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Problems with Life Satisfaction Conceptions of Happiness

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Abstract

Life satisfaction conceptions of happiness have become common in the social sciences and also in philosophy. This paper discusses such conceptions in the light of what I see as the conceptual core of the concept of happiness. Definitions of social scientists Ed Diener and Ruut Veenhoven are discussed. Questions and criticisms of life satisfaction conceptions are considered, including those raised by Fred Feldman and Dan Haybron. Ways in which truth and reality, challenge, and accomplishment are important in our considerations of happiness are examined.

Starting in the 1970's and 1980's within the social sciences happiness became a focus of attention. Richard Easterlin in Economics, Ed Diener in Psychology, and Ruut Veenhoven in Sociology were path breakers. Historically happiness had been an important topic in philosophy, particularly in the ancient Greek and Medieval periods, and among the 19th Century Utilitarians. From the perspective of social scientists philosophers dealing with happiness were overly focused on theoretical issues and insufficiently attentive to empirical examination of happiness. Scientific study of happiness required studies collecting data, and this requires operational definitions of happiness upon which these studies can be based. These have typically focused on attitudes, feelings, emotions, or moods. Happiness as an attitude of satisfaction with one's life as

a whole has become one of the most common ways of conceiving of happiness among social scientists. Many philosophers, too, have adopted such a conception of happiness.¹

A classic theory of happiness such as Aristotle's does not fit well with these recent ways of looking at happiness. Happiness, or *eudaimonia* is, according to Aristotle, "virtuous activity of the soul,"² activity, in particular activity exercising reason well in our actions, our thinking, and the development of our characters. Positive feelings, such as pleasure, and attitudes typically accompany this activity, but are not themselves happiness. His theory is not one that lends itself easily to empirical study. Seeing the nature of happiness as an ongoing state of affairs makes it something objective, rather than a subjective state of a person.

Many contemporary philosophers have adopted a subjective way of conceiving of happiness, similar to social scientists, as a psychological state, distinguishing it from *well-being*. Dan Haybron, for example, distinguishes *psychological happiness*, which focuses on states of mind and *prudential happiness*, which focuses on well-being³. Haybron claims, about Aristotle's theory "Aristotle seems not to have had a theory of happiness. He had a theory of well-being."⁴ Not all philosophers hold a subjective view of happiness, but among those that do, life satisfaction is perhaps the most common: happiness is being pleased with, liking, being satisfied with one's life.

In this paper I will be using the methods of philosophy, and focusing on conceptual issues, such as how terms such as "happiness" and "life satisfaction" might be defined. As I mentioned, it has become common recently for not only social scientists but also philosophers to regard happiness as a psychological concept, and to use "well-being" for a classic theory such as Aristotle's. I will not be keeping these two concepts so distinct, for as I shall argue when I discuss what I regard as the conceptual or logical core of happiness, I believe happiness cannot

be so sharply distinguished from well-being. So sometimes I will be using “happiness” where some might claim “well-being” should be used.

The life satisfaction view, then, is held by many philosophers and social scientists. It is being used as a basis for much empirical research, with questions related to life satisfaction appearing in many surveys used by researchers. It is, in a number of ways, an attractive view, seeming to fit with intuitions of many about happiness, and offering ways of being operationalized for empirical research. It is important, therefore, to examine it to see how promising it really is in clarifying and extending our understanding of happiness.

Conceptual Core of Happiness

I believe there is a logical or conceptual core of the concept of happiness that goes back at least to the ancient Greeks and still forms our general understanding of the concept. According to this conceptual core happiness of a life (a) has to do with one’s life as a whole, (b) is relatively long-lasting, (c) makes one’s life worthwhile, and (d) is something desired by everyone. I believe discussions of happiness generally presume this conceptual core of happiness, while holding varying particular conceptions. And the interest people have in happiness is based on presuming this conceptual core. If I am right about this conceptual core of happiness, it is not so easy to separate happiness from well-being and doing so may stipulate meanings that miss some of the basic concept of happiness.

