GREATER HAPPINESS for a greater number Is that possible and desirable?

Ruut Veenhoven
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Symposium ‘The future of happiness’
November 24
Club of Amsterdam
Questions

• What is ‘happiness’?

• How happy are we?

• What make us happy?

• Is greater happiness possible?

• Is greater happiness desirable?
What is ‘happiness’?
What is ‘happiness’?
Four qualities of life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>external</th>
<th>internal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>chances</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>outcomes</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is ‘happiness’?

Four qualities of life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>external</th>
<th>internal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>chances</strong></td>
<td>Livability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>outcomes</strong></td>
<td>Utility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**What is ‘happiness’?**

**Four kinds of satisfaction**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Passing</th>
<th>Enduring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Whole</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is ‘happiness’?
Four kinds of satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Passing</th>
<th>Enduring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part</td>
<td>Pleasure</td>
<td>Domain satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole</td>
<td>Top experience</td>
<td>Life satisfaction (Happiness)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How happy are we?
How happy are we?

Example of a survey question

Taking all together, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

Dissatisfied          Satisfied
How happy are we?
Switzerland 2000

COUNTRY/REGION: SWITZERLAND

HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH YOUR LIFE

Percent

0,0% 5,0% 10,0% 15,0% 20,0% 25,0% 30,0%

DISSATISFIED 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 SATISFIED

Happiness Scale:
1. Extremely dissatisfied
2. Very dissatisfied
3. Somewhat dissatisfied
4. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
5. Somewhat satisfied
6. Very satisfied
7. Extremely satisfied
How happy are we?
Zimbabwe 2000

COUNTRY/REGION: ZIMBABWE

HOW SATISFIED ARE YOU WITH YOUR LIFE

Percent

DISSATISIFIED

Satisfied

7

8

9
HAPPINESS IN 148 NATIONS 2000-2009

People enjoy their life-as-a-whole on scale 0 to 10
What makes us happy?
What makes us happy?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>chances</th>
<th>external</th>
<th>internal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>outcomes</td>
<td>Livability</td>
<td>Life-ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Utility</td>
<td>Happiness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analogous concepts in biology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>chances</th>
<th>external</th>
<th>internal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>chances</em></td>
<td>Biotope</td>
<td>Fitness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>outcomes</em></td>
<td>Ecological</td>
<td>Survival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>function</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What makes us happy?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>chances</th>
<th>external</th>
<th>internal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Livability</td>
<td>Life ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>kind of society</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>outcomes</th>
<th></th>
<th>Happiness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Utility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What makes us happy?
Wealth of the nation
What makes us happy?

Inequality of incomes in the nation
What makes us happy?

Good Governance
What makes us happy?

Societal conditions in 135 nations

- Good governance +.66
- Economic affluence +.63
- Democracy +.60
- Gender equality +.58
- Income inequality -.07

Explained variance 75%
What makes us happy?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>external</th>
<th>internal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>chances</strong></td>
<td>Livability</td>
<td>Life ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>outcomes</strong></td>
<td>Utility</td>
<td>Happiness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Utility

Happiness
What makes us happy?

Sources of difference in modern nations

• Heredity ± 30%
• Good/bad luck ± 10%
• Social position ± 10%
• Learned abilities 25%?
• Choice 25%?
Greater happiness possible?
Greater happiness possible?

- Theoretical answers
- Empirical answers
Greater happiness possible?

Theoretical answers

• Trait theory  no

• Comparison theory  no

• Need theory  yes
Greater happiness possible?

Average happiness 1973-2010
Greater happiness possible?
Gains on scale 0-10, 1973-2006

- Italy + 0,96
- Denmark + 0,50
- USA + 0,34
- France + 0,28
- UK + 0,06
- Netherlands + 0,10
- Japan + 0,00
- Belgium – 0,53
Is greater happiness desirable?
Is greater happiness desirable?

**Presumed negative effects of happiness**
- Passive
- Self centered
- Hedonistic
- Unconcerned about the world

Idea of ‘Contented cow’
Described in ‘Brave New World’
Is greater happiness desirable?

**Observed positive effects of happiness**

- Active
- Creative
- Social
- Open to pleasure, but not narrow hedonistic
- Concerned about the world

*Fits theory that happiness signals thriving*
Conclusion

• Greater happiness is possible

• Greater happiness is desirable
World Database of Happiness

http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl