



**A Mosaic of Souls:
Happiness and the Self**

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An Undergraduate Journal for the
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From the Editor

Dear Readers,

You will find many facets of happiness in this issue of *Flourish*. The pieces fit together not so much as a narrative but in mosaic form. Each article offers its own approach to striving for happiness and well-being—through social interaction, through art and play, through compassion, etc. In the last issue, the question of controlling happiness was discussed; in this issue, by striving for happiness, we consider the elements of happiness within our control. The collection of academic articles, op-eds, and personal accounts express a diversity of perspectives so that you, the reader, can explore happiness.

This is my first year publishing the journal, and I am in awe of what the writers and staff members have contributed. I have learned so much through the speaker dinner series, the artwork and the articles that can be found on these pages, and I am thrilled to share these perspectives with you.

I cannot thoroughly express my gratitude for the editors who exercised patience with me, especially Bo, former editor-in-chief, for helping me through the publication process, and Isaac, our design editor. Despite being on the other side of the Atlantic, Daniel, the founder of *Flourish*, has still managed to be a wonderful mentor, full of support and guidance. I would also like to thank Professor

Hedy Kober for meeting with me to talk about the journal and providing words of encouragement and helpful advice. I also have many thanks for our sponsor: the Yale Cognitive Science Department.

In its third year on campus, *Flourish* hopes to sustain and expand the conversation on happiness and the good life by serving as an interdisciplinary forum. So, feel free to inspect each article and its details, but don't forget to take a step back and consider the big picture.

Celina Chiodo

Editor-in-chief, *Flourish*

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Heaven is a place on earth, here and now:

Upward Spirals, Decision Paralysis, Smiles at
Strangers, and Life Gems

Emma Speer

Recent scientific breakthroughs suggest that happiness is a thing. The pursuit of happiness hasn't really been so much about the presence of "positive" life qualities as it is about the absence of negative qualities. But happiness is a thing, people!

The symptoms of negative emotions are familiar to us all: narrow-minded thinking, racing thoughts, desire to be alone, low energy, lack of interest in formerly enjoyable things, general feelings of despair and suckiness. Happiness has "symptoms," too, but of the opposite effect: creative and broad thinking, increased sociability, global thinking versus self-thinking, and improved heart rate. Just as things like depression have a self-perpetuating or "downward spiral effect" recent studies suggest that happiness has an "upward spiral" effect (Frederickson 2001, Cohn et al 2013, Frederickson et al 2008). The happier someone is, the more positively they interpret events, the more reasons they have to be happy, the happier they get, the more positively they interpret events, the more reasons they have to be happy, ad infinitum.

Seems like all we have to do is start this upward spiral; but how?

The single most effective predictor of happiness is human relationships (Meyers and Diener, 1995). Humans are inherently social beings. Social Baseline Theory attempts to lay out why social interactions are so important to human well-being. Principle 1 first states that humans are inherently social. Principle 2 claims that interaction helps us regulate our current and future emotions by signaling that social resources are available (Coan and Beckes, 2011). We have mirror neurons that cause us to mimic other people, including other people's facial reactions to increase our levels of empathy. Laughter is contagious. Literally, scientific studies have shown that the laughter of others makes oneself laugh more. (Bachorowski and Owren, 2001, 2002).* The parable "money can't buy happiness" rings with psychological truth (Inglehart, 1990; Campbell, 1981) except for when someone *spends it on someone else* (Dunn et al 2008).

There are four defined character traits of happy people: self-esteem (Campbell, 1981), personal control, optimism (Dember & Brooks, 1989; Seligman, 1991) and extraversion (Diener, Sandvik, Pavot, & Fujita, 1992; Headey & Wearing, 1992). Extraverts, those who prefer to be in social situations rather than on their own, report more social interactions than do introverts but both groups report enjoying social interactions (Pavot, Diener and Fujita 1990; Lucas and Deiner 2001) albeit to different extents. Extraverts, however, report higher levels of happiness (Pavot et al 1990, Vallaerux 2006).

Barbara Frederickson ran a longitudinal study that explored the role of social interaction (via loving-kindness meditation) on overall happiness. Different from self-based classic meditation, loving-kindness meditation (LKM) explores one's relationships with others. People who engaged in LKM reported higher levels of happiness and more social interaction (Frederickson et al 2013). "Flourishers"

are the epitome of happiness: “they experience positive emotions regularly, excel in their daily lives and contribute to the world around them in constructive ways” (Catalino and Frederickson, 2011, referencing Keyes, 2007). Flourishers display more extroverted tendencies and report that activities involving other people, such as playing sports or games, increase positive affect drastically more than non-social “positive” activities, such as learning and exercising (Catalino and Frederickson 2011).

Dan Gilbert has explored how the ability to choose leaves us paralyzed and disappointed. We assume that the more options we have, the more control we can exert and the happier we will be (Gilbert and Ebert 2002), but surprisingly, this does not seem to be the case. Gilbert and Ebert ran a study at a university where college students enrolled in a photography course. At the end of the course, students had to choose to keep just one of their two photographs. Every student had to choose immediately. Then half the students were given four days to change their mind, while the other half had to stick with their original decision. The former group reported being less happy with their choice than the latter. In a second study, every student was allowed to choose at the beginning of the semester if they wanted to have the four-day—or instant—decision at the end of the course and nearly every student chose the four-day option, *even though this makes us less happy*. When we are forced into just one option, we are psychologically programmed to “make it work.” In this example, the college students who were pressured into making a quick decision convinced themselves they actually liked their choice more. This strengthens our “psychological immune system” and allows us to be more emotionally resilient (Gilbert et al 1998). An even more extreme example of strong psychological immune system is this relatively old study where recently handicapped people and lottery winners report equal levels

of happiness about a year after the event (Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman, 1978).

When we are not present, we are likely somewhere different in time (anticipating the future, dwelling on the past) or mentally travelling in space (what is Jerry doing right now...). This mental displacement is a defining feature of the human mind, but it also has its dark side. It can obstruct us from living in the moment. We have the *option* to not be where we are. We have the *option* to think about other people when we are physically with another. We have the *option* to daydream about the fun things we have planned for tomorrow, or after graduation, or where we're walking to, and so we don't need to look up and notice all that's occurring around us. Social media connects us in so many ways, but it also is just another *option*. Standing in line at Blue State, for example, we have the *option* to check our G-mails or refresh our Facebook five times in the hopes that something different comes up. What if we didn't see this as an option? What if we had no choice but to talk to whomever we are physically with? What if we had no choice but to be where we are?

A huge key of loving-kindness meditation is being present and appreciating what you have in your life. Accepting people for what they are, responding without judgement, paying attention to those around you, focusing on the good in people. Depression drags your mind down a rocky and treacherous path. Happiness frees your mind to embrace the moment and everything it has to offer.

Leading experimental psychologist in the study of happiness Barbara Frederickson introduced the term "micro-moments of connection" in her most recent book *Love 2.0*. She claims they drastically improve one's happiness overtime. These micro-moments range from smiling

to a stranger on the street to laughing your butt off with your best friend. These micro-moments are possible in every single social interaction we have, so although these micro-moments initially seem hard to come by, they are abundant.

We must *choose not to choose*. I'm not recommending love and kindness meditation, but rather I am praising its effects: improved and increased social interactions. We interact with humans daily, but this does not mean we are engaged with humans. So many opportunities for "micro-connections" slip through the cracks due to a distancing of the mind from the body. We must exercise our ability to find happiness with the situational cards we are dealt. If social interaction is what makes us happiest and choices make us unhappy, then perhaps we must decide to make anything besides *being where we are* and *being with the people around us* the only option. These micro-moments are hidden gems in our day to day life, and these studies seem to be giving us a hint as to where the gems are hidden: right in front of us, right now.

