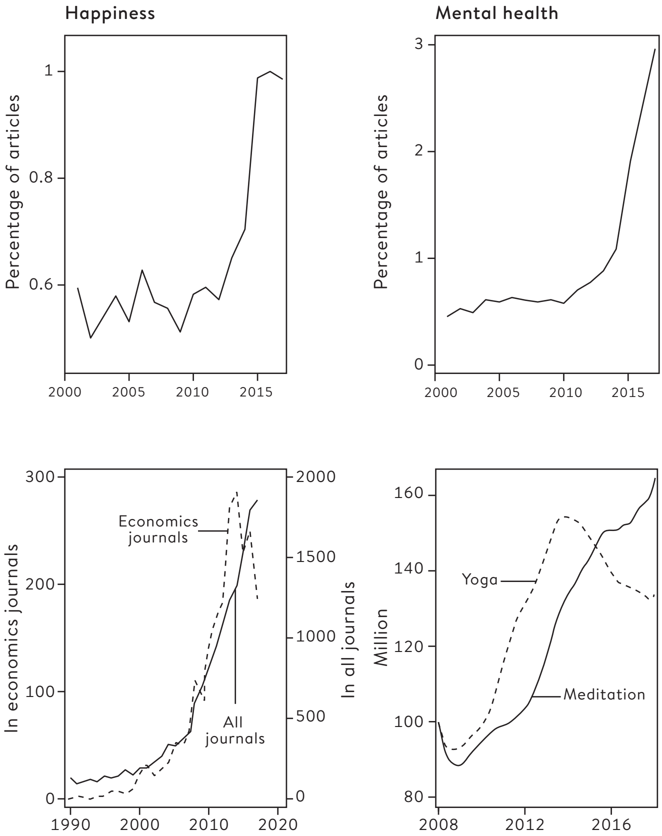
And finally there are the changes in lifestyle. In the USA 14 per cent of all adults report that they have meditated in the past twelve months, and 17 per cent have been to a yoga class.[5] Nearly 50 per cent live in households where someone has visited a mental-health professional in the last year.[6] All these activities are growing rapidly and the final graph shows the hugely increased interest in both meditation and yoga. I am often amazed when talking to a cabinet minister, top official or top businessman to find they have been meditating for years – in secret, of course.

But let's be honest. Even though interest in it has blossomed, this is still a minority culture and in the final chapter of Part One I will discuss the cross-winds that are blowing in the opposite direction. To overcome these cross-winds will require huge effort and clarity of purpose from all of us.

What can each of us do?

So how can we each become more effective as creators of happiness, both as citizens and in our own occupation, whatever that is? These are the issues we address in Part Two of the book:

- How can we as individuals find more happiness and contribute better to the happiness of others?
- How can teachers help children to become creators of happiness?
- How can managers make work more enjoyable?
- How can health-workers heal our minds as well as our bodies?
- How can couples find happiness and bring up happy children?



Happiness

Mental health

Figure 0.2

(*top*) Articles in *The Guardian* newspaper mentioning happiness and mental health
(*bottom left*) Articles on happiness in academic journals
(*bottom right*) Google searches for meditation and yoga

- How can local communities provide the social and physical basis for happy living?
- How can economists like myself provide good policy advice, aimed at happiness?
- How can politicians create happier societies?
- What are the priorities for science and technology, if happiness is the aim?

To answer these questions I draw on the vast mass of evidence now emerging on what works best for happiness. Wherever possible, the evidence I present comes from properly controlled experiments. The experimental method has been well established in medicine for over a century, but more recently it has spread into social science.[7] And happiness is increasingly included as a measured outcome – in my opinion it is the most important one. So this book reports cutting-edge science, directed at human happiness.

This is an extraordinarily exciting time. Cultural change can be quite rapid if the right idea arises at the right time.[8] The Happiness Principle is an idea whose time has come. Most people now realize that economic growth, however desirable, will not solve all our problems. Instead we need a philosophy and a science which encompasses a much fuller range of human experience.

