

OTHER BOOKS BY MARTIN E. P. SELIGMAN

Helplessness

Learned Optimism

What You Can Change and What You Can't

The Optimistic Child

AUTHENTIC HAPPINESS

*Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize
Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment*



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POSITIVE FEELING AND POSITIVE CHARACTER

IN 1932, Cecilia O'Payne took her final vows in Milwaukee. As a novice in the School Sisters of Notre Dame, she committed the rest of her life to the teaching of young children. Asked to write a short sketch of her life on this momentous occasion, she wrote:

God started my life off well by bestowing upon me grace of inestimable value. . . . The past year which I spent as a candidate studying at Notre Dame has been a very happy one. Now I look forward with eager joy to receiving the Holy Habit of Our Lady and to a life of union with Love Divine.

In the same year, in the same city, and taking the same vows, Marguerite Donnelly wrote her autobiographical sketch:

I was born on September 26, 1909, the eldest of seven children, five girls and two boys. . . . My candidate year was spent in the motherhouse, teaching chemistry and second year Latin at Notre Dame Institute. With God's grace, I intend to do my best for our Order, for the spread of religion and for my personal sanctification.

These two nuns, along with 178 of their sisters, thereby became subjects in the most remarkable study of happiness and longevity ever done.

Investigating how long people will live and understanding what conditions shorten and lengthen life is an enormously important but enormously knotty scientific problem. It is well documented, for example, that people from Utah live longer than people from the neighboring state of Nevada.

But why? Is it the clean mountain air of Utah as opposed to the exhaust fumes of Las Vegas? Is it the staid Mormon life as opposed to the more frenetic lifestyle of the average Nevadan? Is it the stereotypical diet in Nevada—junk food, late-night snacks, alcohol, coffee, and tobacco—as opposed to wholesome, farm-fresh food, and the scarcity of alcohol, coffee, and tobacco in Utah? Too many insidious (as well as healthful) factors are confounded between Nevada and Utah for scientists to isolate the cause.

Unlike Nevadans or even Utahans, however, nuns lead routine and sheltered lives. They all eat roughly the same bland diet. They don't smoke or drink. They have the same reproductive and marital histories. They don't get sexually transmitted diseases. They are in the same economic and social class, and they have the same access to good medical care. So almost all the usual confounds are eliminated, yet there is still wide variation in how long nuns live and how healthy they are. Cecilia is still alive at age ninety-eight and has never been sick a day in her life. In contrast, Marguerite had a stroke at age fifty-nine, and died soon thereafter. We can be sure their lifestyle, diet, and medical care were not the culprits. When the novitiate essays of all 180 nuns were carefully read, however, a very strong and surprising difference emerged. Looking back at what Cecilia and Marguerite wrote, can you spot it?

Sister Cecilia used the words “very happy” and “eager joy,” both expressions of effervescent good cheer. Sister Marguerite’s autobiography, in contrast, contained not even a whisper of positive emotion. When the amount of positive feeling was quantified by raters who did not know how long the nuns lived, it was discovered that 90 percent of the most cheerful quarter was alive at age eighty-five versus only 34 percent of the least cheerful quarter. Similarly, 54 percent of the most cheerful quarter was alive at age ninety-four, as opposed to 11 percent of the least cheerful quarter.

Was it really the upbeat nature of their sketches that made the difference? Perhaps it was a difference in the degree of unhappiness expressed, or in how much they looked forward to the future, or how devout they were, or how intellectually complex the essays were. But research showed that none of these factors made a difference, only the amount of positive feeling expressed in the sketch. So it seems that a happy nun is a long-lived nun.

College yearbook photos are a gold mine for Positive Psychology researchers. “Look at the birdie and smile,” the photographer tells you, and dutifully you put on your best smile. Smiling on demand, it turns out, is easier said than done. Some of us break into a radiant smile of authentic good cheer, while the rest of us pose politely. There are two kinds of smiles. The first, called a Duchenne smile (after its discoverer, Guillaume Duchenne), is genuine. The corners of your mouth turn up and the skin around the corners of your eyes crinkles (like crow's feet). The muscles that do this, the *orbicularis oculi* and the *zygomaticus*, are exceedingly difficult to control voluntarily. The other smile, called the Pan American smile (after the flight attendants in television ads for the now-defunct airline), is inauthentic, with none of the Duchenne features. Indeed, it is probably more related to the rictus that lower primates display when frightened than it is to happiness.