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A Mosaic of Souls:

Engaging Art as Spiritual Practice

Daniel Lev Shkolnik

Most of us can remember the strangely moving power of passages in certain poems read when we were young, irrational doorways as they were through which the mystery of fact, the wildness and the pang of life, stole into our hearts and thrilled them. The words have now perhaps become mere polished surfaces for us; but lyric poetry and music are alive and significant only in proportion as they fetch these vague vistas of a life continuous with our own, beckoning and inviting, yet ever eluding our pursuit. We are alive or dead to the eternal inner message of the arts according as we have kept or lost this mystical susceptibility.

—William James, 1902

Whether or not you believe in the second coming or divine orison, spirit-realms or the Age of Aquarius, animism or the inanimate beauty of the cosmos, humanity seems to have a healthy appetite for the spiritual. The “mystic susceptibility” William James hunts for in *Varieties of Religious Experience* is illusive game. Mystical experience, according to James, wears many masks and goes by many names. It can go by divine grace, orison, satori, spiritual enlightenment, among other. It can be found in the depths of romantic passion or on the liquid peaks of a drug trip, can be cultivated in a mountain monastery or at your kitchen table. You can get from Jerusalem to Bethlehem by donkey, jeep, or plane and each leaves you with a different view of the land. The spiritual journey is just as free. Engaging artwork is yet another vehicle of spiritual enlightenment. A well-honed artistic taste cultivates our ability to understand the world itself as a sacred, artistic work.

The Second Artist

Every piece of art has two artists. The first is the creator: the author, the painter, the storyteller, the cook, the architect. The second artist is the co-creator: the reader, the viewer, the listener, the eater, the inhabitant. When we are faced with a work of art, we are always taxed with the task of co-creating the artwork—of co-artistry.

In the early pages of his book, *I Am A Strange Loop*, Douglas Hofstadter proposes the idea of “soul shards.” Every artist leaves shards of his soul in the work he makes.

In the living room we have a book of the Chopin études for piano. All of its pages are just pieces of paper with dark marks on them ... yet, think of the powerful effect that they have had on people all over the world for 150 years now ... pianists in turn have conveyed to many millions of listen-

ers, including you and me, the profound emotions that churned in Frédéric Chopin's heart, thus affording all of us some partial access to Chopin's interiority—to the experience of living in the head, or rather the soul, of Frédéric Chopin. The marks on those sheets of paper are no less than soul-shards—scattered remnants of the shattered soul of Frédéric Chopin.

—Douglas Hofstadter, 2007

Yet the resurrection of soul-shards is not a passive act. A piece of art is never complete until it evokes something in another person. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is merely coded ink on coldpress sheets, Van Gogh's *Starry Night* is oil smeared on canvas, and Chopin's etudes—as Hofstadter puts it—are just, “pieces of paper with dark marks on them.” To complete the artistic process, we have to resuscitate the spirit that went into creating the work, or give it new meaning using our own artistic powers.

Using our own artistic faculties we fulfill the artistic process begun by the artist and endow a piece of art with meaning, passion, and symbolic associations that it otherwise lacks. By doing so, we grant the artwork its second half: a host in which a piece of canvas or a poem can gestate and become more than coded ink, more than oil, more than dark marks on paper.

When we experience art is the only moment in which it truly exists as art. The experience of art is the gestalt of two souls: the creator's and our own. The artist creates artwork that is a reflection of his or her own soul. We then interpret the work by the light of our own artistic tastes, aesthetic sense, and the greater passions of our lives. Each person brings their own visions of the world, their own associations and soul before a piece of art. Through the recombina-



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*untitled,
Camille
Hoffman*

tion of the soul-shards in the work, the viewer produces a completely unique experience of the work within herself or himself. The result is a completely new entity, a “mosaic” of soul-shards—the product of two artistic visions.

The Second Artist as Mosaic Maker

Thinking of the second artist as a mosaic-maker is useful to understanding what I mean. In approaching a work of art we have two sets of soul-shards: our own fragmented soul and that of the artist as represented by the work. We are charged with arranging the two sets of shards into a mosaic, but have absolute freedom as to how the mural will look. The way we combine the shards depends on our artistic tastes and capacities, but the resulting mosaic is completely unique piece of art. It is made up in part by our own shards and so different from any that anyone else could make.

Marcel Proust once wrote: “The true voyage of discovery consists not in finding new landscapes, but in

having new eyes.” It is impossible to “dislike” a work of art, we can only say we “do not understand it yet.” Our liking depends on the mosaic that we ourselves arrange. If we know how to arrange our shards with theirs, we tend to like them. If we aren’t used to that kind of puzzle-work, then we tend to dismiss the art.

One can be “taught” to appreciate certain kinds of artwork, music, food. While a piece of art may not change, what does is our taste for its shards and our sense of how to arrange them with our own. If at first when approaching a work we do not find the mosaic rapturous or beautiful, there is a way to re-arrange the shards into one that does. Poor art needs more work on the part of the viewer. Sometimes the arrangement has to be just as strange—or stranger—than the original work. Sometimes the second artist needs to be a better artist than the first.

It comes with practice.

Once we have it, we can turn this same power of mosaic-making towards the world. When we do, the world itself and everything in it becomes a piece of art: a potted plant in a window, the tar on the cracks of a street, a Chagall, the idea of the Adriatic coast. Yet it isn’t art until someone looks at it and mentally makes it into a piece of artwork.

The “first artist” does not have to be human. Nature, chaos, God, or biology, these artists constantly produce the world as raw artwork. To see its beauty there needs to be a second artist (you) who can transform the raw sidewalk, the taste of Turkish coffee, the thought of a forest fire, or the sensation of betrayal, into something more than waves across the surface of the mind, but instances of artistic transcendence.

By cultivating the skills of a second artist, we can understand creation as a glistening mosaic of soul-shards: both those of our own life and the odd medley of shards that make up the solid plenum of the world. We can recombine our own shards with those of the world in endless iterations. Some designs will be grim, others will be hopeful, some may bring on tears and others rapture. But like any work of art, no mural can ever be final. And as we marvel at the mixed-up crockery of existence, we must remember that regardless of what Great Artist signed his name in the bottom corner, our own name is written just below.



*They tried in their way, to reach out to the stars,
Camille Hoffman*



Rational Faith

Bo Malin-Mayor

To a casual observer, it seems like the effectiveness of depression medications has declined over time. To test out new drugs, researchers give some people the drug and some people a sugar pill disguised as the drug, a placebo. Hopefully the people who get the real drug do a lot better than people who just get the placebo. However, modern depression medications like SSRIs (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors, in case you were curious), beat the placebo by less than depression drugs from 40 years ago. This seems to imply that modern drugs are less effective than old medications.

However, enterprising scientists have uncovered evidence that this is not true. The issue is not that medications are getting weaker, but that the placebo effect is getting stronger. We would have assumed that the placebo effect would stay the same over time: why would a sugar pill be more effective now than it was before? But the data shows that it is actually depression medications that have stayed roughly the same strength over time, while placebos have gotten better and better at curing depression. The modern medications look worse than the old ones only by comparison to the placebo. But why is the placebo improving? It's certainly not because sugar is becoming a better and better cure. A placebo works by inspiring faith in the patient that



he is being cured. One explanation for the improvement in placebo performance is that as the medical profession continues to advance, people are placing more and more faith in the pills doctors give them.

The Pygmalion effect is named for a sculptor of ancient Greek legend who fell in love with a woman he had carved out of ivory. Seeing his devotion, the goddess Aphrodite brought the sculpture to life so that Pygmalion's love would not be in vain. But in many cases we don't need the intervention of a goddess for our image of someone to become reality. Managers who expect their employees to do better end up with employees who actually do better, and when a teacher has high expectations, students achieve more.