Life Satisfaction Views

Life satisfaction views see happiness judgments about one's life, typically global and not one's life just at the moment, but over a span of time. We can regard it, broadly, as thinking of happiness as essentially being satisfied with, liking, being pleased with one's life as a whole.

Two Definitions from the Social Sciences

Let us consider what two social scientists who are prominent in happiness studies, psychologist Ed Diener and sociologist Ruut Veenhoven, say about how happiness as life satisfaction can be characterized or defined. In his path breaking article, "Subjective Well-Being," Ed Diener notes three hallmarks of subjective well-being: (1) "...it is subjective"; (2) "subjective well-being includes positive measures"; and (3) measures of subjective well-being include "a global assessment of all aspects of a person's life."⁵ For Diener, subjective well-being is a scientific way of referring to happiness. In the recent book, *Happiness: Unlocking the Mysteries of Psychological Wealth*, co-authored with Robert Biswas-Diener, they write:

Subjective well-being encompasses people's life satisfaction and their evaluation of important domains of life such as work, health and relationships. It also includes their emotions such as joy and engagement...In other words happiness is the name we put on thinking and feeling positively about one's life.⁶

Sociologist Ruut Veenhoven defines happiness as "the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of his life-as-a-whole favorably. In other words: how well he likes the life he leads."⁷ He sees it as an attitude with cognitive and affective parts. The cognitive part, on his view, requires that someone actually make an overall judgment about his life: "...the concept cannot be used for animals, little children and mentally retarded people. Similarly it does not apply to people who simply never thought about the matter."⁸ How are such life satisfaction judgments made? Veenhoven claims they are based on both hedonic level of affect and

contentment (perceived realization of wants).⁹ However, he sees affect, and in particular affect based on need gratification, as primary, and claims that this fits in nicely with an understanding of needs as coming into existence as part of the process of evolution.¹⁰

Attractiveness of Life Satisfaction Conceptions

A life satisfaction understanding of happiness is attractive in a number of ways. First, from the point of view of empirical researchers it offers an opportunity to collect data, something that seems not possible with many of the definitions in the history of philosophy. It is a way of making happiness “scientific”. One can do surveys asking questions designed to elicit subjects’ overall satisfaction with life.

Second, it places the determination of happiness in the individual. A judgment of happiness is essentially a first person judgment. In an issue of *Psychological Inquiry* focusing on eudaimonic views of well-being, Diener, Sapyta and Suh defend subjective well-being as the criterion for well-being “because it allows individuals rather than experts (us) to decide what is important to them.”¹¹ To many, understanding happiness in terms of objective features (virtuous activity, being a fully functioning person, etc.) is not only paternalistic, but simply wrong. Such views are normative, evaluative, identifying “real” happiness in a limited way, and regarding the happiness of many people as deficient or inferior.

Third, when we think broadly about happiness, it just simply makes sense. It seems obviously true that happy people like their lives, and are pleased with or satisfied with their lives. And who would not want to find their life as a whole satisfying?

Finally, it is a conception of happiness that is optimistic, offering the possibility of increasing one's happiness or subjective well-being. Attitudes can be changed I will be discussing the issue of how taking different perspectives might lead to different judgments. For instance, comparing oneself with those worse off rather than those better off can lead to a judgment of greater satisfaction with life. In Positive Psychology there is a good deal of emphasis on gratitude, seeing reflecting things for which one is thankful as enhancing one's well-being. This can be seen as taking a certain perspective in order to judge one's life more positively.

How does satisfaction with life as a whole do with with what I identified as the conceptual or logical core of happiness? It does better than views that analyze happiness simply in terms of feelings such as pleasure or emotions It is hard to see how feelings or emotions can have to do with life as a whole. With regard to making one's life worthwhile, while positive feelings and emotions are welcome, they seem insufficient to make one's life worthwhile. Life satisfaction, on the other hand, is a plausible candidate for making one's life worthwhile. Depending on the scope of the judgment it may well be long-lasting.

