

Who Is the Happy Warrior? Philosophy Poses Questions to Psychology¹

Martha C. Nussbaum

Martha Nussbaum (born 1947) is the Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics in the Law School, Philosophy Department, and Divinity School at the University of Chicago. She earned her Ph.D. in philosophy from Harvard University in 1975. She holds more than fifty

honorary degrees from universities around the world. She has published more than twenty-five books, including *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (2001) and *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (2010). Her work addresses a wide range of philosophical and political questions, with an emphasis on the philosophy of ancient Greece and Rome, feminism, and ethics. The following essay, which takes its title from William Wordsworth's poem "Character of the Happy Warrior" (composed 1807), offers a philosophical critique of the concepts of happiness used by psychologists and social scientists.

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

—WORDSWORTH, "CHARACTER OF THE HAPPY WARRIOR," 1807

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

—NIETZSCHE, "MAXIMS AND ARROWS," 1889

Psychology has recently focused attention on subjective states of pleasure, satisfaction, and what is called "happiness." The suggestion has been made in some quarters that a study of these subjective states has important implications for public policy. Sometimes, as in the case of Martin Seligman's "positive psychology" movement, attempts are made to link the empirical findings and the related normative judgments

¹Editors' note: Included here is Part I of the article. Part II, entitled "Normative Questions," concerns the practical consequences of the Utilitarian (that is, Jeremy Bentham's) concepts of pleasure and happiness, especially for public policy. Part III, "Pursuing an Objective List: Some Misunderstandings," refutes some misconceptions about Nussbaum's position. And finally, Part IV, "The Truth in Subjective-State Analysis," suggests ways that public policy might benefit from psychological studies of "subjective well-being," if applied thoughtfully.

directly to the descriptive and normative insights of ancient Greek ethics and modern virtue ethics. At other times, as with Daniel Kahneman's work, the connection to Aristotle and other ancient Greek thinkers is only indirect, and the connection to British Utilitarianism is paramount; nonetheless, judgments are made that could be illuminated by an examination of the rich philosophical tradition that runs from Aristotle through to John Stuart Mill's criticisms of Bentham.^o

The aim of my paper is to confront this increasingly influential movement within psychology with a range of questions from the side of philosophy. Often these questions have a very long history in the discipline, going back at least to Aristotle; the more thoughtful Utilitarians, above all Mill, also studied them in depth. Some of these questions are conceptual; others are normative. After going through quite a number of them, I will attempt to correct some misunderstandings, within this psychological literature, of my own "objective-list" conception and the role I think it ought to play in public policy. And I will say what I think some appropriate roles for subjective-state analysis in public policy might be.

Conceptual Issues

What Is Pleasure?

Psychologists often talk about pleasure, and also about subjects' hedonic state.^o Too rarely, however, do they ask some very obvious questions about it that greatly affect any research program involving the concept. Two central questions are, is pleasure a single thing, varying only in intensity or duration, or is it plural, containing qualitative differences? And is it a sensation, or is it something more like a way of attending to the world, or even a way of being active?

Jeremy Bentham famously held that pleasure was a single sensation, varying only along the quantitative dimensions of intensity and duration (see my discussion in Nussbaum 2004). Modern psychology follows Bentham. Indeed, Kahneman explicitly traces his own conception of "hedonic flow" to Bentham (see, for example, Kahneman and Krueger 2006, p. 4). And yet, is Bentham correct? Does his account correctly capture the complexity of our experience of pleasures of many sorts? We speak of pleasure as a type of experience, but we also refer to activities

Bentham: Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), philosopher and founder of modern Utilitarianism, the view that the best course is the one that maximizes "utility," or the greatest benefit. John Stuart Mill accepted the Utilitarian view in general but was critical of some of Bentham's ideas.

hedonic state: the level of the subject's experience of pleasure.

as "my pleasures," saying things like, "My greatest pleasures are listening to Mahler^o and eating steak." We also use verbal locutions, such as "enjoying" and "taking delight in." (The ancient Greeks used such verbal locutions much more frequently than they used the noun.) Such ways of talking raise two questions: Is pleasure a sensation at all, if such very different experiences count as pleasures? And is it single? Could there be any one thing that both eating a steak and listening to Mahler's Tenth, that harrowing confrontation with grief and emptiness, have in common?