When trained psychologists look through collections of photos, they can at a glance separate out the Duchenne from the non-Duchenne smilers. Dacher Keltner and LeeAnne Harker of the University of California at Berkeley, for example, studied 141 senior-class photos from the 1960 yearbook of Mills College. All but three of the women were smiling, and half of the smilers were Duchenne smilers. All the women were contacted at ages twenty-seven, forty-three, and fifty-two and asked about their marriages and their life satisfaction. When Harker and Keltner inherited the study in the 1990s, they wondered if they could predict from the senior-year smile alone what these women’s married lives would turn out to be like. Astonishingly, Duchenne women, on average, were more likely to be married, to stay married, and to experience more personal well-being over the next thirty years. Those indicators of happiness were predicted by a mere crinkling of the eyes.

Questioning their results, Harker and Keltner considered whether the Duchenne women were prettier, and their good looks rather than the genuineness of their smile predicted more life satisfaction. So the investigators went back and rated how pretty each of the women seemed, and they found that looks had nothing to do with good marriages or life satisfaction. A genuinely smiling woman, it turned out, was simply more likely to be well-wed and happy.

These two studies are surprising in their shared conclusion that just one portrait of a momentary positive emotion convincingly predicts longevity and marital satisfaction. The first part of this book is about these momentary positive emotions: joy, flow, glee, pleasure, contentment, serenity, hope, and ecstasy. In particular, I will focus on three questions:

- *Why* has evolution endowed us with positive feeling? What are the functions and consequences of these emotions, beyond making us feel good?
- *Who* has positive emotion in abundance, and who does not? What enables these emotions, and what disables them?
- *How* can you build more and lasting positive emotion into your life?

Everyone wants answers to these questions for their own lives and it is natural to turn to the field of psychology for answers. So it may come as a surprise to you that psychology has badly neglected the positive side of life. For every one hundred journal articles on sadness, there is just one on happiness. One of my aims is to provide responsible answers, grounded in scientific research, to these three questions. Unfortunately, unlike relieving depression (where research has now provided step-by-step manuals that are reliably documented to work), what we know about building happiness is spotty. On some topics I can present solid facts, but on others, the best I can do is to draw inferences from the latest research and suggest how it can guide your life. In all cases, I will distinguish between what is known and what is my speculation. My most grandiose aim, as you will find out in the next three chapters, is to correct the imbalance by propelling the field of psychology into supplementing its hard-won knowledge about suffering and mental illness with a great deal more knowledge about positive emotion, as well as about personal strengths and virtues.

How do strengths and virtues sneak in? Why is a book about Positive Psychology about anything more than “happiology” or *hedonics*—the science of how we feel from moment to moment? A hedonist wants as many good moments and as few bad moments as possible in his life, and simple hedonic theory says that the quality of his life is just the quantity of good moments minus the quantity of bad moments. This is more

than an ivory-tower theory, since very many people run their lives based on exactly this goal. But it is a delusion, I believe, because the sum total of our momentary feelings turns out to be a very flawed measure of how good or how bad we judge an episode—a movie, a vacation, a marriage, or an entire life—to be.

Daniel Kahneman, a distinguished professor of psychology at Princeton and the world’s leading authority on hedonics, has made a career of demonstrating the many violations of simple hedonic theory. One technique he uses to test hedonic theory is the colonoscopy, in which a scope on a tube is inserted uncomfortably into the rectum and moved up and down the bowels for what seems like an eternity, but is actually only a few minutes. In one of Kahneman’s experiments, 682 patients were randomly assigned to either the usual colonoscopy or to a procedure in which one extra minute was added on at the end, but with the colonoscope not moving. A stationary colonoscope provides a less uncomfortable final minute than what went before, but it does add one extra minute of discomfort. The added minute means, of course, that this group gets more total pain than the routine group. Because their experience ends relatively well, however, their memory of the episode is much rosier and, astonishingly, they are more willing to undergo the procedure again than the routine group.

