

Happiness: Hedonic and Eudemonic Perspectives and Dynamics



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[03]
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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to review hedonic and eudemonic perspectives of happiness in order to inquire happiness as a multidimensional construct. In doing so, irrespective of philosophical deviations, we recognize possibilities of complementing hedonic and eudemonic variables of happiness in order to explain deep roots of the construct. Further, we observe a dynamic relationship between certain explicit and implicit variables and life happiness.

Keywords: Happiness, Hedonism, Eudemonism

Introduction

We are living in an ‘age of paradox’ where one facet of the world enjoys technologies of unimaginable sophistication while other facet of at least one billion people suffers without enough food to pass the day. On the other hand, even so called ‘economically developed countries’ achieve greater productivity and material success yet along the way succumb to new issues of environment pollution, deterioration of ethical standards, unrest, man-made diseases i.e. obesity, diabetics, heart and brain attacks along with other illnesses of modern life. As an example, United State of America (USA) has achieved sticking economic progress and

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higher Gross National Product (GNP) per capita over the past half a century. However, overall life satisfaction of Americans has been remaining nearly constant (Helliwell et al., 2015). According to Easterlin (2001) richer individuals are happier than poorer ones, but over a time the society did not become happier as it became richer. There is a limitation for material success of a person in terms of inducing happiness. In Sri Lanka perspectives, the same trend can be seen where there is no improvement in overall happiness of citizens, irrespective of upward growth of GDP. World Happiness Report 2012 states, that Sri Lanka's position of self-rated happiness is 137 out of 156 countries, whereas, this year (2015) the country has been ranked 132 out of 158 countries. All Asian countries other than Cambodia and Afghanistan perform better in the ranking than Sri Lanka in terms of happiness. Even though, recently Sri Lanka is recognized as a lower middle income country with high level of literacy rate, the overall happiness of the citizens is not parallel with such economic development. As a result of the visible decline in the overall happiness, now it is clearly understood that we need a different model of happiness, beyond the mere material growth. As an example, British philosophers talk about the greatest goods for the greatest number. Bhutan has adopted the goal of Gross National Happiness (GNH) instead of GDP. China promotes harmonious society. This paper intends to identify different facets of happiness as a multidimensional construct and provides a conceptual direction to design a happiness model beyond the so called 'material satisfaction'.

Two Perspectives of Happiness

According to the scientific literature, there are two relatively distinct perspectives for empirical inquiries into happiness. The first perspective is hedonism that reflects maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain which was articulated thousands of years ago by the Greek philosopher, Aristippus (Watson, 1895).

His concept of hedonism has been further elaborated by many others. Accordingly, Epicurus (342 – 270 BCE) introduced ethical hedonism which holds our primary moral obligation to maximize experience of pleasure (Brunschwin and Nussbaum, 1993). Later, David Hume (1711 – 1776) and Jeremy Bentham (1748 – 1832) used the philosophy of hedonism to develop a foundation of utilitarianism (Peterson et al., 2005) the doctrine, based on the fact that utility promotes happiness. Bentham defined happiness, based on psychological experience as the cumulative value of pleasure and pain and he further argued that moral quality of human action should be judged by its consequence on human happiness (Veenhoven, 2010). Hedonism is being promoted even now, under the name of hedonic psychology (Kahneman et al., 1999). Preconceived understanding among hedonic psychologists is that, happiness or well-being comprises of subjective happiness and all good or bad judgments of life, based on pleasure versus displeasure (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Further, they stated that hedonic viewpoint focuses on Subjective Well-Being (SWB) equated with positive affect and greater pleasure. Although, there is a continuous philosophical

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debate on validity and desirability of hedonism, most of the researchers who appreciate hedonism are still using SWB measurements to assess happiness, irrespective of availability of many tools, to evaluate pleasure and pain continuum in human lives. As an example, Diener (2000) highlighted that people's own evaluation of their lives must figure prominently in assessing the success of the society in terms of democratic notion. Further, Peterson (2005) pointed out that pursuit of pleasure is widely endorsed as a mean of happiness, especially by the western world.