These questions were subtly discussed by Plato, Aristotle, and a whole line of subsequent philosophers.² Bentham simply ignores them. As Mill writes in his great essay "On Bentham," "Bentham failed in deriving light from other minds." For him, pleasure simply must be a single homogeneous sensation, containing no qualitative differences. The only variations in pleasure are quantitative. Pleasures can vary in intensity, duration, certainty or uncertainty, propinquity or remoteness, and, finally, in causal properties (tendency to produce more pleasure, and so on). The apparent fact that pleasures differ in quality, that the pleasure of steak eating is quite different from the pleasure of listening to Mahler's Tenth, bothered Bentham not at all; he does not discuss such examples.

Perhaps the reason for this problem is that Bentham's deepest concern is with pain and suffering, and it is somewhat more plausible to think of pain as a unitary sensation varying only in intensity and duration. Even here, however, qualitative differences seem crucial: the pain of a headache is very different from the pain of losing a loved one to death. As Mill says, Bentham's view expresses "the empiricism of one who has had little experience" — either external, he adds, or internal, through the imagination.

Nor was Bentham worried about interpersonal comparisons, a problem on which economists in the Utilitarian tradition have spent great labor, and one that any program to use subjective satisfaction for public policy must face. For Bentham there was no such problem. When we move from one person to many people, we 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. One of the most attractive aspects of his thought is its great compassion for the suffering of animals, which he took to

Mahler: Gustav Mahler (1860–1911), Austrian composer, known especially for his ten symphonies.

²For one good philosophical overview, see Gosling and Taylor (1982); see also the excellent treatment in Taylor (1976). An admirable general philosophical discussion is Gosling (1969).

be unproblematically comparable to human suffering.³ This attractive aspect, however, is marred by his failure even to consider whether animal pains and pleasures are qualitatively different, in at least some respects, from human pains and pleasures.

What is appealing about Bentham's program is its focus on urgent needs of sentient beings for relief from suffering and its determination to take all suffering of all sentient beings into account. But Bentham cannot be said to have developed anything like a convincing account of pleasure and pain, far less of happiness. Because of his attachment to a strident simplicity, the view remains a sketch crying out for adequate philosophical development.

Modern philosophers starting off from the Greco-Roman tradition have noticed that already in that tradition there is a widespread sense that Bentham's sort of answer will not do. A proto-Benthamite answer is familiar, in views of hedonists such as Eudoxus⁴ and the title character in Plato's *Philebus* who represented Eudoxus's position. But there is an equally widespread sense among the Greek thinkers that this view will not do. The young interlocutor Protarchus, in the *Philebus*, is quickly brought by Socrates to reject it: he sees that the sources of pleasure color the pleasure itself, and that the pleasure of philosophizing is just not the same qualitatively as the pleasure of eating and sex. (The name "Philebus" means "lover of young men," and the character is represented as using his unitary view of pleasure to seduce attractive youths.)⁵

Aristotle takes up where the *Philebus* left off. Throughout his work he insists on the tremendous importance of qualitative distinctions among the diverse constituent parts of human life; he later suggests that these distinctions affect the proper analysis of the concept of pleasure. Notoriously, however, he offers two very different conceptions of pleasure, one in book VII and one in book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. 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, supervenes on, activity, "like the bloom on the cheek of youth." In other words, it is so closely linked to the relevant activities that it

³He denied that animals suffered at the very thought of death, and thus he argued that the painless killing of an animal is sometimes permitted.

⁴No writings of Eudoxus survive; we know his views through Aristotle's characterization of them in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1172b9 ff. and by reports of later doxographers; he is usually taken to be the inspiration for the title character in Plato's *Philebus*.

⁵In the Greek world, this would not mark him as depraved, only as greedy: he is the Greek equivalent of a womanizer.

cannot be pursued on its own, any more than bloom can be adequately cultivated by cosmetics. To get that bloom you have to pursue health. Similarly, one gets the pleasure associated with an activity by doing that activity in a certain way, apparently a way that is not impeded or is complete. It would seem that what Aristotle has in mind is that pleasure is a kind of awareness of one's own activity, varying in quality with the activity to which it is so closely linked. In any case, pleasure is not a single thing, varying only in intensity and duration (the Eudoxan position). It contains qualitative differences, related to the differences of the activities to which it attaches.

J. S. Mill follows Aristotle. In a crucial discussion in *Utilitarianism*, he insists that "[n]either 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 *Republic* book IX, 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 (with Aristotle in Book VII) or, with Aristotle in Book X, 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 refers to "which of two modes of existence is the most grateful to the feelings." Clearly, however, the unity of the Benthamite calculus has been thrown out, to be replaced by a variegated conception, involving both sensation and activity, and prominently including qualitative distinctions. It is for this reason that philosophers today typically find Mill more subtle and conceptually satisfactory than Bentham.