In your own life, you should take particular care with endings, for their color will forever tinge your memory of the entire relationship and your willingness to reenter it. This book will talk about why hedonism fails and what this might mean for you. So Positive Psychology is about the meaning of those happy and unhappy moments, the tapestry they weave, and the strengths and virtues they display that make up the quality of your life. Ludwig Wittgenstein, the great Anglo-Viennese philosopher, was by all accounts miserable. I am a collector of Wittgensteinabilia, but I have never seen a photo of him smiling (Duchenne or otherwise). Wittgenstein was melancholy, irascible, scathingly critical of everyone around him, and even more critical of himself. In a typical seminar held in his cold and barely furnished Cambridge rooms, he would pace the floor, muttering audibly, “Wittgenstein, Wittgenstein, what a terrible teacher you are.” Yet his last words give the lie to happiology. Dying alone, he said to his landlady, “Tell them it’s been wonderful!”

Suppose you could be hooked up to a hypothetical “experience ma-

chine" that, for the rest of your life, would stimulate your brain and give you any positive feelings you desire. Most people to whom I offer this imaginary choice refuse the machine. It is not just positive feelings we want, we want to be *entitled* to our positive feelings. Yet we have invented myriad shortcuts to feeling good; drugs, chocolate, loveless sex, shopping, masturbation, and television are all examples. (I am not, however, going to suggest that you should drop these shortcuts altogether.)

The belief that we can rely on shortcuts to happiness, joy, rapture, comfort, and ecstasy, rather than be entitled to these feelings by the exercise of personal strengths and virtues, leads to legions of people who in the middle of great wealth are starving spiritually. Positive emotion alienated from the exercise of character leads to emptiness, to inauthenticity, to depression, and, as we age, to the gnawing realization that we are fidgeting until we die.

The positive feeling that arises from the exercise of strengths and virtues, rather than from the shortcuts, is authentic. I found out about the value of this authenticity by giving courses in Positive Psychology for the last three years at the University of Pennsylvania. (These have been much more fun than the abnormal psychology courses I taught for the twenty years prior.) I tell my students about Jon Haidt, a gifted young University of Virginia professor who began his career working on disgust, giving people fried grasshoppers to eat. He then turned to moral disgust, observing people's reactions when he asked them to try on a T-shirt allegedly once worn by Adolf Hitler. Worn down by all these negative explorations, he began to look for an emotion that is the opposite of moral disgust, which he calls *elevation*. Haidt collects stories of the emotional reactions to experiencing the better side of humanity, to seeing another person do something extraordinarily positive. An eighteen-year-old freshman at the University of Virginia relates a typical story of elevation:

We were going home from working at the Salvation Army shelter on a snowy night. We passed an old woman shoveling her driveway. One of the guys asked the driver to let him out. I thought he was just going to take a shortcut home. But when I saw him pick up the shovel, well, I felt a lump in my throat and started to cry. I wanted to tell everyone about it. I felt romantic toward him.

The students in one of my classes wondered if happiness comes from the exercise of kindness more readily than it does from having fun. After a heated dispute, we each undertook an assignment for the next class: to engage in one pleasurable activity and one philanthropic activity, and write about both.

The results were life-changing. The afterglow of the "pleasurable" activity (hanging out with friends, or watching a movie, or eating a hot fudge sundae) paled in comparison with the effects of the kind action. When our philanthropic acts were spontaneous and called upon personal strengths, the whole day went better. One junior told about her nephew phoning for help with his third-grade arithmetic. After an hour of tutoring him, she was astonished to discover that "for the rest of the day, I could listen better, I was mellower, and people liked me much more than usual." The exercise of kindness is a *gratification*, in contrast to a pleasure. As a gratification, it calls on your strengths to rise to an occasion and meet a challenge. Kindness is not accompanied by a separable stream of positive emotion like joy; rather, it consists in total engagement and in the loss of self-consciousness. Time stops. One of the business students volunteered that he had come to the University of Pennsylvania to learn how to make a lot of money in order to be happy, but that he was floored to find that he liked helping other people more than spending his money shopping.