The growing influence of women in society is helping this revolution. Research suggests that most women care more about inner feelings than men do, while typically men focus more on external issues.[9] Moreover, women are typically more altruistic than men, and more concerned with how others feel, and so their increasing power and influence will help to ensure that the happiness movement succeeds.[10]

For all these reasons, I am confident that this surging, subterranean movement will eventually become mainstream and displace the dominant culture of today.

My own involvement

We all have our part to play in this happiness revolution. But how, you might ask, did I, as an economist of all things, become involved in it? It is actually not surprising. Economics was originally founded in order to discover which institutions would produce the greatest happiness for the people. As soon as I discovered this, I switched to economics. As I explain in my thanks at the end of the book, I was by that time in my thirties. However, I was quickly shocked by the narrow view economists had about what actually causes happiness. Essentially they thought it was about purchasing power, plus a few other bits and pieces.

The fallacy of this assumption was already apparent by 1974 when Richard Easterlin showed that US citizens were getting no happier despite the country's rapid economic growth. I thought then of writing a book about happiness, but instead I wrote an article.[11] For at that time there was little research evidence on what makes people happy. But by 1998 there was much more, and we invited Daniel Kahneman, the psychologist who subsequently won the Nobel Prize in Economics, over to London to lecture on the new science of happiness. Soon after that I decided to write my own book on Happiness. I rang Kahneman for advice and he replied, 'First read the collected essays on Wellbeing that I've just published and then come to Princeton.' I did, and it was one of the most exciting times of my life. I also visited the founder of positive psychology, Martin Seligman, and the laboratory of Richard Davidson, where he carried out his ground-breaking work on the neuroscience of happiness.

The next thing was an email from a Buddhist monk in Nepal. Richard Davidson had written to his Buddhist friend Matthieu Ricard about this British economist who was working on happiness. In due course, Matthieu arrived at our house in his red and saffron robes, and I became aware of the wonderful Mind and Life group of Western scholars who meet regularly with the Dalai Lama to discuss the relation between Buddhist and Western psychology. Through this group I came to know the Dalai Lama, who has probably done more than any living person to advance the cause of happiness.

So I have met many inspiring people and had many unexpected experiences. Perhaps the strangest of all was organizing courses on mindfulness for British Members of Parliament. They lapped it up. Some MPs even said their lives had been changed forever.

After I had finished writing *Happiness*, I asked myself, What can I do next which will help to reduce misery? I concluded that the area of mental health was where I could do the most. But how? In 2003 I had become a Fellow of the British Academy and duly went to a very stiff inaugural tea party. I was standing next to a tall, good-looking chap and asked him what he did. He turned out to be David Clark, one of the world's leading clinical psychologists. I have worked with him ever since.

In 2004 it was virtually impossible for people with depression or crippling anxiety disorders to get psychological therapy in Britain's National Health Service. So David and I made the case for a completely new service. He provided the technical expertise; I provided the economic argument and the political connections. Tony Blair had made me a Labour Party member of the House of Lords, and so we were able to present our case to a seminar at 10 Downing Street. Eventually, after many more meetings, the case was accepted. Thanks to David's leadership the service now treats over half a million sufferers a year, half of whom recover during a course of treatment. The service is so successful that it is now being copied in at least five other countries.

But happiness is more than mental health. If the Happiness Principle and all it implies is to become embedded in our culture, it needs an organization to promote it. Every successful culture has institutions that enshrine its principles. Religious cultures have churches, temples, synagogues or mosques. But where is the organization that is dedicated to the Greatest Happiness Principle, and where do its followers meet regularly to be inspired and supported in living good lives? That was the next challenge.

In 2006 I was in a TV debate with Anthony Seldon, the newly appointed head of a private secondary school called Wellington College. He had just introduced happiness lessons into the school, despite considerable scepticism from teachers and school governors. We had an immediate rapport and soon we got together with Geoff Mulgan, the former head of Tony Blair's policy unit, and decided to launch a movement that could fill the organizational gap. Its aim is to inspire individuals to live good, happy lives – through its website and even more through face-to-face groups that meet regularly to inspire and to be inspired.