Examples of Measures

It would be useful to have in mind examples of surveys used to collect data about life satisfaction. The first two examples, *Satisfaction with Life One Leads* and *Satisfaction with Life-as-a-Whole* are examples of surveys using self-report on a single question cited by Ruut Veenhoven in the World Database of Happiness.¹²

Satisfaction with Life one Leads

Self-report on single question:

"On the whole how satisfied are you with the life you lead?"

- 4 very satisfied
- 3 fairly satisfied
- 2 not very satisfied
- 1 not at all satisfied

Used in Euro-barometer surveys, bi-annual general population samples in all EU member states, since 1973.

Reference: Website Eurobarometer: www.za.uni-koeln.de/research/eurolabor

Satisfaction with Life-as-a-Whole

Self-report on single question:

"We have talked about various parts of your life, now I want to ask you about your life as a whole. How satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days.....?"

- 7 completely satisfied
- 6
- 5
- 4 neutral
- 3
- 2
- 1 completely dissatisfied

Preceded by questions on satisfaction with domains of life.

Code: O-SLW/c/sq/n/7/a

Reference: Andrews, F.M. & Withey, S.B., ' Social Indicators of Well-being: Americans' Perceptions of Life Quality', Plenum Press, 1976, New York, USA

Another widely used scale is the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), developed by Diener and Emmons.¹³ It includes five questions, rated on a 1-7 scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree:

1. In most ways my life is close to ideal.
2. The conditions of my life are excellent.
3. I am satisfied with my life.
4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in my life
5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Life Satisfaction as an Attitude

As mentioned earlier, life satisfaction conceptions see happiness as essentially being satisfied with, liking, being pleased with one's life as a whole. It then involves basically having a certain kind of *attitude* toward one's life.

In order to understand the various ways satisfaction with life can be interpreted, it will be helpful to consider the concept of attitude and how the concept is used in philosophy and in the social sciences. In general, in philosophical uses of the concept of attitude, especially in ethics, attitudes have two important features. The first is that attitudes consist of beliefs and rather complicated sets of dispositions, dispositions concerning one's thoughts, feelings, emotions, actions and statements about the particular objects of one's attitude. The second important feature is that attitudes are in some ways under our control, and in that respect are different from feelings and emotions.¹⁴

In some (but not all) philosophical discussions attitudes are seen as essentially or at least predominantly as cognitive. For example, Bengt Brülde calls attitude views such as the life satisfaction view "the cognitive view" and says:

On the pure cognitive (or attitudinal) view, happiness is regarded as a cognitive state, or more specifically, as a positive attitude (in the philosophical sense of this term) towards one's life as a whole. On this view, happiness has no affective component, i.e. the positive value judgement need not (at least not by definition) be accompanied by any pleasant feeling. To be happy is simply to evaluate one's own life in a positive manner, to approve of it, or to regard it favourably. Here it might be "to evaluate one's own life in a positive manner, to approve of it, or to regard it favourably" with no specific conceptual assumption of positive feelings.¹⁵

In the social sciences (and by some philosophers) attitudes are thought of as involving both judgments and emotions. So satisfaction with one's life would involve a cognitive element, making a judgment about one's life, and an affective, emotional element, positive emotions and feelings about one's life. I'm not aware of any social science account that emphasizes attitudes as essentially cognitive in the way that Brülde does. The accounts by Diener and Veenhoven discussed earlier are examples of this view of life satisfaction. It does seem, too, that some emphasize the emotional part as being most critical. Philosopher Elizabeth Telfer, seems to do this in defining happiness as "being pleased with one's life as a whole."¹⁶

So we can have various accounts of life satisfaction depending on whether it involves both a cognitive judgment and emotion or affect, or just one of these. In addition, if it involves both, the role of one or the other could be regarded as the most significant.

What Sort of Judgment?