*untitled,
Kayla Tarlton*



Unfortunately, we also seem to be able to sabotage those around us by holding low expectations of them. One study even suggests that if we expect our romantic partners to reject us, they are more likely to do so. If you have low standards for the people around you, be careful: they might live down to what you expect.

The placebo effect and the Pygmalion effect are two examples of the fact that belief about what will happen influences what actually happens. This simple realization has huge consequences. The idea of realism, for example, quickly becomes problematic. We often tell people to be realistic about the chances an event will happen, but what does this mean if the event depends on the person's own perceptions? If I think a placebo won't cure me, it won't. But if I think it will, it will. So is it realistic to believe that it will cure me, or that it won't?

In this type of situation, we can be realistic and also have a choice. I can be pessimistically realistic and believe my employees will work badly, and odds are they actually will. But hopefully I would be optimistically realistic and believe that my employees will work well, tipping the scale towards that outcome. Of course, our choices don't lead directly to an outcome in such a deterministic form. Unless I have total control over the situation, my choice only makes the expected outcome more likely to end up happening. And if the probability of our choice happening was miniscule to start with, making it a little better is a recipe for disappointment. A first-grader isn't going to learn calculus in a month regardless of how much I believe she will. But there are circumstances where our beliefs will change the likelihood of an event actually happening from unlikely to likely, and these circumstances are perhaps far more common than most people think.

Situations where belief in something changes the likelihood of it occurring from less than 50% to greater than 50% allow for the existence of a wonderful thing we might call rational faith. You get to have faith in something for your own personal reasons, and that faith inevitably becomes realistic. Rational faith situations are wonderful because you are truly in the driver's seat. Whichever outcome fits with your beliefs or choices becomes the most probable outcome. Some people believe that projections of the future based on reason must be opposed to projections based on faith, but in these cases the two are compatible. By drawing attention to this kind of situation, science has provided a credible argument for a set of circumstances in which even blind faith is rational and justified.

Too often, we dismiss people's beliefs simply because they do not have reasons for them. The kids in this class have always failed, why should I believe you will teach them to pass? Only 40% of people survive this cancer, isn't it realistic to prepare for the worst? But these sorts of questions ignore the fact that faith is itself a reason to believe. If you really believe you can teach them to pass, I should realize that alone makes you more likely to do it than the teachers who didn't believe in them before. By attempting to be "realistic" in these cases, we may actually be sabotaging those around us with our pessimism. Perhaps 40% of people with the cancer survive, but 55% of those who believe they will survive make it through. In that case, persuading your friend to prepare for the worst isn't being realistic, it's just doing harm.

Yes, you might say, that's all very rational. But what if the chance of survival was 1%? What about irrational faith? What about believing something despite the fact that even though you believe it, it is truly unlikely to happen? So far, this article has suggested that belief changes probability distributions far more than most people suspect. Many instances of faith which the stereotypical scientist finds irrational may in fact be quite reasonable. Certainly, though, irrational faith does exist and can seem deeply bothersome. There is something bizarre about saying "I have faith that my students will all pass the next test" while knowing that none of them have passed any of the previous ones. Faith like this makes people seem oblivious to the dictates of reality, assuming that anything will come to them if they just wish it.

Yet despite my rational education I cannot quite find it in me to dismiss irrational faith. If it is harmful it is harmful, and it must go. Sometimes though one needs to hitch his wagon to a star, in the words of Emerson, to find a road worth traveling. If it is not harmful do we let the starstruck one go and shape his life in his way? Or do we say with reason "Wait, you're deceiving yourself, turn back!"? I worry this could be a great loss. Is realism as valuable as that?



From Self- Actualization to Self- Transcendence:

A Personal Experience

Fan Yang

1. The Encounter.

It was midnight. I was still in the library—hoping to find something to quiet my anxious mind.

“Hello. I know why you are here.” An old man appeared behind the shelves.

“Well, I don’t even know.”

“You don’t know what you want.”

He touched something. “I came to my dream university. I have wonderful parents and friends. I’m kind and even smart... Perhaps I want something that I don’t know?”

“You want to become. You have fulfilled the basic needs, but are now tortured by the need for self-actualization.

That was how I met Abraham Maslow.



2. The Pursuit.

Maslow described to me what a person could be—compassionate, autonomous, humorous, creative, loving... People with these characteristics are “self-actualizers”. They fully realize their potentials and live a fulfilling life. But Maslow didn’t explain HOW to become a self-actualizer. That didn’t prevent me from trying. I remembered all the characteristics and tried to behave accordingly. I felt motivated.

Upon graduation, I had become more “compassionate...loving” in my own mind. HOW MUCH more? I wasn’t sure. The degree of self-actualization was hard to measure. It was disappointing not to see concrete results after such long-term, exhausting efforts. Yes, the pursuit was exhausting. Whenever I was engaged in something, I scanned the characteristics of self-actualizers and tried to behave accordingly. My brain was always thinking about the situation and evaluating myself at the same time. That was distracting. Moreover, not every characteristic could be directly pursued. I tried to be compassionate and autonomous. But having peak experiences? That seems to be the by-product of something else. What is that something else? Who shall I ask?

3. The New Encounter.

I went to graduate school and became less ardent in self-actualization. The pursuit was ambiguous and even impossible. Perhaps, there was something beyond self-actualization that I wasn’t aware of.

Then I met Maslow again.

“How are you?” It was him. “I didn’t mention the nontranscending self-actualizers and transcendents last time, did I? The transcendents are more spiritual, more holistic, more apt to be innovators...”

OK. The transcendents were better. So what? I didn’t succeed in actualizing the self. Now you list a bunch of similar and higher standards. They were not appealing.

He continued: “Transcendents transcends the dichotomy between selfishness and unselfishness. There is more and easier transcendence of the ego, the Self, the identity... It is unfortunate that I can no longer be theoretically neat at this level...I have to go now.”

4. Positive Psychology.

Transcendence. I repeated the word to myself. So, self-actualization is not the ultimate goal? This time I was cautious about following his words. Instead, I seized every source relevant for living a happy life.

Positive Psychology caught my eye. I learned many strategies about how to be happy, such as maintaining positive relationships, caring less for money, trying to stay focused... Admittedly, as more strategies were learned, it became harder to hold them in mind. But anyway, they were more practical than self-actualization. I shouldn’t expect anything more fundamental. As recommended, be grateful and show gratitude.



*Elie obscured,
John Lee*

5. The West and the East.

Later, in my quest for happiness, I encountered Bertrand Russell and Zhuangzi.

Russell was straightforward: “Your whole search has a wrong focus. You have been too obsessed with making YOURSELF happy. You can’t be happy when your own ego is your only focus.” It never occurred to me that I was obsessed about myself. I thought myself was compassionate, loving, kind...But I didn’t protest. Perhaps he was right.

Zhuangzi was more subtle. He dreamt of being a butterfly. He was confused “whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man. Between a man and a butterfly there is necessarily a distinction.” He seemed to say that the differences among things are not as absolute as we thought. Perhaps, myself is also not as disconnected and distinct from other people and things in the world? A sense of awakening came to me.

6. The Changes.

Maslow. Russell. Zhuangzi. They were all indicating the same message. I had to devote myself into something that beyond myself. I was changed.

I became more focused. When I was painting a picture or helping others, I thought only about the picture and others. I didn’t care whether I was behaving like a self-actualizer, or whether I was happy or not. Surprisingly, happiness came when I was not concerned about them. I recalled that Maslow claimed peak experiences were characterized by a loss of self. The connections among focus, loss of self and happiness were real to me.



I also became relaxed. The goal of actualizing potentials drove me to work all the time. It was the sole focus of my life and made me anxious. With self-transcendence, I don't have to achieve a particular end state. I opened myself to the world, not to conquer it.