To understand well-being, then, we also need to understand personal strengths and the virtues, and this is the topic of the second part of this book. When well-being comes from engaging our strengths and virtues, our lives are imbued with authenticity. Feelings are states, momentary occurrences that need not be recurring features of personality. Traits, in contrast to states, are either negative or positive characteristics that recur across time and different situations, and strengths and virtues are the positive characteristics that bring about good feeling and gratification. Traits are abiding dispositions whose exercise makes momentary feelings more likely. The negative trait of paranoia makes the momentary state of jealousy more likely, just as the positive trait of being humorous makes the state of laughing more likely.

The trait of optimism helps explain how a single snapshot of the momentary happiness of nuns could predict how long they will live. Optimistic people tend to interpret their troubles as transient, control-

lable, and specific to one situation. Pessimistic people, in contrast, believe that their troubles last forever, undermine everything they do, and are uncontrollable. To see if optimism predicts longevity, scientists at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, selected 839 consecutive patients who referred themselves for medical care forty years ago. (On admission, Mayo Clinic patients routinely take a battery of psychological as well as physical tests, and one of these is a test of the trait of optimism.) Of these patients, 200 had died by the year 2000, and optimists had 19 percent greater longevity, in terms of their expected life span, compared to that of the pessimists. Living 19 percent longer is again comparable to the longer lives of the happy nuns.

Optimism is only one of two dozen strengths that bring about greater well-being. George Vaillant, a Harvard professor who runs the two most thorough psychological investigations of men across their entire lives, studies strengths he calls "mature defenses." These include altruism, the ability to postpone gratification, future-mindedness, and humor. Some men never grow up and never display these traits, while other men revel in them as they age. Vaillant's two groups are the Harvard classes of 1939 through 1943, and 456 contemporaneous Boston men from the inner city. Both these studies began in the late 1930s, when the participants were in their late teens, and continue to this day, with the men now over eighty. Vaillant has uncovered the best predictors of successful aging, among them income, physical health, and joy in living. The mature defenses are robust harbingers of joy in living, high income, and a vigorous old age in both the largely white and Protestant Harvard group and the much more varied inner-city group. Of the 76 inner-city men who frequently displayed these mature defenses when younger, 95% could still move heavy furniture, chop wood, walk two miles, and climb two flights of stairs without tiring when they were old men. Of the 68 inner-city men who never displayed any of these psychological strengths, only 53% could perform the same tasks. For the Harvard men at age 75, joy in living, marital satisfaction, and the subjective sense of physical health were predicted best by the mature defenses exercised and measured in middle age.

How did Positive Psychology select just twenty-four strengths out of the enormous number of traits to choose from? The last time anyone bothered to count, in 1936, more than eighteen thousand words in English referred to traits. Choosing which traits to investigate is a serious

question for a distinguished group of psychologists and psychiatrists who are creating a system that is intended to be the opposite of the *DSM* (the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* of the American Psychiatric Association, which serves as a classification scheme of mental illness). Valor, kindness, originality? Surely. But what about intelligence, perfect pitch, or punctuality? Three criteria for strengths are as follows:

- They are valued in almost every culture
- They are valued in their own right, not just as a means to other ends
- They are malleable

So intelligence and perfect pitch are out, because they are not very learnable. Punctuality is learnable, but, like perfect pitch, it is generally a means to another end (like efficiency) and is not valued in almost every culture.

While psychology may have neglected virtue, religion and philosophy most assuredly have not, and there is astonishing convergence across the millennia and across cultures about virtue and strength. Confucius, Aristotle, Aquinas, the Bushido samurai code, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, and other venerable traditions disagree on the details, but all of these codes include six core virtues:

- Wisdom and knowledge
- Courage
- Love and humanity
- Justice
- Temperance
- Spirituality and transcendence

Each core virtue can be subdivided for the purpose of classification and measurement. Wisdom, for example, can be broken down into the strengths of curiosity, love of learning, judgment, originality, social intelligence, and perspective. Love includes kindness, generosity, nurturance, and the capacity to *be* loved as well as to love. Convergence across thousands of years and among unrelated philosophical traditions is remarkable and Positive Psychology takes this cross-cultural agreement as its guide.