Modern philosophical discussion of pleasure follows Aristotle and Mill. In one of the best recent accounts, J. C. B. Gosling's (1969) book *Pleasure and Desire*, Gosling investigates three different views of what pleasure is: the sensation view (Bentham/Eudoxus), the activity view (Aristotle's first account), and what he calls the "adverbial" view (pleasure is a particular way of being active, a view closely related to Aristotle's second account). Uneasily, with much uncertainty, he opts, with Aristotle, for the adverbial view.

Now it is obvious that such debates influence the ways in which one would study pleasure empirically. If Aristotle, Mill, and Gosling are correct, it would not make sense to ask people to rank all their pleasures along a single quantitative dimension: this is just bullying people into disregarding features of their own experience that reflection would

quickly reveal. People are easily bullied, particularly by prominent psychologists, and so they do answer such questions, rather than respond, "This question is ill-formed." If Mill and Aristotle are right, however, they would quickly agree on reflection that qualitative differences matter.

Moreover, any experiment that simply assumes pleasure to be a hedonic state, something like a sensation, would also be inadequate, say Mill and Aristotle, to the complexity of human experience, since people agree that activity matters: they would not think that the pleasure derived from being plugged into Robert Nozick's "experience machine" was equivalent to a pleasure associated with actually doing the activity oneself (Nozick 1974, pp. 42–45).

What Is Satisfaction with One's Life as a Whole?

Some of the most influential experiments ask not about pleasure or hedonic flow, but about satisfaction with one's life as a whole. Typical is the question posed by Kahneman, "Taking all things together, how satisfied are you with *your life as a whole* these days? Are you very satisfied, satisfied, not very satisfied, not at all satisfied?" (Kahneman and Krueger 2006, p. 7 n. 2, emphasis in the original). Notice here the bullying we encountered before: people are simply told that they are to aggregate experiences of many different kinds into a single whole, and the authority of the questioner is put behind that aggregation. There is no opportunity for them to answer something plausible, such as, "Well, my health is good, and my work is going well, but I am very upset about the Iraq war, and one of my friends is very ill." Not only is that opportunity not provided, but, in addition, the prestige of science—indeed of the Nobel Prize itself—is put behind the instruction to reckon all life elements up as a single whole. The fact that people answer such questions hardly shows that this is the way that they experience their lives.

If we bracket that difficulty, however, we arrive at another one. There is a deep ambiguity about the question being asked. The psychologists who pose this question take the question to be a request for a report of a subjective state of satisfaction, which is at least closely akin to the feeling of pleasure. (Kahneman treats this question and the hedonic flow question, on the whole, as different ways of getting at the same thing.) One might indeed hear the question that way. But one might also hear it in a very different way, as a request for a reflective judgment about one's life, which judgment might or might not be accompanied by feelings of satisfaction, contentment, or pleasure.

Consider Mill's last words: "You know that I have done my work" (Packe 1954, p. 507). Now I would say that this is in one way an answer to the overall satisfaction question: Mill is reporting, we might say,

satisfaction with his life as a whole. He has done what he aimed to do. And yet it seems highly unlikely that Mill, on his deathbed, suffering from physical pain and from the fear of death that he acknowledges not being able to get rid of, is experiencing feelings of satisfaction or pleasure. (Mill once reports that the one great attraction of a belief in a life after death [which he finds himself ultimately unable to accept] is the hope it yields of being reunited "with those dear to him who have ended their earthly life before him"—a loss, he continues, that "is neither to be denied nor extenuated" [Mill 1998, p. 120]. So he would no doubt be struggling, on his deathbed, with the eternal loss of Harriet^o in addition to his own demise.) While judging that his life is on balance successful, he is almost certainly not experiencing feelings of satisfaction or pleasure.

Since the psychologists who work with this question do not notice this ambiguity, they do nothing to sort things out, so we do not really know which question their subjects are answering. Probably some are answering one question, some the other. What would be needed to progress would be conceptual work to separate the feeling-conception from the judgment-conception, and then a set of questions designed to tease apart those distinct notions.