This sounded like a retreat from achievement. To the contrary, I experienced a strong sense of motivation and meaning. The line between pursuing achievement and selfishness could be subtle. When the achievement is simply a mark of personal greatness, its value could be compromised. Giving myself away to something larger than myself, however, provides deep meanings. Viktor Frankl, a psychologist and concentration camp survivor, pointed to us that meaning often came from "something or someone, other than oneself." Martin Seligman had also stated, in the meaningful life "you use your highest strengths and talents to belong to and serve something you believe is larger than the self." In fact, many people were like me: they reported deriving meaning from giving a part of themselves away to others and making a sacrifice on behalf of the overall group.

7. The Simple Truth.



It's surprising how the West and the East, philosophy and psychology reach deep agreement in terms of transcendence. The world is immense, and my life is only a small part of it. But by integrating my life into the world, my life is enlarged. When the self fades out, the whole world comes in.

“Mum, I discovered something.” I claimed with excitement.

“What is it?” She was cooking for the family.

“I need to care more about other people and things in the world, rather than myself.”

“Oh,” she continued peeling the potato, “I told you since you were a kid, that being selfish is bad.”

I expected more dramatic reactions. Well, perhaps it's a trivial simple truth anyway. Perhaps that's why it's so good.



Doing Good Without Empathy:

How to motivate yourself to help people, even
when you can't feel their pain

Aaron Gertler

The Trouble with Empathy

Paul Bloom, a Yale psychology professor, claims that empathy is a dangerous feeling.

Or, in the words of his well-titled essay, “Against Empathy”:

“I am not against morality, compassion, kindness, love, being a good neighbor, doing the right thing, and making the world a better place. My claim is actually the opposite: if you want to be good and do good, empathy is a poor guide.”

Bloom admits that empathy has a good side: When we feel empathy for someone in trouble, we are more likely to help them. Empathy is “a force against selfishness and indifference”. Bill and Melinda Gates are huge fans of empathy. So is Barack Obama.

So what’s the problem?

Again, Bloom:

“Empathy is biased; we are more prone to feel empathy for attractive people and for those who look like us or share our ethnic or national background. And empathy is narrow; it connects us to particular individuals, real or imagined, but is insensitive to numerical differences and statistical data.”

In a vacuum, empathy is fantastic. It’s better to care about someone and want to help them if your only other option is to ignore them.

But we don’t live in a world of isolated choices. When we empathize with someone, we place a higher priority on helping them than on helping other people. And since the world is full of people who need help, our empathy can lead us to ignore some needs while placing an undue emphasis on others.

Over the decades, hundreds of psychologists have brought attention to various gaps in our instinctive empathy. In 2005, Kogut and Ritov published a study (“The Singularity Effect”) demonstrating that we’ll give more to help a single specific person, someone whose name we know, than to help a stranger—or, for that matter, *eight* strangers. Meanwhile, Forgiarini et al., in “Racism and the Empathy for Pain” (2011), found that white people literally feel less pain when they watch black people suffer, as opposed to other white people.

We can see these phenomena at work when we witness how the American public reacts to the issues that come to their attention. Bloom uses the example of Jessica McClure, a baby girl from Texas who fell down a well in 1987. The story of “Baby Jessica” made the front page of many newspapers, and readers raised over a million dollars for her rescue

(most of which wound up in a trust fund, since the rescue only took two days).

In 1985, just two years before Baby Jessica, famine in Ethiopia killed hundreds of thousands of people and left millions more malnourished. But while this event spent months on the front pages, private donors gave only a few tens of dollars for each person affected.

The usual patterns of empathy were all stacked against Ethiopia. It was a nation thousands of miles from the world's richest countries, where millions of nameless, dark-skinned victims (most of them teenagers or adults) struggled with an unexciting problem. After a few months, people got tired of hearing about famine.

It's easy to imagine someone opening the *New York Times*, skimming an Ethiopia headline, and flipping to the sports page instead of reading the article. This hypothetical reader loves her family, and would drop everything to help a neighbor—but her empathy, like yours and mine, is a very limited source of good intentions.

At the end of his essay, Bloom compares empathy to anger: Both are useful emotional tools, both have social aspects, and both can inspire moral actions. But we don't want to feel angry most of the time, and we want to control our anger through rational deliberation. The same goes for empathy.

What if Bloom is right? What if empathy isn't the best guide to moral action? What if it really does lead us to prefer attractive people and people with names, even at the expense of the faceless masses?

If that's the case, we might be in trouble. Empathy is a very popular altruistic emotion, especially with psychologists—the scientists who seem to give us most of our moral advice these days. If we can't rely on empathy as a guide to moral action, do we have any good alternatives?

I think we do. In this article, I'll summarize a few strategies for motivating oneself to do good without simply relying on empathy. I also hope you'll think up your own strategies. After all, we share this planet with 7.1 billion strangers, and we'll need more than just empathy to give each other the help we need.

Strategy 1: Wear the Veil of Ignorance

The moral philosopher John Rawls came up with the “Veil of Ignorance” thought experiment to help us get around various forms of bias.

Here's my version of the trick:

Imagine that you no longer exist. Instead, you are a disembodied mind floating above the Earth. Down below, you can see every living human going about their business. You know how each person feels, and the reason that they feel the way they do.

Soon, you'll become one of those people. But you don't know which person. You might be an Indian farmer struggling to survive, or a Saudi prince standing on the deck of his yacht, or a baby girl in Beijing with middle-class parents. There's a 1-in-7.1-billion chance of each, multiplied by the number of people in that position. Becoming a prince is as likely as winning the lottery; living in extreme poverty is as likely as rolling a six on a six-sided die.

Given this condition, what should society look like? What is the world where you'd be happiest coming into existence as a random person? And how can you, the person you really are now, act to bring the real world closer to your ideal world?

This isn't as crazy as it might sound. You didn't choose to be born as the person you are, and neither did anyone else. Shouldn't any fair moral system try to correct for cosmic luck? The Veil of Ignorance does exactly that, by forcing us to imagine a world that doesn't simply reward the people we happen to be.

The Veil of Ignorance is a complicated idea, and hard to test in a rigorous way. But last semester, your humble author, alongside Tammy Pham '15, used a Veil of Ignorance condition in a moral psychology experiment. Our preliminary results: People who think they have an equal chance of becoming each person within a situation act in a way that saves more lives, on average.

Hopefully, we and other researchers will learn more about the Veil in future experiments. In the meantime, try it out yourself. If you were about to become a random person somewhere on the Earth, which problems would you want to solve, to give yourself the best chance at a good life?

Strategy 2: Follow The Leader

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has given billions in grants to help people in the developing world. A typical person who benefits from a Gates Foundation grant might be a farmer (call her "Maya") who earns about two dollars per day and never finished middle school.

As an American college student, I don't have much in common with Maya. But I do have a lot in common with Bill and Melinda Gates: We all live in the same country, we all went to American high schools, we all own Windows products, and so on.

What's more, while Maya might care mostly for the health and happiness of her family (which would make perfect sense), the Gateses and I care about very similar issues—the health and happiness of the world's population as a whole.

I'd have a hard time empathizing with Maya, even if I tried hard to imagine life through her eyes. But I can easily empathize with Bill and Melinda Gates.

My empathy for the Gateses doesn't lead me to want to help them with their problems—but it does make me want to help them with their *mission*. And that mission happens to be “doing as much good as possible”. If I follow Bill and Melinda in that goal, I'm still using empathy to guide me toward good actions. But I'm getting an even better deal by anchoring myself to people with decades of do-gooding experience, whose positive instincts I trust are more finely-honed than my own.

Who are your heroes? How are they working to fix our broken world? How are you going to help them—to continue their work, and even improve on it?