While there are variations among life satisfaction views in terms of how much emphasis is placed on cognitive aspects such as judgments and how much emphasis is placed on affect aspects, typically they claim that some sort of judgment of life satisfaction is involved. One question that arises is whether in fact all people make such a judgment, and whether some who do not make such a judgment are nevertheless happy. And do people make such judgments on their own, independently of being prompted, such as by participating in a survey in which a researcher poses the question? Ruut Veenhoven claims that most people regularly make such judgments about their lives and whether they are satisfied with their lives. However, philosophers Dan Haybron and Fred Feldman beg to differ. Dan Haybron argues that that

feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with one's life assumed by the life satisfaction view are not common: "...while sometimes we do have broad feelings of being satisfied or dissatisfied with our lives, such moments appear to be short-lived, mostly occurring when we are unusually reflective."¹⁷

Feldman distinguishes actualists and hypotheticalists with regard to life satisfaction judgments. Actualists claim that someone must actually make a judgment of life satisfaction: without a judgment there cannot be life satisfaction. Ruut Veenhoven holds such a position. On the other hand, we have Tatarkiewicz, who by virtue of claiming "it is enough that he would be satisfied if he were to think of it"¹⁸ is a hypotheticalist. Feldman introduces two examples to raise questions about whether a judgment of life satisfaction is a necessary condition for happiness.

One example is Timmy, "a happy-go-lucky guy who has friends, and a job, and an apartment, and a car that he likes. He always has a smile on his face."¹⁹ He generally seems to be enjoying himself. Observing him, we would judge him to clearly be happy. But he has never thought about what his ideal life would be like and what is important to him, and has never thought about the things that would go into judging that he is satisfied with his life. In other words, he is an unreflective happy-go-lucky person who, as it happens, has never made an actual judgment of life satisfaction. If we switch to a hypotheticalist version of life satisfaction judgments, we could imagine, Feldman claims, that being led to reflect on his life as a whole and formulate a life ideal he might not do well at this, and even become despondent. "...his happiness is in part dependent on the fact that he is doing things he enjoys, rather than thinking about his life and his ideals."²⁰ This then is an example of what seems to be a paradigmatically

happy person who does not make an actual and would likely not make a hypothetical judgment of overall life satisfaction

Feldman's second example is a philosopher engaged in contemplation, absorbed in thinking about a metaphysical problem. He is not thinking about his life as a whole and not making any judgments about it, yet seems quite happy in what he is doing. Switching to hypotheticalism on this issue, we could imagine a philosopher absorbed in contemplation who would not find himself thinking about whether he was satisfied with his life as a whole, and, if he were interrupted and asked about it, would judge that his life, at least then, would be better if he had been left to his contemplation. Feldman's conclusion with regard to these examples is that they serve as counterexamples to the view that a judgment of life satisfaction is necessary for happiness "*[A] person can be very happy at a time even though she is not making any judgment about her life as a whole at that time; she can have a happy life even though she never makes any judgment about her life as a whole.*"²¹

Some Criticisms by Haybron

A Counterexample

Dan Haybron also finds problems in the life satisfaction conception, though he had earlier held the view himself.²² He raises another kind of counterexample, one in which someone is unhappy but yet is satisfied with life overall. Haybron holds an emotional state view of happiness according to which it consists of having positive moods and emotions along with a propensity to have positive moods and emotions in the future²³, and one of these criticisms is that, assuming an emotional state view, an example such as this can arise: someone might be depressed (and

paradigmatically unhappy, given the emotional state view) and yet be satisfied with his or her life, for example, a tortured artist..²⁴ So, in some cases, satisfaction with life may be correlated with unhappiness.

Norms, Perspectives

Haybron also argues there is a problem in the very conception of life satisfaction judgments. Life satisfaction involves more than a belief, such as a belief that one's life is going well. It involves also an evaluation, affirming or endorsing one's life. And here norms and perspectives complicate matters.