The second perspective is eudemonism, which stands in contrast to hedonism reflecting the need of realizing one's true nature, in order to earn happiness. Many philosophers, religious masters and visionaries from both Western and Eastern worlds, challenged the hedonic view of happiness (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Eudemonic theories hold the stance that all desires and all outcomes that a person appreciates may not yield happiness or quality of life, (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Aristotle (384 – 322 BCE) clearly rejected Aristippus's view on happiness and emphasized that true happiness entails only after identifying one's virtues, cultivating them and living according to them (Aristotle, 2000). Freud saw hedonic happiness as a short-lived orgasmic experience that arrives due to release of primitive urges (Veenhoven, 2010). Similar position was further advanced by John Stuart Mill (1806 – 1873) and stressed that how self fulfillment facilitates sense of happiness. Eudaimonism is an ethical doctrine which facilitates to recognize one's unique potentials and live according to virtues (Waterman, 1993). Further, he emphasizes that eudemonic

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happiness arrives when an individual's life is governed according to virtues and is fully engaged. In line with eudemonic principles, Ryff and Singer (1996) elaborated concept of Psychological Well-Being (PWB), which emphasizes life-time developmental perspectives from six distinct aspects of life: autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, life purpose, mastery and positive relatedness. Ryff and Singer (1998) argued that model of SWB is narrow as a measure of well-being and not reflects key aspects of a healthy life. Frey and Stutzer (2002) explain happiness from two perspectives: objective happiness related to physiological measures and subjective happiness related to psychological measures. Most importantly, Ryan and Deci (2000) presented the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which posits the fact that satisfaction of basic psychological needs fosters both SWB and PWB. SDT is based on three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness and theorizes that the achievement of such needs is essential for both SWB as well as eudemonic well-being (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Further, they stated that eudemonic viewpoint focuses on PWB, which defines in terms of fully functioning of a person.

Even though hedonic happiness and eudemonic happiness are two contrasting paradigms, SDT posits that the happiness includes both aspects. Based on SDT, Ryan and Deci (2001) argued that conditions that promote hedonic happiness may not necessarily generate eudemonic well-being. As emotional status is indicative of organismic valuation process (Rogers, 1963), we believe that hedonic happiness also plays important role in the equation of

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overall life happiness. Irrespective of philosophical deviations between hedonic and eudemonic point of views of happiness, it is important to inquire as to how complement each other in order to understand holistic view of individuals, their context, and cultural factors that promote happiness (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Most importantly, life happiness is a product of both subjective factors as well as objective factors in various domains in life (Easterlin, 2006; Steel et al., 2008). Radcliff (2001) argue that happiness cannot be explained fully as a comparative or relative phenomenon, as most of the human evaluations are both affectively and cognitively directed. In the same vein, Brülde, (2007) identified happiness as the hybrid product of both cognitive and affective components. This aspect has been further validated by number of researchers (E.g. King and Napa, 1998; Sumner 1996). Based on the above conceptualization, it can be substantiated that happiness is a dual phenomenon which includes both cognitive and affective components that address both eudemonic and hedonic needs of happiness.

External Determinants of Happiness

External dimensions of life happiness refer to criteria proposed by others that may directly or indirectly facilitate to improve life happiness. Such dimensions may derive from theories, virtues, values, practices, directions or guidelines given by philosophers, visionaries, religious leaders, researchers etc. Underlining fact of application of explicit measurements to estimate life happiness is that such measurements directly contribute to happiness (Johnson & Krueger, 2006). As external dimensions are defined by others,

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such aspects may not fully comply with one's inner motives or desires and therefore Diener (2000) argued that constitute of a good life of a person should be defined by oneself.

However, our view is that objective or explicit dimensions should be considered to the equation of individual happiness as such dimensions are essential in terms of desirability and sustainability of entire mankind and the planet. Further, it is our view that to certain extent, the explicit standards of happiness may overlap with the eudemonic happiness which holds the stance that all desires and life outcomes that a person appreciates, may not necessarily deliver pleasure. In the next section we discuss number of explicit factors which may affect individual happiness.

Can happiness be earned from wealth? According to the literature, it has attempted to provide solutions from both hedonic as well as eudemonic point of views to this question thus answers are rather mixed and complicated. Wealth is considered as one of the most important aspects of happiness (Derber, 1979). According to Lyubomirsky et al., (2005), income is the most important indicator of life success in the modern society. In 2003, Diener et al., stated that financial status is very strongly related with SWB of very lower income groups while marginally related with the higher income groups. Further, Diener et al., (1999) explained that, when income remains stable over a long period of time, people may adapt to a particular level and SWB may change temporarily for sudden fluctuations of income levels. Microeconomic explanation for this relationship is that, as a result