Strategy 3: Educate Yourself

One problem with empathy is that it takes a lot of energy to put ourselves in the shoes of people we know nothing about. An obvious solution to this problem involves learning something about the people we don't yet know. If

you find yourself pondering which cause to support, what to do with your money, or whose side to take in an argument, start Googling!

Let's say you're choosing whether to support a cancer-research charity or a charity which fights malaria. You know a lot about cancer thanks to family history, or books you've read, or movies you've seen. But you know almost nothing about malaria.

So you Google "what is it like to have malaria" and read a really terrifying blog post from Bill Gates. (Look it up now to see what I mean.)

Now you understand just a bit more about malaria, and how it compares to something like cancer. This isn't the only information you'll need to make your decision, but the more information you have, the more likely you are to choose the option which best fulfills your personal values.

Actually, "personal values" might not be the best way to put this. One benefit of new information is that it helps us understand what *other* people value, and how we can help them get what *they* want, rather than what *we* want for them.

For example, imagine that you were a teetotaling American senator in the 1910s, pondering whether to support the Eighteenth Amendment, which would ban the sale of alcohol throughout the U.S.

This makes sense to me, you might think. After all, I don't drink. And anyone who loves alcohol so much they couldn't live without it must be an alcoholic, so it would be better if they stopped drinking, too!

Your empathy isn't helping you think about these strange people who don't like the same things you like. But thankfully, you're sharp enough to realize that not all people want the same things that you want. So you use the 20th-century version of Google—that is, you visit a few different bars in Washington, DC, and try to learn about the locals.

You meet some alcoholics at these bars, but you also meet a *lot* of social drinkers, for whom alcohol is an unmitigated good; it helps them make friends, gives them a way to relax after work, and helps them form some of their happiest memories. Thus informed, you realize that Prohibition could easily do more harm than good, and you decide to change your vote.

Prohibition may seem like an extreme example, but even today, we're surrounded by arguments and moral questions that aren't even close to black-and-white. Should abortion be legal? What about sweatshop labor? Should the U.S. open its borders? Should we change the way we give out foreign aid?

Empathy might help us make some of these decisions. But sometimes, there's no substitute for accurate, balanced information.

We Cannot Live On Empathy Alone

Bloom's detractors argue that we can work to expand our empathy, and that empathy can motivate us where cold-hearted moral calculation fails to move our hearts. These are good points.

But no matter how well you practice empathy, it won't always get you where you need to go, especially if you're tired, or if the person you're trying to help is a total stranger.

This is no cause for despair. The human mind is a versatile thing. Generations of philosophers, psychologists, politicians, scientists, and spiritual leaders have attacked the problem of “becoming a better person” from a thousand different angles. And each person will find that some of those angles do the trick for them.

So if you realize that a person is in trouble, and you’re trying to figure out how and whether you should help them, but the empathy just isn’t flowing...

Think about what you’d want for that person if you had a chance of *becoming* them, or becoming someone like them. Wear the Veil of Ignorance!

Imagine how the people you admire would treat that person if those people were in your situation. Follow the leader!

Learn more about the world—the person in front of you, and also the people you’ll never get to meet, because they don’t happen to live in your city or your country. Educate yourself!

Or, if none of these seem right, try something else!

Pretend that you are a great hero, just for a moment. Or think of yourself as a generous, kind person, and live up to your proud self-concept. Focus on everything you share with the people around you—your common humanity, your emotional depth, your capacity for love—and resolve to treat them as you would yourself, even if you don’t really understand their lives.

Every good person is good in their own way. What will be your way?



Rejecting the Machine:

What We Value Above Happiness

Adrian Stymne

“Pursue pleasure!” “No, forgo pleasure for happiness!” “You’re both wrong! Forget happiness, seek peace instead!” To me, it seems these three guiding principles are very similar: they make a particular internal state the end goal of action. Almost every aspect of our culture—Tinder, this excellent magazine, Aristotle, Buddhism—assumes that one or more of these three birds of a feather, these three aspects of Feeling Good, does and should guide our lives.

This cultural narrative has even begun to seep into discussions of macroeconomic policy. The United Nations now carries out annual global surveys of subjective happiness, and there is a push by certain economists, such as London School of Economics professor Richard Layard, to make Gross National Happiness (GNH) a key indicator of societal development. But is the pursuit of happiness really the foremost thing that guides our behavior?

In his 1974 book *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Robert Nozick presents a thought experiment he calls The Experience Machine. You can enter the machine, and it will place you in a reality of your choice: basically, the Matrix, but better. Once you enter, you forget that you are in a machine. Everything feels perfectly real. The world conforms to

you, and you can choose to live the most pleasing, happy, peaceful life you want. You will never wake up again, and can live out the rest of your life, and die, in the machine.

Let us ignore practical objections (“Wouldn’t the fact that I never get hurt make me question the reality?”) and focus instead on emotional or moral responses. Imagine that all of the practical things are figured out: do you, after thinking about it, *feel* that you want to enter? Does the idea of eternal happiness, peace, and pleasure appeal to you? Think about it for a few seconds before you continue reading.

I’ve asked this question to a variety of people, and some reject the machine immediately. Others are more open, and answer something along the lines of “Yes. If there is no way to tell the difference, if I never have to face the choice and the consequences of it by waking up again, I would do it. Why be unhappy when you can be happy?” This response is what we would expect from us feel-gooders, us utility-maximizing humans, from the cultural narrative. Broken ankles and broken hearts, horrible moments and horrible years, the death of pets and the death of relationships; no more pain from any of them. Just peace, happiness and pleasure.

I then ask them to think about Cypher in *The Matrix*, who betrays his friends in order to go back into a simulated, pleasant reality. The scene recreates Nozick’s thought experiment with an added twist: entry to the machine is no longer free, but requires you to harm someone you care about. I have yet to meet anyone who says they would do the same, even though nothing has really changed: once you enter the machine, you will not remember; you will never have to face the consequences; you will live the rest of your life in peace, happiness, and pleasure.

That we turn down the Experience Machine, even though it maximizes our happiness, heavily implies that there are other things that we value more than we value Feeling Good. By analyzing the responses that people have given me to the question, we can find out what they are.

There are two kinds of “No!” I’ve received to the first question: the one which is immediate, almost visceral, and the one which is more articulate and well-reasoned. Among the most common reasoned responses is “this world is real.” Maybe we dislike the mere thought of lying to ourselves, and capital-T Truth is more important than happiness? I doubt it, based on the visceral reaction (which is very common). I generally get this “No!” as a knee-jerk response, often accompanied by a look of disgust. My theory is that most people do not like to think about happiness and peace as chemical brain states, which the thought experiment takes as a presupposition. After all, we have been taught that happiness and peace are meaningful ends in and off themselves. To reduce them to chemistry seems to devalue them. We would, perhaps, rather lie to ourselves than abandon our commitment to happiness. Capital-T Truth is at least not the primary reason people refuse the machine.

Other common reasons people give is that here, on the outside, it is possible to “make an impact,” either through directly helping others or through the proxy of science and discovery. In other words, these individuals would forgo personal happiness in order to affect and change that which is outside of themselves. I believe that this is a general truth, one that the current social narrative obfuscates: well-being is a side effect of actions rather than the end goal of them. Even those that first entertain the notion that they would enter the machine—in line with the social narrative—turn back when faced with the second question. When the cost is made more concrete, they realize that they would not violate

other values to achieve happiness. In general, the Experience Machine is refused because it is solipsistic, self-centered: the people that reject the machine on the basis that “this world is real” refer, consciously or subconsciously, to this fact.