These strengths and virtues serve us in times of ill fortune as well as better moments. In fact, hard times are uniquely suited to the display of many strengths. Until recently I thought that Positive Psychology was a creature of good times: When nations are at war, impoverished, and in social turmoil, I assumed, their most natural concerns are with defense and damage, and the science they find most congenial is about healing broken things. In contrast, when nations are at peace, in surplus, and not in social turmoil, then they become concerned with building the best things in life. Florence under Lorenzo de Medici decided to devote its surplus not to becoming the most awesome military power in Europe, but to creating beauty.

Muscle physiology distinguishes between *tonic* activity (the baseline of electrical activity when the muscle is idling) and *phasic* activity (the burst of electrical activity when the muscle is challenged and contracts). Most of psychology is about tonic activity; introversion, high IQ, depression, and anger, for example, are all measured in the absence of any real-world challenge, and the hope of the psychometrician is to predict what a person will actually do when confronted with a phasic challenge. How well do tonic measures fare? Does a high IQ predict a truly canny response to a customer saying no? How well does tonic depression predict collapse when a person is fired? “Moderately well, but imperfectly” is the best general answer. Psychology as usual predicts many of the cases, but there are huge numbers of high-IQ people who fail, and another huge number of low-IQ people who succeed when life challenges them to do something actually intelligent in the world. The reason for all these errors is that tonic measures are only moderate predictors of phasic action. I call this imperfection in prediction the Harry Truman effect. Truman, after an undistinguished life, to almost everyone’s surprise rose to the occasion when FDR died and ended up becoming one of the great presidents.

We need a psychology of rising to the occasion, because that is the missing piece in the jigsaw puzzle of predicting human behavior. In the evolutionary struggle for winning a mate or surviving a predator’s attack, those of our ancestors who rose to the occasion passed on their genes; the losers did not. Their tonic characteristics—depression level, sleep patterns, waist size—probably did not count for much, except insofar as they fed the Harry Truman effect. This means that we all contain ancient strengths inside of us that we may not know about until we

are truly challenged. Why were the adults who faced World War II the “greatest generation”? Not because they were made of different stuff than we are, but because they faced a time of trouble that evoked the ancient strengths within.

When you read about these strengths in Chapters 8 and 9 and take the strengths survey, you will find that some of your strengths are tonic and some are phasic. Kindness, curiosity, loyalty, and spirituality, for example, tend to be tonic; you can display these several dozen times a day. Perseverance, perspective, fairness, and valor, at the other extreme, tend to be phasic; you cannot demonstrate valor while standing in a check-out line or sitting in an airplane (unless terrorists hijack it). One phasic action in a lifetime may be enough to demonstrate valor.

When you read about these strengths, you will also find some that are deeply characteristic of you, whereas others are not. I call the former your *signature strengths*, and one of my purposes is to distinguish these from strengths that are less a part of you. I do not believe that you should devote overly much effort to correcting your weaknesses. Rather, I believe that the highest success in living and the deepest emotional satisfaction comes from building and using your signature strengths. For this reason, the second part of this book focuses on how to identify these strengths.

The third part of the book is about no less a question than “What is the good life?” In my view, you can find it by following a startlingly simple path. The “pleasant life” might be had by drinking champagne and driving a Porsche, but not the good life. Rather, the good life is using your signature strengths every day to produce authentic happiness and abundant gratification. This is something you can learn to do in each of the main realms of your life: work, love, and raising children.

One of my signature strengths is the love of learning, and by teaching I have built it into the fabric of my life. I try to do some of it every day. Simplifying a complex concept for my students, or telling my eight-year-old about bidding in bridge, ignites a glow inside me. More than that, when I teach well, it invigorates me, and the well-being it brings is authentic because it comes from what I am best at. In contrast, organizing people is not one of my signature strengths. Brilliant mentors have helped me become more adequate at it, so if I must, I can chair a committee effectively. But when it is over, I feel drained, not invigorated. What satisfaction I derive from it feels less authentic than what I get

from teaching, and shepherding a good committee report does not put me in better touch with myself or anything larger.