Our attitudes toward our lives have an ethical dimension, he claims. They are not simply factual assessments of how things are going in our lives, but include norms that affect the assessments, norms having to do with our judgments not being arbitrary, but reasonable or relevant and also fitting some ethical norms related to responding to our lives virtuously. Someone might value drivenness and decry complacency, and such a person might believe it is best for one to be dissatisfied with one's life. Others, adopting norms such as gratitude and fortitude might be satisfied with their lives even when going through adversity or facing a bleak future.²⁵

Perspective, too, influences global life satisfaction judgments. Various researchers have noted that people's life satisfaction judgments can be influenced by things such as good weather, finding money, and seeing someone with a difficult handicap. Such experiences seem to give the person different perspectives that influence the judgment. The same individual can make varied life satisfaction judgments, too, shifting from one perspective to another.²⁶ So a widow might,

while reflecting on her loss, be not so satisfied with her life. Alternatively, recollecting how good her life with her husband was and that others have lost loved ones at younger ages, she might be quite satisfied with her life. These perspectives are often arbitrary, and the varied influences they have on life satisfaction judgments suggest problems with seeing such judgments as good gauges of happiness or well-being.²⁷

These questions show that satisfaction with life as a whole is not a straightforward clear concept. This makes it problematic with regard to determining whether it will serve as a rough synonym for happiness, or a proxy for it in research. Haybron believes it has to be rejected as a definition of happiness. It isn't clear that everyone makes such judgments and the norms and perspectives involved make it questionable whether it can be seen as a gauge of individual happiness. While life satisfaction will not work as a definition for happiness of an individual, Haybron notes that it may still have value for research purposes. In aggregating the data regarding life satisfaction for large groups and populations, he claims, the differences may wash out.²⁸

Reality, Challenge, Accomplishment

Reality, Truth and Mistakes

The life satisfaction conception of happiness is a theory of subjective well-being. It sees happiness or well-being as dependent on the feelings, attitudes, desires and ideals of the individual, and not criteria outside the individual (e.g., a standard that must be met). But are there objective elements that must be added? I will consider several: (1) If a person's life satisfaction is based on wrong beliefs, does that raise questions about whether they really are

happy? And (2) Are there cases of goals, challenges, accomplishments that are important to happiness and well-being that cannot be reduced to satisfaction?

Robert Nozick introduced the famous example of the “experience machine.” It has to do with whether we would choose to be hooked up to a machine that stimulated our brains to induce guaranteed pleasurable experiences without any antecedent activity or state of affairs bringing them about. In his book, *The Examined Life*, Nozick emphasizes that people want and value a connection with reality. He says “...the connection to actuality is important whether or not we desire it—and the experience machine is inadequate because it doesn’t give us that.”²⁹ We might note that when someone is hooked up to the experience machine, feeling many pleasures while not actually having experiences (for example, feeling the pleasures of having an exquisite meal while all the while simply hooked up to the machine), the happiness experienced (here conceived as a variety of hedonism) is, on Nozick’s view, mistaken. What about more ordinary mistakes?

What if I am satisfied with my life as a whole, judging it to be a life with which I am pleased and experiencing positive affect, but I am mistaken with regard to the facts about important domains of my life? Common examples we encounter in the literature include holding a relationship to be very important but being mistaken about it: your spouse is unfaithful and really doesn’t love you; your children have contempt for you, etc. We can add other examples: you have made a significant accomplishment, but are mistaken about it (the novel you have written is poor and uninteresting; your research is, etc.) Does this make a difference for life satisfaction? Feldman notes:

There are people who are confused about their lives. They think things have happened to them, but in fact those things have not happened. We might say that happiness requires being satisfied with the things that have *actually happened* in your life as a whole. Alternatively, we might say that happiness requires being satisfied with the things that *you think have happened* to you in your life as a

whole. Depending upon the details of formulation, these views could yield different judgments concerning the case of a person who is mistaken about what happened to him.³⁰

In discussing this issue with people I find that some believe that it is the beliefs upon which the life satisfaction is based that matter, and the truth of them is not critical; others believe that the truth is critical, and a false happiness is not really happiness. If Nozick is right in claiming that the connection to reality, actuality is important, that would steer us toward saying that the truth matters.