In my own case, the ambiguity produces something like a contradiction. That is, my own conception of a good life attaches a great deal of value to striving, longing, and working for a difficult goal. So, if I ever notice myself feeling feelings of satisfaction, I blame myself and think that, insofar as I have those feelings, I am like Mill's "pig satisfied" or Aristotle's "dumb grazing animals," and thus, reflectively, I report dissatisfaction with my life as a whole. Nor do I think that I am an unusual case. As I have indicated, Mill's contrast between Socrates and the pig reveals similar values, and anyone whose culture is deeply influenced by romanticism, with its exaltation of longing and yearning (or, indeed, by the more romantic varieties of Christianity, such as Augustine's), would have the same difficulty: insofar as one is feeling satisfied, thus far one's life is not a success. That is what Nietzsche^o is getting at in my epigraph: having feelings of satisfaction as a goal, he thinks, is a rather base thing, something that he associates with the impoverishment of English culture, as contrasted with German romanticism. Zarathustra, asked whether he

Harriet: Harriet Taylor Mill (1807–1858), Mill's wife and an important influence on his thinking.

Nietzsche: Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), German philosopher, critic of Christianity, and author of *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) and *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883–1885) among other works.

is happy, responds, "Do I strive after happiness? I strive after my works."⁶ Schiller, Beethoven, and Mahler might have said that they were satisfied with their life as a whole—in the reflective-judgment sense. They probably, however, did not report many feelings of satisfaction, and they would have worried about themselves if they had had such feelings. (Indeed, Mahler's Resurrection Symphony revolves precisely around the contrast between the herdlike feeling of satisfaction and the more exalted judgment that one's whole life is rich and meaningful—because it is governed by an active kind of love. The former is represented by the swoopy, aimless clarinet phrases of the third movement, the latter by the passionate heartbeat that the final movement associates with the wings of the soul.)⁷

What Is Happiness?

Bentham simply identifies happiness with pleasure. Kahneman on the whole agrees with Bentham. Some psychologists are more subtle. Seligman's conception of authentic happiness, for example, involves both positive emotion and valuable activity (Seligman 2002). But (to return to my question about Socrates and the pig) how are these two constituents related? Are they both necessary for happiness and jointly sufficient? Is one more important than the other? And must the positive emotion be suitably linked to the good activity, a kind of taking delight in one's good activity?

Here is what Aristotle thought: that activity is far and away the main thing, and that pleasure will normally crop up in connection with doing good activities without struggle, the way a virtuous person does them. Pleasure accompanies activity, and completes it, like, he says, the bloom on the cheek of a healthy young person. That example implies, too, that it would be totally mistaken to pry the pleasure apart from the activity and seek it on its own: for it would then not be the bloom on the cheek of a healthy person, it would be the rouge on the cheek of a person who has not bothered to cultivate health. And Aristotle also thought that sometimes the pleasure would not arrive: for example, the courageous person who is about to lose his life in battle is happy, but has no pleasant emotion, because he is losing everything. Wordsworth's^o very Aristotelian poem, "Character of the Happy Warrior," tells a similar tale, describing the "happy warrior" as "happy" because he is active in accordance with all the virtues, and yet he has little if any pleasure, and a good deal of pain.

Wordsworth: William Wordsworth (1770–1850), a major English Romantic poet.

⁶See the excellent treatment of this passage in Birault (1985).

⁷See my analysis of the symphony in Nussbaum (2001b).

Wordsworth is a useful interlocutor at this point, because we can see that the Aristotelian idea was dominant until Bentham's influence dislodged it, changing the very way that many people, at least, hear the English word "happiness." So powerful was the obscuring power of Bentham's oversimplification that a question that Wordsworth takes to be altogether askable, and which, indeed, he spends 85 lines answering—the question what happiness really is—soon looks to philosophers under Bentham's influence like a question whose answer is so obvious that it cannot be asked in earnest. Thus early twentieth-century philosopher Henry Prichard, albeit a foe of Utilitarianism, was so influenced in his thinking about happiness by Bentham's conception that he simply assumed that any philosopher who talks about happiness must be identifying it with pleasure or satisfaction. When Aristotle asks what happiness is, Prichard argued, he cannot really be asking the question he appears to be asking, since the answer to that question is obvious: happiness is contentment or satisfaction. Instead of asking what happiness consists in, then, he must really be asking about the instrumental means to the production of happiness.⁸ Nietzsche, similarly, understands happiness to be (uncontroversially) a state of pleasure and contentment, and expresses his scorn for Englishmen who pursue that goal, rather than richer goals involving suffering for a noble end, continued striving, activities that put contentment at risk, and so forth. Apparently unaware of the richer English tradition about happiness represented in Wordsworth's poem, he simply took English "happiness" to be what Bentham said it was. So, much later, did Finnish sociologist Erik Allardt, when he wrote an attack on the idea that happiness was the end of social planning, entitling his book *Having, Loving, Being*—active things that he took to be more important than satisfaction, which Finns, heir of Nordic romanticism, typically think quite unimportant (Allardt 1975).⁹ Like Nietzsche, he understood the "happiness" of the social scientists to be a state of pleasure or satisfaction. (He is correct about the social scientists, if not about "happiness.")