The well-being that using your signature strengths engenders is anchored in authenticity. But just as well-being needs to be anchored in strengths and virtues, these in turn must be anchored in something larger. Just as the good life is something beyond the pleasant life, the meaningful life is beyond the good life.

What does Positive Psychology tell us about finding purpose in life, about leading a meaningful life beyond the good life? I am not sophomore enough to put forward a complete theory of meaning, but I do know that it consists in attachment to something larger, and the larger the entity to which you can attach yourself, the more meaning in your life. Many people who want meaning and purpose in their lives have turned to New Age thinking or have returned to organized religions. They hunger for the miraculous, or for divine intervention. A hidden cost of contemporary psychology's obsession with pathology is that it has left these pilgrims high and dry.

Like many of these stranded people, I also hunger for meaning in my life that will transcend the arbitrary purposes I have chosen for myself. Like many scientifically minded Westerners, however, the idea of a transcendent purpose (or, beyond this, of a God who grounds such purpose) has always seemed untenable to me. Positive Psychology points the way toward a secular approach to noble purpose and transcendent meaning—and, even more astonishingly, toward a God who is not supernatural. These hopes are expressed in my final chapter.

As your voyage through this book begins, please take a quick happiness survey. This survey was developed by Michael W. Fordyce, and it has been taken by tens of thousands of people. You can take the test on the next page or go to the website www.authentichappiness.org. The website will keep track of changes in your score as you read this book, and it will also provide you with up-to-the-moment comparisons of others who have taken the test, broken down by age, gender, and education. In thinking about such comparisons, of course, remember that happiness is not a competition. Authentic happiness derives from raising the bar for yourself, not rating yourself against others.

FORDYCE EMOTIONS QUESTIONNAIRE

In general, how happy or unhappy do you usually feel? Check the *one* statement below that best describes your average happiness.

- 10. Extremely happy (feeling ecstatic, joyous, fantastic)
- 9. Very happy (feeling really good, elated)
- 8. Pretty happy (spirits high, feeling good)
- 7. Mildly happy (feeling fairly good and somewhat cheerful)
- 6. Slightly happy (just a bit above normal)
- 5. Neutral (not particularly happy or unhappy)
- 4. Slightly unhappy (just a bit below neutral)
- 3. Mildly unhappy (just a bit low)
- 2. Pretty unhappy (somewhat "blue," spirits down)
- 1. Very unhappy (depressed, spirits very low)
- 0. Extremely unhappy (utterly depressed, completely down)

Consider your emotions a moment further. On average, what percentage of the time do you feel happy? What percentage of the time do you feel unhappy? What percentage of the time do you feel neutral (neither happy nor unhappy)? Write down your best estimates, as well as you can, in the spaces below. Make sure the three figures add up to 100 percent.

On average:

The percent of time I feel happy ____ %

The percent of time I feel unhappy ____ %

The percent of time I feel neutral ____ %

Based on a sample of 3,050 American adults, the average score (out of 10) is 6.92. The average score on time is happy, 54.13 percent; unhappy, 20.44 percent; and neutral, 25.43 percent.

There is a question that may have been bothering you as you read this chapter: What is happiness, anyway? More words have been penned about defining happiness than about almost any other philosophical question. I could fill the rest of these pages with just a fraction of the attempts to take this promiscuously overused word and make sense of

it, but it is not my intention to add to the clutter. I have taken care to use my terms in consistent and well-defined ways, and the interested reader will find the definitions in the Appendix. My most basic concern, however, is measuring happiness's constituents—the positive emotions and strengths—and then telling you what science has discovered about how you can increase them.

2

How PSYCHOLOGY LOST ITS WAY AND I FOUND MINE

HELLO, Marty. I know you've been waiting on tenterhooks. Here are the results . . . Squawk. Buzz. Squawk." Then silence.

I recognize the voice as that of Dorothy Cantor, the president of the 160,000-member American Psychological Association (APA), and she is right about the tenterhooks. The voting for her successor has just ended, and I was one of the candidates. But have you ever tried to use a car phone in the Tetons?