While I find myself drawn to the view that happiness judgments can be mistaken, and that a person could judge himself to be happy and be wrong, I also recognize we have to be careful to not be too demanding in an emphasis on the truth. It has been noted that positive illusions related to our lives are not uncommon, and some claim they are necessary. Headey and Wearing, in *Understanding Happiness* claim

...happy people construct a picture of reality in which they see their current lives as being almost as satisfying as the life they can expect, aspire to and deserve, but considerably better than the worst period in their life, the life their parents led and the life of the average person in the country.³¹

They also note that people have a *sense of relative superiority*, believing they are above average in their performance in their job, their driving, parenting, etc., and that believing you are below average in some domain, while perhaps accurate, is often a sign of depression.³² These sorts of “illusions” are common enough that we have to accept them to some degree. However, it seems to me that we can accept this while also claiming that accuracy and the truth are important.

While, of course, not all of us can be above average drivers, and we might let the belief of being above average in that domain go by, we would not let the belief that one is the best driver in the world go by. It involves a matter of degree.

Perhaps because of my training in philosophy, I find that I incline toward the view that truth and objective states of affairs (reality) are important. A life satisfaction based on some critical falsities seems to me to be wrong. It seems to me one can believe one is happy and be incorrect. First person, as well as third person judgments of happiness, can be wrong. But the mistakes would have to be concerning relatively more important aspects of one's life. So if my being able to write papers on happiness that are insightful and stimulating is an important goal in my life critical to my happiness, and I believe I am successful in doing this, while in fact my papers are meaningless and demented drivel, and people are out of kindness simply humoring me, it seems to me that my believed and felt happiness is mistaken. On the other hand, if I am by and large correct with regard to the more important aspects of my life, but incorrect about some aspects of my life that are not so central (for example, incorrect in believing that I am an above average driver, that I am free of any habits or traits that are annoying to other people, and that I am above average in doing internet searches on computer) my believed happiness would not be undermined. Positive *illusions* of a relatively minor sort would not count as mistakes major enough to contradict believed happiness, but major positive *delusions* would.

Challenge and Accomplishment

I would like to consider an example which I believe will help to raise a question as to whether there is a feature of at least some lives that adds to the happiness and well-being of those lives, but which cannot in any straightforward way be accounted for by "subjective" views of happiness, including the life satisfaction view.

Jane Hodgson was an abortion rights advocate in the United States. She was the only doctor in the United States who was convicted of illegally performing an abortion in a hospital, a conviction which was overturned by the 1973 Roe v. Wade U. S. Supreme Court decision. Her obituary in the New York Times includes a quotation from her reported in a biography of her: “I think in many ways I’ve been lucky to have been part of this. If I hadn’t gotten involved, I would have gone through life probably being perfectly satisfied to go to the medical society parties and it would have been very, very dull. I would have been bored silly.”³³ Hodgson is clearly judging her life to have been better by having been involved in this challenge and activity. How can we understand and account for this feature of her life that she sees as having made such a difference?

The philosopher Ronald Dworkin sees the idea of a good life, or well-being, as having to do with “how we should live to make good lives for ourselves.”³⁴ Dworkin claims we must recognize a complexity in the concept of well-being that includes a distinction between “volitional well-being,” having or achieving what a person wants, and “critical well-being,” which is “having or achieving what he *should* want, that is, the achievements of experiences that it would make his life a worse one *not* to want.”³⁵ When he goes on to further develop the idea of critical interests he claims there are two different and competing general models of value which are used in “conceiving the source and nature of the value a life can have for the person whose life it is”: *the model of impact* (its value consists in its product—“its consequences for the rest of the world,” and *the model of challenge* (which Dworkin himself prefers)--“a good life lies in the inherent value of a skillful performance of living.”³⁶ These address the concerns people have when they ask about their own lives or the lives of others whether they “add up to anything.” What is relevant to the Hodgson example is the model of challenge. She seems to see

her involvement with regard to abortion rights as something that added something significant to her life, enhancing the quality of it and her happiness. And this seems to be something that she sees as a part of her life, not something external to it (as the impact of a life might be claimed to be).