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of higher purchasing power, individuals may have the options to select courses of action that may improve the well-being or happiness. The psychological explanation for the above correlation is that, the financial difficulties may hamper development of human potential and create stresses due to limitations of achieving day to day needs (Adler & Snibbe, 2003). However, there are adequate empirical evidences to substantiate that the relationship between financial status and happiness is not straight. Although hedonic viewpoint promotes wealth as a life promoter, eudemonic principles have not recognized wealth as a life goal. Kasser and Ryan (1993) pointed out, that desire for money does not necessarily bring happiness and instead too much emphasis on material wealth than other important life domains i.e. family relationships, community work may affect to deteriorate happiness and life satisfaction. As a result of placing too much priority for financial goals, individuals may not satisfy their psychological needs and in return happiness may further decline (Ryan and Deci, 2001). Rising economic or financial status marginally facilitates to increase happiness or life satisfaction (Helliwell, 2003; Gundelach and Kreiner 2004; Frey and Stutzer, 2002). Traditional factors such as the type of welfare state or the economic level in the society do not play a critical role in enhancing happiness (Gundelach and Kreiner, 2004). According to the Relative Standards Model, the value of financial resources is relative to one's expectations, desires, and individual standards (Campbell et al., 1976). Life happiness may consist of an individual's psychological perception on financial matters rather than the actual financial status (Johnson & Krueger, 2006). Most

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importantly, Johnson & Krueger (2006) proposed that life happiness depends on one's satisfaction with the financial status rather than the actual financial status.

Although mentally and physically healthy individuals are happier than their peers (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005), the relationship between health condition and happiness is complicated. It is reported that some individuals with an objectively poor health status, have shown high SWB and in contrast, certain individuals with good health demonstrated low well-being status (Ryan and Deci, 2001). This association reflects that there is a strong correlation between SWB and self-reported health and there is a considerably weaker correlation between SWB and objective health rating (Diener et al., 1999). Presence of illness often associates with displeasure and negative affect and illness may restrict opportunities for positive affects (Ryan and Deci, 2001). In the same line Lyubomirsky et al., (2005) stated that happy people are more mentally and physically healthier than less happy people. Further, they stressed that happy individuals are less likely to engage with harmful or unhealthy behaviors including smoking, abuse of drugs and alcohol. Moreover, Røysamb et al., (2003) identified that the association between well-being and health is influenced by environmental and genetic factors. Ryff et al., (2004) revealed that those who have high level of eudemonic well-being have lower levels of daily salivary cortisol, pro-inflammatory cytokines and cardiovascular risk compared with those who show lower levels of eudemonic well-being. Post (2005) also identified a strong correlation between well-being,

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happiness, health, and longevity of people who are emotionally kind and compassionate. Moreover, Ryff and Singer (2000) concluded that promoting interpersonal relationship is a vital root to develop positive health. Based on the above empirical evidence it can be theorized that eudemonic happiness which is based on self-development, purposeful engagement, and personal growth has a positive impact on physical and mental health and happiness positively correlates with measures of individual health.

Aristotle stated that “good living or happiness of an individual is necessary for the happiness of others” (Sherman, 1987, p. 589) emphasizing the importance of one’s individual happiness for the happiness of others. Social companionship or friendship is stronger than financial status in predicting happiness of individuals (Lane, 1999; Lane, 2000). Further Lane (2000) explained the importance of social relationship in creating happiness. According to Lane, friendships deliver intimacy and warmth which is an essential component of happiness. Berscheid (2003) and Demir et al., (2007) recognized interpersonal relationship as the most important single factor of existence and happiness of mankind. Human beings learn through imitation and gain happiness through meeting social norms and sense of belonging to the community (Helliwell and et al., 2015). Happy individuals have better social relationships than their less happy peers and chronically happy individuals have shown more positive attitudes towards others (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Therefore happy individuals may spontaneously tend to develop