Aristotle's richer conception is still present in our lives, and we can see that ideas like Seligman's idea of authentic happiness capture something of its spirit.¹⁰ According to this Aristotelian tradition, what we all can agree about is that happiness (*eudaimonia*) is something like flourishing human living, a kind of living that is active, inclusive of all that has intrinsic value, and complete, meaning lacking in nothing that would

⁸Prichard (1935) is famously discussed and criticized in Austin (1979). My account of Prichard follows Austin's, including his (fair) account of Prichard's implicit premises.

⁹A brief summary of some of the argument in English can be found in Allardt (1993). (The original language of the book is Swedish because Allardt is a Swedish-speaking Finn.)

¹⁰For an excellent recent analysis, arguing that the Aristotelian view captures best our intuitive sense of what happiness is, see Nozick (1989, chap. 10).

make it richer or better. Everything else about happiness is disputed, says Aristotle, but he then goes on to argue for a conception of happiness that identifies it with a specific plurality of valuable activities, including activity in accordance with excellences¹¹ (valuable traits) of many sorts, including ethical, intellectual, and political excellences, and activities involved in love and friendship. Pleasure, as I have said, is not identical with happiness, but it usually (not always) accompanies the unimpeded performance of the activities that constitute happiness.

Something like this is the idea that Wordsworth is relying on, when he asks, in each of the many areas of life, what the character and demeanor of the "happy Warrior" would be, and answers that question. As J. L. Austin^o (1979, p. 20) 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 he acts in accordance with those traits. He is moderate, kind, courageous, loving, a good friend, concerned for the community, honest,¹² 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.

So would Seligman agree with Aristotle and Wordsworth that the happy warrior is indeed happy? Or does he require pleasant emotion in addition to the good activity? If even Seligman's conception is underspecified, however, Kahneman does not get to the point of noticing a problem at all and simply goes along with Bentham.

(I note that the happy warrior is still happy because he is still able to act well; Aristotle believed, however, that more extreme calamities could "dislodge" one from happiness, by removing one's sphere of activity. His example is Priam^o at the end of the Trojan War, who lost his children, his political freedom and power, and his personal freedom.)¹³

J. L. Austin (1911–1960): British philosopher of language and author of *How to Do Things with Words* (1962).

Priam: king of Troy in Homer's epic poem *The Iliad*.

¹¹I thus render Greek *aretē*, usually translated "virtue." *Aretē* 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 *aretē* of a pruning knife.

¹²Here 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.

¹³See my treatment of this passage in Nussbaum (2001a, chap. 10).

When we notice that happiness is complex, we are prepared to face yet a further question in connection with its proper analysis: does happiness require self-examination? All the ancient philosophers take issue with some of the popular accounts of *eudaimonia*^o in their cultural setting, by arguing that no life is truly happy unless it is accompanied by reflection. As Socrates says in the *Apology*, "The unexamined life is not worth living for a human being." One sees clearly in Plato's dialogues how controversial this emphasis is. When people are asked to define a virtue (seen as a putative part of happiness), they never include this element of knowledge or reflection—until Socrates patiently shows them that any definition that leaves it out is inadequate. On reflection, however, they always agree with Socrates, and I would say that my contemporary students do as well when they think about it for a while. Aristotle gives a little more room than Plato does to the nonintellectual elements in virtue, including emotions as at least one part of what each virtue involves. But he, too, sticks to the Socratic commitment, saying that each and every virtue of character requires the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom. Much later, as we saw, Mill insists that it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied.

Wordsworth, as you can see, agrees with the Socratic tradition: the happy warrior's "law is reason." He "depends / Upon that law as on the best of friends," and he strives to become ever "More skilful in self-knowledge."