If we truly believed that happiness, peace, and pleasure were guiding principles in our lives, we would not turn down the Experience Machine. Even though our culture has a fixation with these three aspects of well-being, we know on a deep level that these are just internal states that have little value in and of themselves. Thinking about the Experience Machine, asking ourselves the question, allows us to make this insight explicit. On a personal level, tearing down the false belief that we do things because they make us happy/pleased/peaceful allows us to delve more deeply into the actual sources of our actions, such as for example cultural beliefs, deeply held moral convictions, or habits. It also allows us to reject the idea that we are somehow failed or flawed if we fail to feel at peace or happy. Furthermore, it gives us a certain fortitude and flexibility, an ability to look toward a long-term goal and achieve it, even in the face of unpleasantness and unrest.

On the societal level, this approach suggests less proscriptive solutions: the goal is not to make everyone happy, but to make sure that people are able to pursue that which they find important. In the same way that proponents of GNH critique standard economic measures for not reflecting what people find important, so we can critique GNH for making the false assumption that happiness is what matters to everyone. I suggest a Human Empowerment Index in its place: rather than ask people how happy they are, let us ask them how empowered they feel! People have the right to determine for themselves what makes their life worth living, and society should give them the opportunity to pursue their choice.

In conclusion, I do not believe that people have changed: today, as in the past, we find meaning in many things, most of them unrelated to our own well-being. What has changed is the narrative. In a world where handbooks in Buddhism and pop-economics are sold next to each other in airport newsstands, it is easy to become convinced that our meaningful activities are instrumental, and that the end goal is to Feel Good. Taking down well-being from its pedestal, both on a societal and a personal level, will allow each and everyone of us a greater degree of insight and choice as we determine who we are, what we find important, and what we want to do.

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Emotional Intelligence and Dealing with Anxiety

Celina Chiodo

Psychologists developed the theory of emotional intelligence (EI) when studies revealed that the “star performer” in the workplace did not necessarily have the highest IQ.¹ While intelligence was a good indicator of success, individuals with the extremely high IQs did not have any benefit over those with moderately high IQs in achieving the most success. Instead, there was a more fitting relationship between EI and success in the workplace.

Travis Bradberry (co-author of *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*) is a proponent of the correlation between emotional intelligence and workplace success, and he explains that emotional intelligence can be broken down into four

1. See www.eiconsortium.org/reprints/ei_issues_and_common_misunderstandings.html



components: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management.² To paraphrase Bradberry's definitions, self-awareness is the ability to identify how you are feeling and why, while self-management is the application of self-awareness in decision making. Social awareness is the ability to identify the emotions of another person, and relationship management is the application of social awareness to decide how to act around or towards that person. I will elaborate on these definitions via hypothetical explanations:

Let us say that you are having a bad day—you missed your train, it's raining and your pants have ripped. Once you get to your meeting, you are feeling frustrated. Your friend texts you to tell you she broke your mug, and you become incredibly angry even though you could not care less about that mug, and on a good day, you would have brushed it off and said "no problem!" Self-awareness is knowing that you are unusually upset because you have been having a bad day. You let out a breath and respond to your friend telling her not to worry about it, because that is a more appropriate response. Self-management is using that self-awareness to respond in a reasonable way despite your unwarranted irritability towards your friend.

Now let us say that you are at home with your brother and you crack a joke. Your brother gives you a half-hearted laugh and does not look up at you. Normally, you and your brother share jokes all the time. Social awareness is recognizing this change in disposition. You ask him what's wrong, and he tells you he is sad because his crush does not like him back. The two of you talk about his feelings, and you offer to watch his favorite movie. In this case, relationship management is using your social awareness to reach out to your brother and console him because he is sad.

2. See www.forbes.com/sites/travisbradberry/2014/01/09/emotional-intelligence/



These are specific cases, and sometimes using the components of emotional intelligence is not so clear. For instance, it is important that when exercising relationship management that you consider the feelings of the person with whom you are interacting. If your coworker is upset but does not like to be touched, it may be inappropriate to hug her as consolation. The key to relationship management is to consider the other person.

Bradberry claims that mastery of these four components of emotional intelligence leads to the most success in the workplace. However, a study on the link between anxiety³ and perfectionistic concerns provides evidence that an individual's EI level influences not only performance in the workplace but also personal well-being. Perfectionistic concerns are the negative impacts of holding oneself to an extraordinarily high standard; these negative impacts include low self-esteem as a result of failure and being overly concerned with the expectations of others.⁴ In the study, those who experienced anxiety and had high emotional intelligence had less perfectionistic concerns than those who experienced anxiety and had low EI.

Let us imagine that Michael has failed his midterm. He does not use emotional intelligence to deal with the stress of this failure: he feels that he is not smart, that he is a poor student, that his parents will be upset and that all of his peers must have scored higher than he did. He acts on these perfectionistic concerns and gives up on the class and lies to his friends, telling them he scored higher than he did.

Now let us consider Sarah's situation. She has also failed her midterm, but before those perfectionistic concerns start to accumulate, she reflects on the failure. She reasons that the exam was not her entire grade and that this course

3. The study uses the term "neuroticism," but the Oxford English Dictionary states that this term is no longer used in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, so the modern diagnostic category "anxiety" has replaced it.

4. See www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0191886913013901

is not her entire life. Maybe she could have studied more, maybe she studied enough but just “blanked out” while taking the test. Whatever the case, Sarah realizes that feeling worthless over failing an exam will accomplish nothing, she does not compare herself to others, and she decides to see the professor to talk about ways she could do better in the future.

Of course, these scenarios are simplified and fictional. The theory of emotional intelligence has sparked debate among psychologists, and many models exist. Specifically, psychologists disagree on how to define intelligence as well as the methods used to quantify emotions.³

Despite the controversy, emotional intelligence is an important aspect of personal well-being, and it can be improved. Bradberry explains that EI can be developed thanks to plasticity, or, physical change in brain structure due to experience. By increasing connections between the frontal lobes (the “rational brain”) and the limbic system (where emotions are processed), EI can become an easier and quicker response to difficult situations. In other words, actively exercising emotional intelligence will make it easier to do so in the future.

Exercising emotional intelligence can seem difficult—you might not know where to start. Thankfully, there are many resources that can help individuals develop their EI. Yoga classes that focus on meditation can be beneficial to the reflection required to exercise EI. You can also see a therapist or meditate on your own. There are even resources on Yale campus that can help you reflect. YMindful gathers Yalies to meditate together and develop mindful practices that can be exercised in daily life, and Walden Peer Counseling allows students to call anonymous peer counselors

to talk through difficulties they might be facing, making reflection an easier process.



There are certain aspects of life we cannot control—it will rain, people get sick and bad days happen. However, while undergoing trials, there is one thing that we can control—how we respond to the uncontrollable aspects of life.



Inspired at Work

Christina Bradley

A ccording to the Gallup census of 2013, 70% of employees are disengaged at work. Seventy Percent! It is astonishing that seven out of ten people do not feel inspired by their work. Findings show that this ultimately leads to lower productivity and creativity in addition to a negative sense of wellbeing. In an American Time Use Survey done by the US Department of Labor in 2013, the average employed American spends 8.7 hours per day on work related activities. That is a large part of one's day to feel uninspired! Not only does the average American feel unhappy and disengaged at work but they also bring their generally uninspired selves into other areas of their lives.

This is not a small problem. Human beings deserve to feel good—if not great—all the time. When people are disengaged for the majority of their day, it is very hard to feel good and even more difficult to feel great—not, to mention how their unhappiness affects those in their lives. The bottom line is that it is difficult to inspire others when you are not inspired yourself.

Imagine if this were to change, if this seventy percent began to feel more engaged at work. Imagine if they felt happy and proud of what they were contributing to the world, supported by their colleagues, and valued by their employers. Imagine if they were taught mental tools to manage stress and were allowed to practice these when they needed to. Imagine if this seventy percent left work every-day feeling healthy, happy, and connected. Those 8.7 hours of the day would not reduce their sense of wellbeing, but might actually improve it. They would return to their friends and family after a workday able to be supportive and even inspiring, all because they felt not good, but great.