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positive relationships with others. According to Ryan and Deci (2001) positive relationships with others are particularly critical in improving health status of individuals. Moreover, they have emphasized the importance of warm, trusting and supportive interpersonal relationships for individual happiness. Christakis and Fowler (2009) in their book: *The surprising power of our social networks and how they shape our lives*, stated that human network has its own life and therefore individual well-being depends on the well-being of those around them. Individual's success depends not only by fulfilling one's own needs but also meeting needs of others who are in the human network. More to the point, Opatha (2010) defined 'good person' as an individual who concerns both wellbeing of own and others. A 'good person' should invest his or her time, energy and other resources for the development of self as well as others (Opatha, 2010). In family life it is identified that married people are happier than those who are single (Diener et al 1999; Veenhoven, 1989). Gundelach and Kreiner (2004) identified a significant relationship between living with stable relationships and time spent with friends and happiness. Most importantly they concluded that the difference between countries where people are happy and less happy is social relationships, emphasizing importance of social tie-up with other fellow beings. According to Gundelach and Kreiner (2004) social capital which refers to strong webs of social interaction and interpersonal trust is a property of aggregated communities. This aspect may be very vital, especially for countries in the eastern region where social relationships are considered as one of the most important aspects of day-to-day life. Fulfillment of other's

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needs may influence a person's well-being than the fulfillment of one's own personal needs (Tay and Diener, 2011). According to the above empirical evidence, it is clear that stable relationship with members of the community and social companionships plays a significant role in enhancing happiness of individuals.

Internal Determinants of Happiness

Internal factors refer to broader individual's personality, psychological, cognitive and motivational variables, which influence either positively or negatively on happiness. It is observed in the literature, that there are two extreme views on well-being and happiness between economists and psychologists: 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches. 'Top-down' approach refers to the impact of broader personality and cognitive factors on happiness or well-being (Diener et al., 2003) where people are seen as fairly adaptive for a life event and would return to the happiness set-point, depending on the personality and genetic make-up (Easterlin, 2006). Underlining assumption of the 'top-down' approach is that objective conditions that affect happiness are mediated by psychological factors which people adjust ups and downs in their life circumstances. 'Bottom-up' approach of well-being or happiness refers to the impact of external factors: events and circumstances on happiness or well-being (Diener et al., 2003). Underlining assumption of 'bottom-up' approach is that happiness or well-being depends on actual circumstances where one's well-being can be estimated based on the external factors i.e. financial status (Easterlin, 2006). It is observed in the literature that after a decade of extensive studies, now researchers

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are more focused on internal factors, may be due to such factors, which may have greater impact than external factors on life satisfaction and happiness. Happiness is relatively stable over the time and it may rebound after major life events, and external factors have only a modest impact on well-being (Diener et al., 2003; Csikszentmihalyi and Hunter, 2003; Diener et al 2006). Accordingly, number of researchers have substantiated that personality traits play a greater role in determining individual happiness or SWB (E.g. Lykken and Tellegen, 1996; Diener et al., 2003; Diener et al., 2006; Steel et al., 2008). Genetic component of personality accounts a moderate to strong impact on individual happiness (Diener et al., 2003; Steel et al., 2008). Fujita and Diener in 2005 stated that baseline of life satisfaction of individuals is determined by inborn temperaments, even though they may initially react strongly for different life events. Further, behavioral genetic studies show that level of well-being is moderately heritable (Diener et al., 2006). Even though, long-term well-being is significantly influenced by genetic factors, environmental variables may moderate the relationship (Steel et al., 2008). For an example, extraverts are genetically disposed to have more energy, which in turn may help them to engage in more recreational activities that may produce pleasure. In such instances, constraining environmental variables may reduce situational choices and diminish the relationship between personality and well-being. Therefore, it can be substantiated that personality traits may predispose an individual to experience different levels of well-being or happiness, depending on the availability of required environmental factors. Brickman and

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Campbell (1971) in their classic article: *Hedonic relativism and planning the good society*, suggested that emotional relations of individuals are related to their prior experience similar to sensory adaptation and emphasized validity of ‘bottom-up’ approach. Further, they proposed that individuals shortly react for both good and bad events. However, over the time they return to neutrality which labels as ‘hedonic neutrality’ Furthermore, according to Brickman and Campbell (1971), people react strongly to both good and bad events, however they tend to adapt over the time and return to their original level of happiness. Brickman et al., (1978) did a study based on lottery winners and people who were suffering from spinal code injuries and concluded that lottery winners felt very good about winning and later they came to the ordinary level of happiness. In a same vein, there are accumulated evidences that many life incidents are correlated with well-being or happiness, only at moderate level and this may be due to adaptation. As an example, Suh et al., (1996) found that the effect of a major life event remains less than three months and loses its impact on SWB. Further, longitudinal studies on happiness substantiated the possibilities that adaption can occur (Diener, 2000). The moderating process of the impact of external circumstances is explained by Lyubomirsky (2001) based on Construal Theory. According to her, people do not passively experience any events or situations rather, all life events are cognitively analyzed and tend to synthesis one’s own picture. Therefore, each individual may live in a unique subjective social world. Even though, different life events exert greater impact on one’s happiness, multiple cognitive and motivational processes