The commitment to reflection is also a commitment to the ceaseless critical scrutiny of cultural beliefs and cultural authorities. Socrates interrogates everyone he meets, and nobody does very well, especially not received cultural authorities. Socrates himself does best only in the sense that he is aware of the incompleteness and fallibility of his knowledge of happiness. Although later Greek philosophers are more willing than Socrates to pronounce on what happiness is, they are no more trustful of their culture, and all are relentless critics of their cultures' dominant understandings of happiness. Aristotle excoriates the undue attention given to the accumulation of wealth, to pleasure,

eudaimonia: a Greek word used by Aristotle. Its literal meaning is "good spirited"; its closest equivalent in English is "happiness."

and to manly honor. The Stoics^o have similar criticisms. And yet, they hold, not implausibly, that if people give it enough thought, they will agree with their proposal, because it honors something that people will understand to be deep in themselves, the source of their human dignity.

The omission of this reflective element in happiness is one of the most disturbing aspects of the conceptual breeziness of contemporary subjective-state psychology, insofar as it is laying the groundwork for normative recommendations. Our democracy has many of the vices Socrates identified in his: haste, macho posturing, an excessive deference to wealth and honor. We badly need the element of reflection, and if prestigious psychologists simply tell us again and again that reflection is not a necessary element of the happy life, we may begin to believe it.

What Emotions Are Positive?

The part of subjective-state measurement that focuses on moment-to-moment hedonic flow assumes that some emotions are positive and others are negative. Seligman makes a similar assumption and tells us somewhat more about what he is assuming, in keeping with his rather greater interest in philosophical matters. For Seligman, positive emotions, to put it somewhat crudely, are those that feel good. So love would be positive, anger and grief negative, and so forth.

The ancient thinkers adopt a very different account. Again, this issue deeply affects any normative recommendations that may ultimately be based on the conceptual assumptions.

Since the Greeks and Romans (along with the best work on emotions in contemporary cognitive psychology) believe that emotions embody appraisals or evaluations of things in the world, they think it is very important for those appraisals to be correct. Fear, for example, involves (in Aristotle's view) the thought that there are serious damages impending and that one is not entirely in control of warding them off. Anger (again in Aristotle's view) involves the thought that a serious and inappropriate damage has been willfully inflicted on me or someone or something one cares about, and also the thought that it would be good for that damage to be made good somehow.

So we can see that there are a number of things that can go wrong here. One might get the facts wrong, thinking that a danger was present when it was not, or that a wrong had been done when it had not. One

Stoics: believers in a philosophical school founded by Zeno of Citium (335–263 BCE). They believed that virtue and happiness came from an understanding of the true nature of things.

might blame the wrong person for the wrong or might wrongly believe that the damage was blameworthy when it was in fact accidental. Finally, one can get the seriousness of the good or bad event wrong: one may get angry over trivia—Aristotle's example is when someone forgets your name, so you see the world has changed little. Or, again Aristotle's example, one might fear a mouse running across the floor.

Because emotions embody appraisals, one can get them to be appropriate only by getting appropriate appraisals. Thus, in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle gives the aspiring orator recipes for provoking anger in an audience—by convincing them that their enemies have wronged them in some illicit way, for example—and also recipes for taking anger away and calming people down—by convincing them that they had not in fact been wronged in the way they thought, or that the thing was not of much importance.

For all the ancient thinkers, a necessary and sufficient condition of an emotion's being truly positive—in the sense of making a positive contribution toward a flourishing life—is that it be based on true beliefs, both about value and about what events have occurred. This is as true of good-feeling as of bad-feeling emotion. Many instances of good-feeling emotion are actually quite negative, inasmuch as they are based on false beliefs about value. Pleasure is only as good as the thing one takes pleasure in: if one takes pleasure in harming others, that good-feeling emotion is very negative; even if one takes pleasure in shirking one's duty and lazing around, that is also quite negative. If one feels hope, that emotion is good only if it is based on accurate evaluations of the worth of what one hopes for and true beliefs about what is likely.

By the same token, many negative-feeling emotions are appropriate, and even very valuable. Aristotle, like Wordsworth, stresses that the courageous person is not free from fear: indeed, he will appropriately feel more fear and pain at the prospect of losing his life in battle than the mediocre person, because his life, which is at risk, is a valuable life and he knows it. Anger is a sign of what we care intensely about and a spur to justice. Aristotle does not urge people to be angry all the time; indeed, he thinks that the appropriate virtue in this area should be called "mildness of temper," in order to indicate that the good person does not get angry too often. But if someone did not get angry at damages to loved ones or kin, he would be "slavish," in Aristotle's view. Again, compassion is painful, but it is extremely valuable, when based on true beliefs and accurate evaluations of the seriousness of the other person's predicament, because it connects us to the suffering of others and gives us a motive to help them. Grief when a loved one dies is extremely appropriate (although Plato, admiring self-sufficiency, tried to deny this).

The ancient philosophers also stress that happy and sad emotions are conceptually interconnected: to the extent that you value uncertain things that are in the control of chance, you cannot help having both fear and hope about them, since their prospects are in fact uncertain. Where you have love, you will also have anxiety—and, very likely, anger. Where you have gratitude (when someone does something importantly nice for you), there is also conceptual space for anger (if that same person should decide to treat you badly). The Stoics saw clearly that the only way to get rid of negative emotions was not to value the uncertain things of human life at all and to care only for one's own inner states. But Aristotle, and most modern readers of the texts, reject that solution.

Aristotle is correct here. That is, emotions are positive or negative, in the sense relevant to normative thinking, according to the correctness of the appraisals or evaluations they contain. And since human life contains, in fact, many bad accidents and much bad behavior, there is no way a person who values friends, loved ones, work, and political action can avoid having many painful-feeling emotions, such as grief, fear, and anxiety. These emotions are valuable in themselves, as expressions of correct evaluation, and also spurs to good action. Can one imagine a struggle for justice that was not fueled by justified anger? Can one imagine a decent society that is not held together by compassion for suffering? Can one imagine love that does not assume the risk of grief? I believe that C. Daniel Batson's excellent research on compassion (which, I note en passant, has a rare philosophical sophistication and precision) has shown that the painful emotion leads to helping; so it is extremely important not to set out to avoid painful emotional experiences (Batson 1991).

Seligman, in particular, thinks that it is good to promote good-feeling emotions and to minimize bad-feeling emotions, often by thinking hopeful thoughts. But sometimes having a hopeful "take" on the bad thing that has happened seems to trivialize it. The Stoics urged people to respond to the death of a loved one with constructive sentiments, such as "Everyone is mortal, and you will get over this pretty soon." But are they correct? Is this really the way to take the measure of love? It is very interesting to see how Cicero, who in his voluminous correspondence consoled his friends with positive sentiments like Seligman's, rejects them utterly when his beloved daughter Tullia dies. Among the most moving letters in history are his outpourings of desperate grief to his friend Atticus, to whom he says that he feels that he is in a dark forest, and whose injunctions to put an end to his mourning he angrily rejects, saying that he cannot do it, and moreover, he thinks that he should not, even if he could.

Today, Americans are often embarrassed by deep grief and tend to give Stoic advice too freely. A colleague in my university lost his son: a

young man, troubled, who died either of a drug overdose or by suicide. I wrote him, saying that I thought this was the worst thing that could happen to someone and he had my sympathy. This man, whom I do not know very well, wrote back immediately, thanking me and saying, "I really dislike this American stuff about healing." (He is an American.) I inferred from that response that many other messages he had received had talked about healing, and he had gotten fed up with them. I am with him: it seems a deeply inappropriate way to think of the tragic death of a child.

So I would like to see psychology think more about positive pain, that is, the grief that expresses love, the fear that expresses a true sense of a threat directed at something or someone one loves, the compassion that shares the pain of a suffering person, the anger that says, "This is deeply wrong and I will try to right it."