This is the world that Google employee Chade-Meng Tan has set out to create. This engineer from Singapore believes that there are ways to improve life at work in order to create happier, healthier, and more effective individuals. Chade-Meng Tan began as an engineer for Google but has now taken on the title of Google's "Jolly Good Fellow" with a job description reading "enlighten minds, open hearts, and create world peace." In this newly created position he created the Search Inside Yourself (SIY) program with the help of nine contributors including scientists, meditation teachers, and business leaders.

Search Inside Yourself is a program that has been offered to Google employees since its creation in 2007 to increase their success and happiness at work. Chade-Meng

Tan says that “Google wants to help Googlers grow as human beings on all levels: emotional, mental, physical, and beyond the self.” This is a large task, but Chade-Meng Tan believes that it can be achieved through teaching employees about emotional intelligence and meditation. The program’s mission states “the SIY course applies mindfulness and emotional intelligence to build effective leaders.”

Thousands of Google employees have now gone through the program and many have said that it has changed their work and personal lives. Google has been named “the best place to work” for two years in a row by Fortune and their spot at the top has been achieved for good reason. Google wants to help people fulfill their human potential and this program is changing people’s lives. In addition to reporting that 70% of people are disengaged at work, the Gallup poll of 2013, reported that only 8% of people “sternly agree that they experience overall wellbeing because of their work”. Google, has made a mission of trying to increase the 8% and decrease the 70%.

To achieve this, the Search Inside Yourself program, offers employees tools to bringing their happiness and well-being into their own hands by taking three steps:

1. Attention Training
2. Self-knowledge
3. Creating useful mental habits

The attention training portion of the course focuses on giving people the practices to increase their emotional intelligence. Through these practices, such as mindfulness meditation and breathing exercises, people are taught to clear and calm their mind. Once the skills of attention are introduced, they can also be used to cultivate self-knowledge. With a clear and calm mind, people are able to start

observing streams of thought and processes of emotion. By being able to objectively observe processes that occur naturally in the body, people learn to separate themselves from their thoughts and emotions to keep them from controlling their lives. Finally, the practices taught in this course become habits that start to be used unconsciously. Once healthy habits start to form, they have the possibility of shifting people's lives at work and at home.

Practicing these steps creates useful mental habits enabling Googlers to get to know their minds. The major focus of all three steps is the practice of meditation, a tool that has been a foundation to Buddhist practice. However, Buddhism is not what is being taught to Google employees. Stripped of its religious connotations, meditation is offered as a tool to become familiar with how one's mind works. As you observe your mind, your thoughts will naturally calm and settle. Chade-Meng Tan believes that meditation should be seen scientifically, and this belief is shared by the Dalai Lama. Meditation is a tool to increase mindfulness, empathy, emotional intelligence, social skills, and many other skills that have the ability to increase wellbeing and happiness.

This work has a promising future and is helping people find purpose and happiness at work. The hope is that people will use the skills they learn from Search Inside Yourself to improve how they relate to one another and how they treat themselves. Hopefully the 70% of people who feel disengaged at work continues to decrease because of programs like Search Inside Yourself. Imagine how our world would change if human beings felt not only good, but great at work and if they were inspired for most of their 8.7 hour workday. Imagine how they would carry their inspiration home and share it with their friends and family. Imagine a world where everyone feels inspired and supported at work.



Some Problems of Modern Life and Sketches of Possible Solutions

Scott Remer

Humans are curious creatures. We're definitely animals, mammals just like cats or apes or dolphins. We're governed by the some biological laws and necessities. We need food and water, shelter and sleep and sex. And unfortunately, some of us possess the same instinct as our violent primate brethren (not the lovely bonobos): the will to power, the desire to dominate, subjugate, and humiliate the weak. On my more nihilistic days, I think that humans' animal nature is the only fundamentally true thing about us, that everything else is just pretension, a smokescreen to prettify the reality that *Homo sapiens* hasn't progressed a whole lot since those days on the ancestral savanna.



That, after all, seems to be one of the implications of a lot of the behavioral psych findings coming out of labs these days. We used to think we were superior to the rest of the animal kingdom, endowed with mighty wills and unique powers of reason. Nowadays, that picture's untenable. For one thing, scientists have a tough time spelling out what makes humans different from other animals. It isn't tool use. It isn't language. It isn't living in societies. It isn't war. It isn't art. It isn't passing the mirror test for self-recognition. What, then, might it be? It's hard to say. For another, a spate of studies show that we have a finite reservoir of willpower, one which can be depleted fairly quickly over the course of the day as we make choices—even minor ones. A person's capacity to exercise self-control is even limited by their blood sugar levels and whether or not they have to pee. And then most damningly, the existence of the litany of biases that Amos Tversky, Daniel Kahneman, Daniel Gilbert, and others have been cataloguing assiduously—the availability bias, anchoring, confirmation bias, the framing effect, hindsight bias, hyperbolic discounting, the sunk cost fallacy, status quo bias, and so on and so forth—demolishes the belief that we have godlike powers of reason.

I'd like to think that there's something unique about human beings. But if some spark within us sets us apart from the rest of the animal kingdom, it'll shine most brightly once we fully accept our status as animals, members of a species whose adaptations over the millennia shaped the contours of our thought and conditioned the way that we experience the world. We're fundamentally limited by our evolutionary heritage. But the past three centuries' extraordinary economic and technological progress has far outstripped our capacity to keep up by creating new habits. The structure of our society assumes that we are far more highly advanced beings than we actually are, that we're actually those über-rational demigods of Enlightenment imagi-



nation. This flawed assumption makes it hard to achieve true happiness in today's world. I'll elaborate with three examples and offer some tentative solutions.

Fats and sugar taste good. In the days when we had to scavenge for food, that was an excellent thing; fat and sugar indicated ready sources of energy. But nowadays, in an era of processed foods, high-fructose corn syrup, and abundant red meat, it's a public health problem—and health is a prerequisite for happiness. The perfectly rational person would be immune to the siren call of unhealthy food, but we inhabitants of the real world struggle with this. The government exacerbates our struggles by subsidizing wheat, corn, soy, and other ingredients that go into the junk food lining vending machine and grocery store shelves. It isn't easy to eat healthily to begin with, largely because of the spell sugar and fat cast on our pleasure receptors. A pricing system that makes junk food cheap and healthy food expensive doesn't help matters, either. Nor, for that matter, does a food industry dominated by profit-hungry corporations which employ chemists to synthesize snacks that exploit our evolutionary weak spots.

What to do? We can change how we subsidize agriculture. We should stop subsidizing corn and wheat and start subsidizing foods that people should be eating—fruits and vegetables and legumes. We're already paying the farmers, so we might as well encourage them to produce healthy food at low prices. Maybe such a move would help us overcome our attraction to Doritos and their ilk.

Smartphones and the Internet are technologies that similarly exploit natural mechanisms of ours—in this case, our hunger for social connection and thirst for information. Precisely because of how they hijack preexisting neural circuitry, they can be quite addictive. The ideally rational

person would only open one window at a time and set limits for herself, unplugging after a certain time of day. In the real world, smartphones and the Internet fragment our attention—we juggle a million browser tabs, chat windows, and apps at once. There's something almost compulsive about the need to check one's email every few minutes, and the constant low-grade need to maintain one's virtual world can be draining.