We called the movement Action for Happiness. It attracted good candidates for the post of director, including one who prior to the interview had Googled the question ‘What organizations have the word “happiness” in their titles?’ The search engine’s reply was ‘Your search for happiness has produced no results.’ That was 2011. Things have changed since then. Thanks to its great director, Mark Williamson, Action for Happiness now has over a million online followers and 150,000 members in 180 countries.

Finally, there is the global policy challenge: to persuade policy-makers to make happiness their goal. In 2004 the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the club of rich countries, held the first of many conferences on the subject of ‘What is Progress?’ The next step was to get countries to measure the happiness of their people as part of their routine national gathering of statistics. Fortunately, Britain’s Cabinet Secretary Gus O’Donnell was on side and in 2011 Britain became the first country to do that. At the same time, one of the world’s leading development economists, Jeffrey Sachs (who was also adviser to the UN Secretary General), became a strong advocate for happiness. Since then, he, John Helliwell and I have edited the annual World Happiness Report, and more and more governments are now moving towards happiness as the goal of policy.

This book

But, even so, many in the world today (including many of my own friends) are barely aware of the world happiness movement and the way it is challenging many of the worst features of the dominant individualistic culture. This book tries to remedy that ignorance – and then to lay out how members of the happiness movement can in practice transform the lives of those they touch.

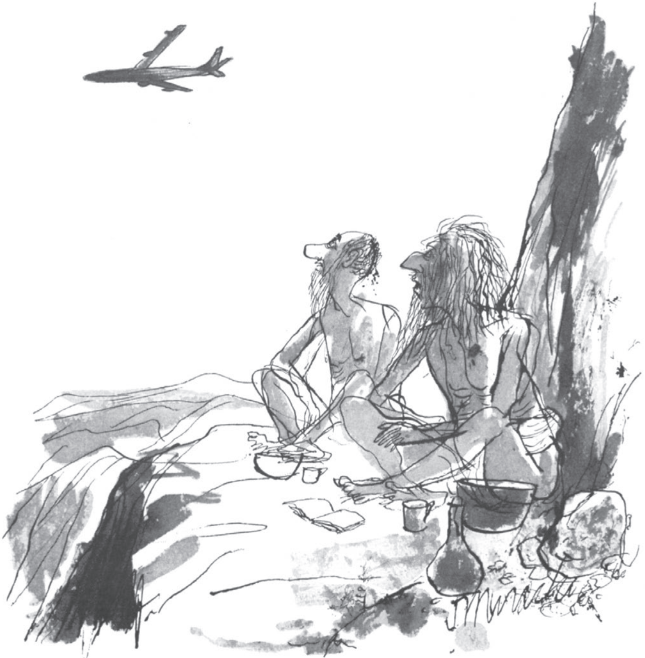
This book has two parts. Part One describes the ideas, science and behaviours which are generating the happiness revolution and the world happiness movement. This section is mainly directed at people who are not yet on board and need to be persuaded. By contrast, Part Two is directed at people who are already on board and want a happier world. It offers scientific evidence to show how each of us, in our own sphere of life, can contribute to bringing that about.

The book cannot possibly cover everything that needs doing. It focuses mainly on those key areas that are at the top of the new happiness agenda.[12] And it constantly stresses that this is not an expensive exercise. Most of the things that can be done are immensely cost-effective and, in many cases, pay for themselves. They are not luxury expenditures. They are critical for the happiness of billions, and they cost peanuts compared with much of what is spent to promote economic growth.

So let's put people first and mean it. We have enough knowledge – let's put it into action. The world happiness movement will surely go from strength to strength. What is counter-cultural today will in time become the mainstream. And the result will be a happier society.

PART ONE

The Happiness Revolution



"They have the know-how, but do they have the know-why?"

CHAPTER 1

What's the Purpose?

> Create all the happiness you are able to create: remove all the misery you are able to remove.
> — Jeremy Bentham[1]

A few years ago I was asked to give a lunchtime talk at Goldman Sachs's offices in London. Until then the record attendance at these talks had been 500, to hear the tennis star Martina Navratilova. There were 810 in the audience for my talk – not because of me, but because of the title: 'Can we be happier?'

I believe passionately that we can and should have a happier way of life, and that the new science of happiness can help us towards it. In this book I try to show how it could happen: what we can each do as individuals, plus the huge potential contributions from teachers, managers, therapists, parents, economists, scientists and policy-makers in general. We shall look at each of these groups in turn.

But first we need to look more closely at the goal. Is greater happiness really the right goal for our society? Or should we just have lots of goals? The problem with multiple goals is what to do when one goal conflicts with another – when, for example, the redistribution of income conflicts with personal freedom. So in practice we have to have one overarching goal. But what should it be?

Everyone wants to be happy. And most people want others to be happy also – at the very least they want it for their family and friends. We also have other wants, which are quite specific – for income, health, freedom, appreciation, friendship and so on. But if we ask why these other things matter to us, we can always give some reason – for example that they will make us feel better. On the other hand, if we ask why it matters that people feel happier, we can give no further answer. Happiness is self-evidently good, and one can convincingly argue that other goods derive their value from the way in which they contribute to our happiness. So happiness is the overarching good.[2]

But whose happiness? I obviously feel that my happiness matters, but everyone else feels the same about theirs. So it is impossible to argue that any one person's happiness is ultimately more important than anyone else's. It follows that the goal for a society must be the greatest possible happiness all round. Inevitably some people will be happier than others, but (as I shall argue later) we should take special care to raise up those with the lowest levels of happiness.[3] Subject to that qualification, the goal for any society should be the happiness of the people.

So how should each of us live our lives? Unfortunately some people think there is no such thing as 'should'. But if you believe there is such a thing, then we *should* obviously try to produce the best possible state of society around us – in other words, the greatest possible happiness that we can.

The Happiness Principle

Thus the starting point for this book is three key ideas which should, I believe, be central to a civilized society.

THE PROGRESS PRINCIPLE

We should judge the state of the world by how far people are enjoying their lives – by the amount of happiness there is, especially among those who are least happy. That, rather than GDP, should be our measure of progress. And, crucially, everybody's happiness matters equally.[4]

Next, turning to individuals, our duty must be to promote the best possible state of the world, in whatever way we can – which leads to the next idea.

THE ETHICAL PRINCIPLE

Each of us should aim, in the way we live and in the choices we make, to create the most happiness we can in the world around us, especially among those who are least happy.

This should be the key principle of moral philosophy. Morality, it says, is not just about avoiding bad behaviour: it is about positively promoting the good of others – in other words their happiness. This is an uplifting message which can inspire everyone in their daily lives, and should become second nature to young children as early as possible. Only a clear message like this can save us from self-absorption. But it is not a hair-shirt philosophy – it calls for joyful living, where we care for others but also for ourselves.

Finally there is the goal for the policy-makers who act on our behalf either in government or in non-government organizations (NGOs). What should this be?

THE POLICY PRINCIPLE

Policy-makers should choose policies which create the greatest possible happiness, especially among those who are least happy.

This should be the central idea of political philosophy. If people are looking for a definition of the common good, this is it: the happiness of the people.

Some history

Taken together, these ideas comprise the Happiness Principle. None of them are new. In the form I have described them, they go back to the great eighteenth-century Anglo-Scottish Enlightenment. The Enlightenment replaced the idea that morality comes from God with the idea that our duty comes from our membership of society. Happiness was no longer postponed to the afterlife, but was to be promoted here and now. This was the defining idea of the modern age.[5]

However, unfortunately there remained in Western culture a strong streak of Puritanism. Many, even among the irreligious, felt that happiness was not enough. In their view, what made sense of life was struggle itself, rather than the fruits of struggle. This philosophy, epitomized by the Social Darwinists and Nietzsche, was strongest on the European continent. But even elsewhere there were many who justified the causes they fought for by something other than improvements in the quality of individual lives.[6] Many of the disasters of the twentieth century were influenced by this belief in the intrinsic merits of struggle.

Fortunately, since the Second World War, life has been better and is probably on average as good as in any previous period. But false gods still dominate much of our thinking. The most obvious is the idea that the only good is GDP – in other words that people exist to produce output, rather than output existing to serve the people. GDP has its value of course, but it is only one of many things that contribute to the overarching good, which is happiness.

Even so, is greater happiness really the best alternative goal for society? Three obvious questions arise.