"Was that about the election results?" shouts my father-in-law, Dennis, in his baritone British accent. From the rear seat of the packed Suburban, he is just barely audible over my three small children belting out "One more day, one day more" from *Les Misérables*. I bite my lip in frustration. Who got me into this politics stuff anyway? I was an ivory-towered and ivy-covered professor—with a laboratory whirring along, plenty of grants, devoted students, a best-selling book, and tedious but sufferable faculty meetings—and a central figure in two scholarly fields: learned helplessness and learned optimism. Who needs it?

I need it. As I wait for the phone to come to life, I drift back forty years to my roots as a psychologist. There, suddenly, are Jeannie Albright and Barbara Willis and Sally Eckert, the unattainable romantic interests of a chubby, thirteen-year-old middle-class Jewish kid suddenly thrust into a school filled only with Protestant kids whose families had been in Albany for three hundred years, very rich Jewish kids, and Catholic athletes. I had aced the admissions examination to the Albany Academy for Boys in those sleepy Eisenhower days before pre-SATs. No

reading this chapter is an example of a win-win encounter: if I have done my job well, I grew intellectually by writing it, and so did you by reading it. Being in love, making a friend, and raising children are almost always huge win-wins. Almost every technological advance (for example, the printing press or the hybrid tea rose) is a win-win interaction. The printing press did not subtract an equivalent economic value from somewhere else; rather it engendered an explosion in value.

Herein lies the likely reason for feelings. Just as negative feelings are a “here-be-dragons” sensory system that alarms you, telling you unmistakably that you are in a win-lose encounter, the feeling part of positive emotion is also sensory. Positive feeling is a neon “here-be-growth” marquee that tells you that a potential win-win encounter is at hand. By activating an expansive, tolerant, and creative mindset, positive feelings maximize the social, intellectual, and physical benefits that will accrue.

Now that you and I are convinced that it is well worth it to bring more happiness into your life, the overriding question is, can the amount of positive emotion in our lives be increased? Let us now turn to that question.

4

CAN YOU MAKE YOURSELF LASTINGLY HAPPIER?

THE HAPPINESS FORMULA

Although much of the research that underlies this book is based in statistics, a user-friendly book in psychology for the educated layperson can have at most one equation. Here, then, is the only equation I ask you to consider:

$$H = S + C + V$$

where H is your enduring level of happiness, S is your set range, C is the circumstances of your life, and V represents factors under your voluntary control.

This chapter looks at $H = S + C$ of this equation. V , the single most important issue in Positive Psychology, is the subject of Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

H (ENDURING LEVEL OF HAPPINESS)

It is important to distinguish your momentary happiness from your enduring level of happiness. Momentary happiness can easily be increased by any number of uplifts, such as chocolate, a comedy film, a back rub, a compliment, flowers, or a new blouse. This chapter, and this book generally, is not a guide to increasing the number of transient bursts of happiness in your life. No one is more expert on this topic than you are. The challenge is to raise your *enduring* level of happiness, and merely increasing the number of bursts of momentary positive feelings

will not (for reasons you will read about shortly) accomplish this. The Fordyce scale you took in the last chapter was about momentary happiness, and the time has now come to measure your general level of happiness. The following scale was devised by Sonja Lyubomirsky, an associate professor of psychology at the University of California at Riverside.

GENERAL HAPPINESS SCALE

For each of the following statements and/or questions, please circle the point on the scale that you feel is most appropriate in describing you.

1. In general, I consider myself:



2. Compared to most of my peers, I consider myself:



3. Some people are generally very happy. They enjoy life regardless of what is going on, getting the most out of everything. To what extent does this characterization describe you?



4. Some people are generally not very happy. Although they are not depressed, they never seem as happy as they might be. To what extent does this characterization describe you?



To score the test, total your answers for the questions and divide by 4. The mean for adult Americans is 4.8. Two-thirds of people score between 3.8 and 5.8.