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Understanding the Text

1. Near the beginning of this article, Nussbaum asks whether pleasure is "a single thing, varying only in intensity and duration, or . . . plural, containing qualitative differences?" (par. 3). Her view soon becomes clear: that pleasure is not simply a single thing that can reliably be measured on a scale of 1 to 10. But what does your experience tell you? Think about several things that give you pleasure. Which seems more true: that the pleasure you receive from these things is one thing that you experience in different degrees, or that pleasure is different in different experiences? Try to explain why this is the case — what is it about these experiences of pleasure that have led you to this position?
2. Nussbaum then asks, "And is it a sensation, or is it something more like a way of attending to the world, or even a way of being active?" (par. 3). This question is a bit more difficult than the first, but it hinges on the word "sensation," a word related to "senses." Based on your experience, do you see pleasure as chiefly a sensory experience? Or even necessarily a sensory experience at all? Or do you see it as an experience that involves both the mind and the body in a more complete way? Never? Sometimes? Always? Try to explain your position.
3. Nussbaum summarizes Aristotle's views on happiness (*eudaemonia*) as distinct from pleasure: "something like flourishing human living, a kind of living that is active, inclusive of all that has intrinsic value, and complete, meaning lacking in nothing that would make it richer or better." In addition, happiness seems to involve activity in accordance with "excellences" and with "love and friendship" (par. 24). Read the full paragraph carefully a few times. What does this mean in practice? What sort of life can you imagine that would meet these standards and exemplify the happy life?
4. Nussbaum is critical of a survey question that psychologists such as Daniel Kahneman often pose: "Taking all things together, how satisfied are you with *your life as a whole* these days?" She argues that there is "a deep ambiguity" about the question: it could be understood to be asking about your feeling about your life, or it could be asking for a judgment about your life. In the paragraphs that follow, she explains the difference, using examples from the life of philosopher John Stuart Mill, her own life, and even the composer Gustav Mahler's. But what about *your* life, or the life of some person you know well? Can you extend her explanation of the difference

between the “feeling-conception” and the “judgment-conception” by drawing on examples that are closer to home?

5. Nussbaum refers more than once to John Stuart Mill’s view that “it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied,” and she also quotes Socrates’s famous statement that “the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being.” But why is “reflection” or “self-examination” so important? And what, according to Nussbaum, does it have to do with happiness?

Reflection and Response

6. Nussbaum writes that “many instances of good-feeling emotion are actually quite negative, inasmuch as they are based on false beliefs about value.” And “by the same token, many negative-feeling emotions are appropriate, and even very valuable” (par. 39). Reread the section entitled “What Emotions Are Positive?” and write an explanation of these two statements, using your own examples. What do these ideas tell us about the true nature of happiness? How do they support Nussbaum’s argument against the “quantitative,” or single dimension, view of happiness employed by Jeremy Bentham and by some modern psychologists?
7. At one point, Nussbaum summarizes the views of Aristotle concerning pleasure (par. 22). Consider a specific activity that gives you pleasure and write a brief description. Reread the paragraph about Aristotle’s ideas with this activity and the pleasure it gives you in mind. Now try to apply Aristotle’s analysis to it. Write a short essay that discusses Aristotle’s views on happiness in light of a specific experience of your own. Do any (or perhaps all) of his ideas ring true in your experience?

Making Connections

8. Find William Wordsworth’s poem “Character of the Happy Warrior” (you can find copies on several websites). Read it carefully. How does it illustrate the concept of happiness that Nussbaum explicates? Quote from the poem and from Nussbaum’s essay to support your argument, but of course explain your own ideas fully as well.

From the Happiness of Virtue to the Virtue of Happiness: 400 BC – AD 1780

Darrin M. McMahon

Darrin M. McMahon is the Mary Brinsmead Wheelock Professor of History at Dartmouth College. He received his Ph.D. from Yale in 1998 and taught at Florida State University for 10 years, where he was the Ben Weider Professor and Distinguished Research Professor. McMahon is the author

of *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford University Press, 2001); *Happiness: A History* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006, named one of the Best Books of the Year in 2006 by the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Library Journal*, and *Slate Magazine*); and *Divine Fury: A History of Genius* (Basic Books, 2013). He is also the co-editor of several books: with Ryan Hanley, of *The Enlightenment: Critical Concepts in Historical Studies*, 5 vols. (Routledge, 2009); with Samuel Moyn, of *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History* (Oxford University Press, 2014); and, with Joyce Chaplin, of *Genealogies of Genius* (Palgrave, 2016). He has been published in *The New York Times*, *New York Times Book Review*, *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Literary Review*, and *Wall Street Journal*. The following selection is an excerpt from an article he published in the journal *Daedalus* in 2004.

Like Aristotle, the great majority of the founding fathers of . . . the American Republic . . . would likely have dismissed such talk [of a person’s perfect virtue resulting in happiness] as the defense of a philosopher’s paradox.^o 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.¹ 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

philosopher’s paradox: The author has been discussing the argument, sometimes made by Roman philosophers, that since happiness comes from a person’s attitude and will, and not from external forces, “the good man can be happy even on the rack” (a torture device).

Cicero: Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCE), a Roman statesman, orator, philosopher, and writer.

Epictetus (55–135 AD): a Greek philosopher of Stoicism.

¹This, I would argue, is true even of Epicureanism, although the case is certainly complicated. For more on Epicurus, see below.