Is happiness a serious enough objective?

Happiness means feeling good. But many people argue that happiness is a transient state: you cannot always be happy, so we need a more solid goal. But this is a misconception of what is being advocated. There are not two states, happy and unhappy, any more than there are two states, rich and poor. There is a scale of happiness, from very happy at the top to desperately miserable at the bottom – just as there is a scale of income from rich to poor. Moreover, people's levels of happiness fluctuate, and what we are concerned with here is their underlying happiness, averaged over a long period of time – how their life feels to them. What we want to see is happier lives.

So we are using the word happiness in exactly the same way that it is used in common parlance. For example, people may ask: how happy is your child at school? Or, how happy are you in your job? Or, are you happily married? Everyone knows what these questions mean: they are trying to find out how you feel about that aspect of your life.

We are just going one step further and asking, how good do you feel about your whole life these days? Nobody can be happy all the time. In fact, if you are trying to do something worthwhile you are almost bound to feel frustrated at frequent intervals. Moreover, work is often hard, as is running a marathon. We do not do everything we do because it will make us happy at the time. We do it because in general we will feel good about it.

Even so, many sensible people have difficulty with the idea of ‘happiness’ or ‘feeling good’ as the ultimate goal for society. Many people prefer the word ‘wellbeing’. But when asked to define it they often struggle. This is not surprising since the word ‘wellbeing’ is not a part of ordinary English: there is no adjective to describe a person with good wellbeing. That is why I prefer the word ‘happiness’ – people know what it means to be happy. But for most purposes either word will do.

So how can we best measure it? The most frequently used concept, by academics and policy-makers alike, is overall life-satisfaction. People are asked: ‘Overall, how satisfied are you with your life these days’, on a scale of 0–10 with 0 indicating ‘Not at all satisfied’ and 10 meaning ‘Very satisfied’. The pattern of replies to the question remains very similar if the word ‘happy’ replaces the word ‘satisfied’.[7]

Other specific questions about feelings can also be useful (especially when we are studying specific experiences over short periods of time). But, as an overall concept, I like the life-satisfaction, single-question approach rather than asking people lots of different questions and then weighting them into a single index – because then the researchers are forced to supply weights for each question rather than leaving it to individuals to make their own overall assessment. And in any case the weights differ between individuals. So life-satisfaction is the most democratic measure, since it is the respondents who decide what is good for them – and not some politician, bureaucrat or scholar.

Moreover, life-satisfaction is the measure that policy-makers prefer. They are used to asking people how satisfied they are with public services, so why not ask them about their life as a whole? Life-satisfaction is therefore the measure we use most frequently in this book.[8] We call it 'happiness', but by all means think of it as 'wellbeing', or 'quality of life' if you (like many policy-makers) prefer to do so.[9]

Does the happiness goal make people selfish?

Does talking about happiness mean we are encouraging selfishness? The answer to this question is a resounding 'No'. For what we are talking about is the goal for society, not a goal we are proposing for each individual. Clearly no society is going to be happy if each individual seeks only his or her own happiness – we are all deeply affected by how other people behave. So suppose the issue is how Jane (see Figure 1.1) should behave. Our Ethical Principle says that she should take into account the effect of her behaviour on both her own happiness and on the happiness of others. When she decides what to do with her life, she should take into account both of these effects. She should not just aim to be happy herself but to be a generator of happiness for herself *and* others.

A libertarian might say it is enough for her to pursue her

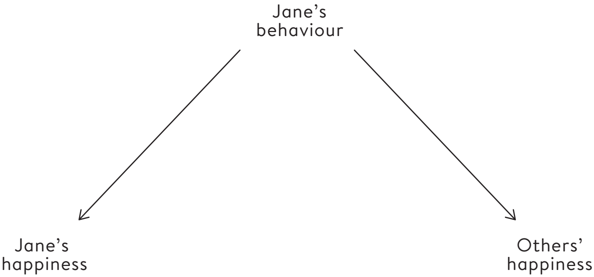


Figure 1.1
The effects of Jane's behaviour

own happiness, provided she does not reduce the happiness of others.[10] But no – as I have argued, she should actively seek to increase the happiness of others.