We have already discussed Nozick's "experience machine" and his belief that people want and value a connection with reality. He says "...the connection to actuality is important whether or not we desire it—that is *why* we desire it—and the experience machine is inadequate because it doesn't give us *that*."³⁷

Nozick applies the concept of reality to life in a number of ways. One has to do with whether our experiences actually correspond to reality, which he believes is important to us. Another way he applies the concept of reality to how we think of life is to claim there are ways that people can be "more real." In introducing this idea he says

We are not merely empty buckets to be stuffed with happiness or pleasure; the self's nature and character matter, too, even matter more. It is easy to fall into an "end-state" conception of the self, demarcating some particular condition for it to reach and maintain. As important as the self's constituents and structure, however, are the ways it transforms itself.³⁸

He claims we can distinguish degrees of reality of the self, and to elucidate the idea uses as examples some literary characters, such as Hamlet, Lear and Antigone, and some people, such as Socrates, Moses and Gandhi, who are more real--"more vivid, concentrated, focused, delineated, integrated, inwardly beautiful."³⁹ He also notes that these people have had significant impact, which stemmed from their greater reality. He suggests that we can reflect on when we feel more real ourselves. He sees being "more real" as enhancing well-being.⁴⁰

This may explain Jane Hodgson's appreciation of the challenge she took on and how it enhanced her life. If we think of some of the features of "greater reality" in a life according to

Nozick's description, her life certainly was more vivid, concentrated, focused and perhaps more integrated than it would have been without her involvement in the fight for abortion rights. But whether it does apply to her particular case, this is an aspect about life that also deserves some attention in considerations of happiness and well-being.

Like Nozick, James Griffin values the importance of reality and an objective basis for judgments about well-being. He criticizes what he calls the "enjoyment account" of well-being by noting it leaves out too much, such as accomplishment and close, authentic personal relationships.⁴¹ In a recent article he writes of "accomplishment making a life better for the person living it."⁴² I would like to focus on accomplishment as Griffin discusses it because I think it shows (as does Nozick's discussion of reality) a limitation of more subjective approaches to happiness and well-being.

Griffin sees accomplishment as one of the main prudential values of life. Others include components of human existence (such as agency, autonomy, capabilities, liberty), understanding, enjoyment, and deep personal relations⁴³. Accomplishment is to be distinguished from achievement (which seems to focus more on competition and the exercising of skill). Accomplishment is something seen as "giving life weight and point."⁴⁴ The desire for accomplishment is different from wanting a *sense* of accomplishment, and doesn't necessarily include that the accomplishment affects my experience.⁴⁵ So it would seem that accomplishment on his view would enhance my well-being even if I did not know of my accomplishment and did not feel pleasure or satisfaction concerning the accomplishment.⁴⁶ Accomplishment, as Griffin discusses it, offers a valuable explanation of the Hodgson example. She does indicate that that she values it, so she has some correlative subjective experiences that enhance the quality of her life.

So it seems that there may be features of lives of the sort discussed, accomplishment, challenge, and being “more real” that add value to our lives that cannot be reduced to enjoyment or satisfaction.

Are there ways of interpreting a life satisfaction conception of happiness so that it could handle these examples I have given? One might argue that the challenges and accomplishments that are important for persons are part of that on which life satisfaction is based. However, as these are discussed by Nozick and Griffin, they add something significant to the lives of persons regardless of whether or not the person knows it or derives satisfaction from it, and this is something that the life satisfaction view cannot handle. It is something that none of the subjective conceptions of happiness can handle.