A related problem is the way electricity messes with our sleep cycles. We live in a world no longer governed by sunrise and sunset. While that affords us much more freedom in organizing our lives, it hasn't been good for our circadian rhythms. Our sleep schedules are divorced from nature, and we often interact with TV and computer screens right before bedtime. And we pay the price: according to its website, the CDC considers sleep deprivation a public health epidemic. Chronic sleep deprivation is a drag on the economy and people's overall wellbeing.

I think we can kill two birds with one stone, although my solution to these problems is pretty radical. Imagine a world where the Internet turned off sometime late at night, like TV before the 24 hour news cycle. We could ensure that academic institutions, hospitals, airports, and other places that operate 24-7 (and members of professions with an urgent need for nighttime Internet access) had access, but the general population didn't. There'd finally be some respite from our technological world's perpetual thrum. Absent two major sources of diversion and sleep cycle disruption, people could sleep better and, if awake, hopefully attain some temporary peace of mind.

Obviously, I've only scratched the surface here, naming just a few of modern life's many problems and hastily tracing some possible solutions. (Just for starters, any

thorough investigation would consider economic inequality and urban design.) Many people criticize evolutionary psychology as unscientific, consisting of just-so stories that it's nearly impossible to falsify (and thus verify). Perhaps, but I still think there's some merit to analyzing questions of social organization from an evolutionary perspective. We should think about ourselves as we are, not as we'd like to be. We haven't evolved much over the past few millennia, so we should think carefully about the society we inhabit and whether or not its structures are suited to the kind of creature that we are. If not, we're just setting ourselves up for unhappiness.





Happiness Doesn't Just Happen

Eli Feldman

Happiness. It seems like it's what everyone is chasing these days. There are countless books, TED Talks, self-help guides, and tabloid articles dedicated to it. Yet very few people make happiness a priority. We throw it aside, much like flossing: the thing that we know we should be focusing on, but we just can't find the time. We bury it under classes, extra-curriculars, networking, and of course ending world hunger on our day off. So if we all are so desperate to be happy, why are we putting that goal on the backburner?

I think a large part of it is that people feel guilty taking time to focus on themselves. Especially in a high-pressure environment like Yale's, people are constantly trying to be the best, out-study each other, beat out the other applicants for that job, get tapped by that society, etc. Taking time for yourself isn't something you can put on your resume; it isn't a shiny accomplishment to be hung on the wall. Friends won't congratulate you on it, and they may not even realize that it's happening. For this reason, in an environment where fancy prizes, letters of rec, and "A"s reign supreme, people sometimes feel that focusing on this "wishy-washy happiness stuff" just isn't as important. But that's where they're wrong, and—as many people find out the hard way—sometimes it's the intangible, "wishy-washy happiness stuff" that is actually most important for your overall success.

Everyone knows that happiness is good for your emotional wellbeing, but what many people don't realize is that happiness is also important to your academic and professional success. People who are generally happy do better at the tasks in front of them; they have more motivation, are more creative, and have the ability to persevere when things get tough. Although people view happiness and emotional success as completely separate from academic and professional success, the two are inextricably linked. If you really want to get ahead of the competition, nail that interview, get the "A", one thing that can set you apart is being genuinely inspired, motivated, and upbeat, which are much rarer than simply being skilled or intelligent.

So that at least explains why people push happiness aside; they put their work first, thinking that happiness is less important than and cannot boost their academic abilities. But even if people were to prioritize their happiness, I think that an even bigger obstacle presents itself; people don't actually know how to make themselves happy.

I know that many readers will see the last sentence and think that I'm being patronizing or exaggerative, but hear me out. Many people think that most things in life just sort of happen. Some of those things make you happy and some of them make you sad. You get a promotion: happy. You get fired: sad. And you can work on getting promoted or not getting fired, but that's about the extent to which you control your own happiness. This couldn't be farther from the truth. Contrary to what many people believe, happiness isn't something that just happens; you have to work at it. You can't just sit back and wait for it; you have to go out and get it.

How do we do that? There are a few simple, crucial ways that we can help make ourselves happier people: first and foremost, we have to make time to do fun things and relax. Our bodies and minds are not meant to be going full force at all hours of the day. People who are cramming from morning to dawn often burn out, and they end up being less productive because of it. For that reason, it is crucial to carve out time to do fun things. It doesn't matter what that thing is: whether it's reading a good book, going out for coffee/seeing a movie with a friend, taking a long walk, meditating, exercising, etc. The important thing is that you drop everything work related and just take some "you" time. Having a few activities like this will allow you to take a breather, clear your head, and let go of all the stress that has been building up. In addition to helping you de-stress, though, it will actually make you more productive. If you've already been working for a number of hours in a row, you're going to run out of steam, and although you will still be "working," you won't be doing so with the same level of productivity as when you sat down. If you take even a half hour break, though, you'll likely find that when you come back, your brain feels totally fresh, and you'll be able to go back and hammer out your work, as opposed to just slugging through it.

The second thing we can do to make ourselves happier is to simply change the way that we view our accomplishments or situation, specifically by being more appreciative of what we have. I know that “count your blessings” isn’t exactly an original idea, but it is actually quite powerful. The truth of the matter is that it’s not about what you have, it’s about how you have it. For people who achieve many things, as most Yalies do, each individual accomplishment can start to seem less significant. For some, it gets to the point where there is nearly no delay between when they receive an award, A, or piece of good news and when they file it away to move on to the next task. This is a massive waste of potential happiness. Accomplishments, as well as the little constants in our lives that are going well, should absolutely be savored and reflected on. If you got into your a cappella group, don’t put it on hold to cram for an exam; go celebrate! If you finish that final essay you’ve been working on for weeks, be proud of it and take some time to reflect on your hard work. The point is that by taking time to appreciate when good things happen, we can actually create our own happiness.

This sheds light on a particularly common myth, which is that money can’t buy happiness. Rubbish! Of course it can, as long as you spend it in the right way. Sure, if you think that you can just buy a sports car and then sit back and have that initial burst of happiness last forever, you’re in for a rude awakening. But if you treat yourself to something—a new phone, a nice dinner out, a beautiful dress, a pair of new sheets—and you savor it, continually appreciate it, and use it to remind yourself of the little things in life that are going right and that you can afford, well why on earth *wouldn’t* it bring you happiness? Again, it’s not the item, it’s the approach; whether it’s a concert with a friend or a watch for graduation, appreciating the item and using it to reflect

on your good fortunes from time to time will absolutely help you be a happier and more appreciative person.

Finally, and perhaps least originally, we have to get enough sleep. I know, who am I, your mother? No, but it turns out that she's been right all these years. It is damn near impossible to be happy when you haven't gotten enough sleep. Not only does sleep deprivation contribute to a generally sour mood, but it also actually changes our cognitive functioning. Studies have shown that sleep deprivation makes it harder for our brain to recognize happy faces, while it is hypersensitive to angry faces, making an already bad day seem worse. And of course sleep deprivation is detrimental to academic productivity, as it impairs memory, alertness, and creative ability.

I hope this article helps illuminate the conundrum of happiness on college campuses like Yale's: why it's important, why we ignore it, and how we can increase it. People file it away behind the academic tasks in front of them, not realizing that both their wellbeing and professional success will suffer. Even when they make it a priority, though, many people do not realize the degree to which they can take happiness into their own hands. By making time to relax, appreciating what we have, and getting enough sleep, we can all be happier, healthier, more successful people. So you can throw away that magazine, ignore that TED talk, and forgo the self-help guide, because making yourself happier can actually be quite simple: the only thing you need to make yourself happier is the motivation and dedication to do so.

Flourish is a student group on campus that publishes an academic journal investigating human happiness, flourishing, and the good life. Students study in a wide range of fields, including philosophy, psychology, economics, and STEM.

In addition to the journal, we organize a speaker dinner series with Yale professors each semester. At each dinner conversation, we bring a professor from a different field to speak about how his or her research can impact our thinking about human flourishing.

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