This highlights two different ways of looking at a society. The first is to ask how happy each person is. This is the standard procedure in studies of happiness. But, as we know, people's happiness depends hugely on how other people behave. So a second approach is to ask how each person is doing as a creator of happiness. This is surely equally important, since happiness can only be experienced if it is first created.

To see the difference between the two concepts, we can imagine a society consisting of only Jane and Emily. Jane is more giving than Emily, so she creates more happiness in Emily than Emily creates in her. Thus, overall, Jane creates more happiness than she herself experiences; and for Emily it is the other way around. This is illustrated in Figure 1.2. The first row shows how much happiness each of them

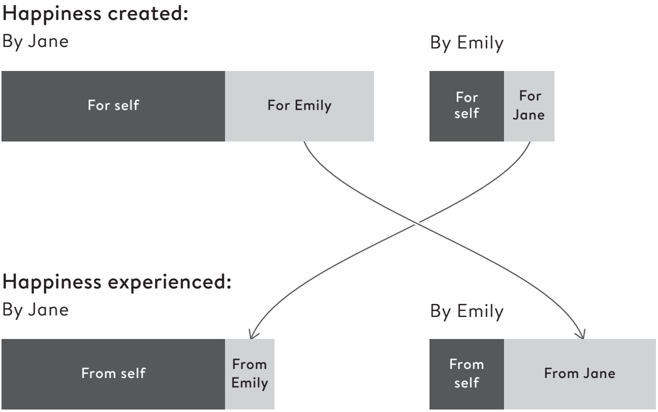

Happiness created:
By Jane
By Emily
For self
For Emily
For self
For Jane
Happiness experienced:
By Jane
By Emily
From self
From Emily
From self
From Jane

Figure 1.2
Happiness created and happiness experienced

creates. The second row shows how much happiness each experiences. Jane gives more happiness to Emily than she receives in return, so that she creates more happiness than she experiences. In the real world there are millions of people like Jane and millions of others like Emily, each of them affecting hundreds or thousands of other people.

This fundamental difference (between the happiness that a person experiences and the happiness which the same person creates) helps us to understand a long-standing controversy over the way we should measure happiness. The standard approach is to look at happiness experienced, through some measure like life-satisfaction. But others argue for something closer to what Aristotle had in mind when he talked about eudaemonia, which included a person's contribution to society. The natural measure of this is the happiness that person creates.[11]

Both approaches are of value. If we want to know who is suffering in a society and why, we certainly have to look at the happiness people experience. But if we want to build a happy society we need to know how to produce creators of happiness. When Aristotle talked of eudaemonia, he included virtue in the discussion. Virtue is of course difficult to measure but it is a key feature of the kind of citizens we would like to live with. Social scientists should therefore try to measure both happiness experienced, which is relatively easy, and happiness created.[12] For we will never understand the happiness and misery in our society unless we also study how people behave.

But how can we affect the way people behave? One approach is to appeal to their self-interest. People who behave well get treated better in return, so their reputation is a huge incentive to behave well. But that is not enough to create a truly happy society. We need people who behave well from habit not from calculation – people who help others, even if they will never see them again.

Such a society is quite possible. After all, people regularly help other people they will never see again, and they tolerate pain and discomfort doing things they think are right. Altruism is a daily reality.[13] So what makes it possible?

The answer seems to be a basic human mechanism whereby people feel happier if they are helping others – not all the time, but in general over their lives. There is good evidence that this is so – that altruistic behaviour makes people happier.[14] In one ingenious experiment Elizabeth Dunn divided a sample of students randomly into two groups. The first group were given money to spend on themselves, and the second group were given money to spend on other people. It turned out that spending money on others made the students happier than spending it on themselves. This experiment has been done in four very different countries with the same results. An equivalent experiment has also been performed on three-year-old toddlers, again with the same result: they smile more when they give away a treat than when they consume it themselves.