Life satisfaction conceptions of happiness are popular, and with good reason. They make sense, and serve as a basis for much empirical research on happiness. We have looked at some questions about them, and some criticisms, in particular raised by Fred Feldman and Dan Haybron. I have argued that it is important to keep in mind the conceptual core of happiness and that the distinction that some make between happiness and well-being, one being subjective and the other objective, may not be well-taken. There are also important issues about to what degree true belief and accuracy is important for happiness judgments, and whether there are important features of some people’s lives related to challenge and accomplishment that may not be captured in life satisfaction conceptions and other subjective conceptions of happiness.

¹ “Attitude” is used in somewhat different senses in philosophy and the social sciences. I will be discussing this further later.

² Aristotle

³ Haybron, 2000, p. 211.

⁴ Haybron, 2007, p. 101.

⁵ Diener, 1984, pp. 543-544

⁶ Diener and Biswas-Diener, 2008, p. 4.

⁷ Veenhoven, 1984, p. 22.

⁸ Veenoven, 1984, pp. 22-23.

⁹ Veenhoven, 2009, p. 6.

¹⁰ Veenoven, 2009, p. 15.

¹¹ Diener, Sapyta and Suh, 1998

¹² Veenhoven, R., *World Database of Happiness*, Erasmus University Rotterdam.

Available at: <http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl>. Accessed August 15, 2010. Use link to Measures of Happiness and category of Examples.

¹³ Diener and Emmons, 1985.

¹⁴ For further discussion of this see Chekola, 1974 pp. 78 and following.

¹⁵ Brülde, p. 9.

¹⁶ Telfer, p. 8-9. (Telford, 1980)

¹⁷ Haybron, 2005, p. 292

¹⁸ Feldman, 2008, p. 227.

¹⁹ Feldman, 2008., p. 231.

²⁰ Feldman, 2008, p. 231.

²¹ Feldman, 2008, pp. 232-233.

²² Haybron, 2005, p. 291.

²³ Haybron, 2005, p. 307.

²⁴ Haybron, 2005, p. 291.

²⁵ Haybron, 2007, pp. 106-107.

²⁶ Haybron, 2007, pp. 109-111.

²⁷ Haybron, 2007, pp. 121-126, is careful to note that this is a problem foremost with regard to individual life satisfaction judgments. In large scale studies it could be that the variations due to norms and perspectives wash out and the large scale correlations are reliable.

²⁸ Haybron, 2007, p. 122.

²⁹ Nozick, 1989, p. 107. (Nozick, 1989)

³⁰ Feldman, 2008, p. 228.

³¹ Headey and Wearing, p. 115

³² Headey and Wearing, p. 47.

³³ New York Times, 2006, p. 31.

³⁴ Dworkin, 1999, p. 196.

³⁵ Dworkin, 1999, p. 230.

³⁶ Dworkin, 1999, pp. 240-241.

³⁷ Nozick, 1989, p. 107.

³⁸ Nozick, 1989, p. 128.

³⁹ Nozick, 1989, p. 131.

⁴⁰ Nozick admits that this notion of reality is far from precise, but suggests that we not too easily dismiss it. He notes that many notions took a long time to clarify and sharpen. He also notes that the way in which the notion seems to be both descriptive and normative, and to “straddle the fact/value gap” is awkward. Nevertheless, it could perhaps help in making progress on “the otherwise intractable fact/value problem.” (Nozick 1989, pp. 138-139) One might note that these points might be suggested about the concepts of happiness, well-being, and quality of life as well.

⁴¹ Griffin, 1986, p. 19.

⁴² Griffin, 2007, p. 141.

⁴³ Griffin, 1986, p. 67.

⁴⁴ Griffin, 2007, p. 143.

⁴⁵ Griffin, 1986, p. 19.

⁴⁶ We might also raise the question whether, if one mistakenly believes that one has had an accomplishment in one's life and takes satisfaction in that belief, one's well-being is less by virtue of the lack of real accomplishment, even though there are some positive subjective experiences. Both Griffin and Nozick give importance to reality with regard to actual well-being that subjective views of happiness see as irrelevant (except for the vulnerability of the judgments of life satisfaction based on the false beliefs, should the truth be found out).

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