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moderate the impact of such events (Lyubomirsky, 2001). Furthermore, she elaborated that happy and unhappy individuals differ based on the particular cognitive judgments and motivational processes operated. However, it is our view that the impact of life event may depend on the gravity of the event, psycho motives, emotional status, personal values and cultural attributes of the societies, where individuals are inhabited. All life events may not hedonically equal. It is important to study the impact of different life circumstances differently. As an example Lucas et al., (2004) stated that even short period of unemployment alters the happiness set-point. Mayer (2000) has stressed on the impact of social manifestation on adaptation based on five decades data regarding income and SWB. Even though adaptation is a powerful force, that is not sufficient to prevent effects of external circumstances (Diener et al., 2006). Further, Veenhoven (1990) stated that there is a limitation for human adaptability which depends on the bio-psychological needs that do not adjust according to circumstances. More specifically, he stated that “People cannot be happy in chronic hunger, danger and isolation: not even if they have never known better and if their neighbors are worse off” (Veenhoven, 1990, p. 32). On the other hand, there are certain life events which may have a lasting effect on happiness (Easterlin, 2006). More specifically Easterlin stated that relative importance of life events is greater than it is in explaining differences among persons, because life circumstances tend to change more over the life cycle than internal factors. The above empirical evidences suggest that individual’s set-point level established by personality and genetic heritage is not sufficient to

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erase completely the impact of the life circumstances on happiness. Based on the above empirical findings on ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ approaches, it can be argued that particular life circumstances may directly as well as indirectly through psychological factors affect happiness. Researchers who are recently engaged in happiness studies, uniformly acknowledge the importance of both internal and external factors in enhancing well-being (e.g. Inglehart et al., 2008; Easterlin, 2006; Easterlin, 2001). Therefore, it is important to study possibilities of converging two approaches in order to explain happiness more comprehensively from both life circumstance and psychological point of views (Easterlin, 2006).

It is observed that the recent studies in life satisfaction and well-being are emphasizing the requirement of fulfilling universal needs and ‘balanced life’ in achieving optimum happiness. Ryff (1989) identified six universal needs: autonomy, growth, relationship, purpose in life, environmental mastery and self-acceptance and degree to which people fulfill such needs correlates with life satisfaction. The above findings stress the requirement of multiple needs in achieving life satisfaction. Diener (2008) identified ‘balanced life’ as a wise course in achieving happiness, although optimum mix of life activities is individually specific. Tay and Diener (2011) conducted a study on a sample of 123 countries to examine the association between need fulfillment and SWB. They identified a set of universal needs associating with SWB. Further, their findings suggested that deprivation and fulfillment of identified needs are closely

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linked to low and high positive feelings respectively. Most important implication of their finding is that each of the identified needs makes a separable contribution to happiness or SWB, thus desirability of ‘balanced life’ where people need to fulfill variety of needs to achieve optimum happiness. Based on the empirical findings discussed in the above, it can be summarized that individual’s happiness may depend on both subjective factors as well as objective factors in various life domains. Even though personality traits, multiple cognitive and motivational processes mediate the impact of objective factors on life happiness, the direct impact of objective factors on life success cannot be fully mitigated. Further in fulfilling needs of various life domains i.e. financial situation, family life, and health and work life it is essential to maintain a reasonable balance in order to achieve optimum happiness.

Conclusion

Generations of studies have pointed out that happiness is a subjective experience that can be objectively measured, assessed and correlated with observable rational functions and related with individual characteristics and the society. Asking people whether they are satisfied with their lives may give important information on happiness, however not sufficient to recognize important dimensions of happiness. Most importantly, as happiness correlates with characteristics and resources valued by the respective societies (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005), community dimension of happiness cannot be captured from individual point of views. Further, definitions and measurements given by western

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countries may not have a conceptual adaptability to Sri Lankan context. We recommend to consider variables representing in both hedonic and eudemonic happiness in order to ensure sustainable happiness for a greater number of citizens and long term existence of the planet. Accordingly, we propose six areas: 1. degree of utilization of one's potential, 2. living according to virtues, 3. financial position in terms of fulfilling individual needs, 4. realizing of family needs, 5. network and relationship with community, 6. subjective and objective health status, in order to recognize happiness as both means and ends of human being.

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