Similar results are found in real life. When Germany was reunited in 1990 the opportunities for volunteering in East Germany were drastically curtailed. The result was that East Germans who had previously volunteered became much less happy relative to other East Germans.[15] Equally, in careful comparisons between individuals, those who volunteer are on average happier and live longer.[16]

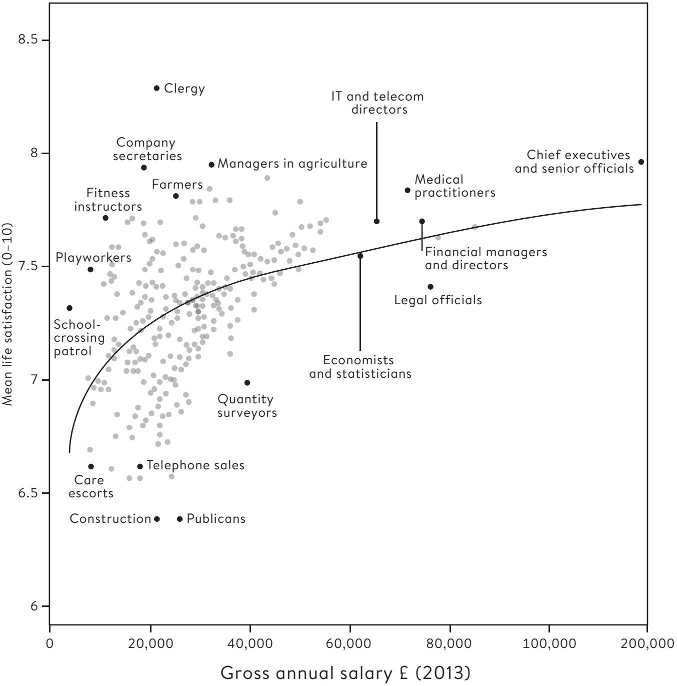


Figure 1.3
How occupations differ in average happiness and average salary in the UK

Because altruism matters so much, some people argue that virtue should be the ultimate aim of our society. But this is to confuse the means with the end. The end is a happy society, and virtue is a means to get there. So we are not offering a dismal philosophy where we constantly make ourselves miserable for the sake of others. We are promoting a generous spirit, where we get real meaning and enjoyment from what we do for others.

In the end, are we not simply restating Jesus's Golden Rule, 'Do to others what you want them to do to you'? That depends on what you want them to do to you. If you want them to make you happy, then yes, we are restating the Golden Rule. But if you want them to teach you the piano, that is probably not what they want of you. We should find out what makes them happy and do what we can to promote it.

The Happiness Principle applies to every choice we make in life: what to study, what job to take, how to manage our time and our family life, and what to do with our money. All morality is about the positive things we should do, as well as the negative ones we should avoid. For much of the unhappiness in the world is caused not by the bad things we do but by the good things we fail to do. Take, for example, the decision about what job to do. We should ask which choice will make the most difference to the happiness of others. What is it that we can do well and wouldn't happen unless we did it? And what will give us the most satisfaction ourselves?

So here, to whet your interest, is a graph showing the income and happiness people get from different occupations in Britain (see Figure 1.3). There is a big spread of both income and happiness, and there is some relation between the two. But the relation is not all that strong and there are huge differences between occupations paying the same money. So anyone wondering whether to enter an occupation is well advised to see how happy the people are who are already in that occupation. More details are in an online Annex.[17] But remember that these are only averages – you yourself might become happier or less happy than the average in that occupation. And of course you should also think about how that occupation affects the happiness of others.

What about social justice?

So far I have talked mainly as though the objective of society should be simply the total volume of happiness experienced in the society. In the eighteenth century this was Jeremy Bentham's approach. My approach would be different. I feel it is worse if A's life-satisfaction is 9 and B's is 5 than if both are at 7, even though the total is the same. That is my concept of social justice: I am concerned with how happiness is distributed. If you accept that happiness is the ultimate good, then social justice must be about how happiness is distributed between people.

In every society there is a wide spectrum of happiness – running from extreme misery to extreme happiness. The chart below shows the distribution of happiness in the British population (see Figure 1.4).[18] The least happy tenth obtain on average 3.8 points of happiness (out of a maximum possible of 10), and they are certainly in a lot of misery. By contrast, the most happy tenth obtain over 9 points out of 10. Some people are a lot luckier in their life than others.