The title of this chapter may seem like a peculiar question to you. You

may believe that with enough effort, every emotional state and every personality trait can be improved. When I began studying psychology forty years ago, I also believed this, and this dogma of total human plasticity reigned over the entire field. It held that with enough personal work and with enough reshaping of the environment all of human psychology could be remade for the better. It was shattered beyond repair in the 1980s, however, when studies of the personality of twins and of adopted children began to cascade in. The psychology of identical twins turns out to be much more similar than that of fraternal twins, and the psychology of adopted children turns out to be much more similar to their biological parents than to their adoptive parents. All of these studies—and they now number in the hundreds—converge on a single point: roughly 50 percent of almost every personality trait turns out to be attributable to genetic inheritance. But high heritability does not determine how unchangeable a trait is. Some highly heritable traits (like sexual orientation and body weight) don't change much at all, while other highly heritable traits (like pessimism and fearfulness) are very changeable.

S (SET RANGE): THE BARRIERS TO BECOMING HAPPIER

Roughly half of your score on happiness tests is accounted for by the score your biological parents would have gotten had they taken the test. This may mean that we inherit a "steersman" who urges us toward a specific level of happiness or sadness. So, for example, if you are low in positive affectivity, you may frequently feel the impulse to avoid social contact and spend your time alone. As you will see below, happy people are very social, and there is some reason to think that their happiness is caused by lots of fulfilling socializing. So, if you do not fight the urgings of your genetic steersman, you may remain lower in happy feelings than you would be otherwise.

The Happiness Thermostat

Ruth, a single mother in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago, needed more hope in her life, and she got it cheaply by buying five

dollars' worth of Illinois lottery tickets every week. She needed periodic doses of hope because her usual mood was low; if she could have afforded a therapist, her diagnosis would have been minor depression. This ongoing funk did not begin when her husband left her three years earlier for another woman, but seemed to have always been there—at least since middle school, twenty-five years ago.

Then a miracle happened: Ruth won 22 million dollars in the Illinois State lottery. She was beside herself with joy. She quit her job wrapping gifts at Nieman-Marcus and bought an eighteen-room house in Evanston, a Versace wardrobe, and a robin's-egg-blue Jaguar. She was even able to send her twin sons to private school. Strangely, however, as the year went by, her mood drifted downward. By the end of the year, in spite of the absence of any obvious adversity, her expensive therapist diagnosed Ruth as having a case of dysthymic disorder (chronic depression).

Stories like Ruth's have led psychologists to wonder if each of us has our own personal set range for happiness, a fixed and largely inherited level to which we invariably revert. The bad news is that, like a thermostat, this set range will drag our happiness back down to its usual level when too much good fortune comes our way. A systematic study of 22 people who won major lotteries found that they reverted to their baseline level of happiness over time, winding up no happier than 22 matched controls. The good news, however, is that after misfortune strikes, the thermostat will strive to pull us out of our misery eventually. In fact, depression is almost always episodic, with recovery occurring within a few months of onset. Even individuals who become paraplegic as a result of spinal cord accidents quickly begin to adapt to their greatly limited capacities, and within eight weeks they report more net positive emotion than negative emotion. Within a few years, they wind up only slightly less happy on average than individuals who are not paralyzed. Of people with extreme quadriplegia, 84 percent consider their life to be average or above average. These findings fit the idea that we each have a personal set range for our level of positive (and negative) emotion, and this range may represent the inherited aspect of overall happiness.

The Hedonic Treadmill

Another barrier to raising your level of happiness is the "hedonic treadmill," which causes you to rapidly and inevitably adapt to good things by taking them for granted. As you accumulate more material possessions and accomplishments, your expectations rise. The deeds and things you worked so hard for no longer make you happy; you need to get something even better to boost your level of happiness into the upper reaches of its set range. But once you get the next possession or achievement, you adapt to it as well, and so on. There is, unfortunately, a good deal of evidence for such a treadmill.

If there were no treadmill, people who get more good things in life would in general be much happier than the less fortunate. But the less fortunate are, by and large, just as happy as the more fortunate. Good things and high accomplishments, studies have shown, have astonishingly little power to raise happiness more than transiently:

- In less than three months, major events (such as being fired or promoted) lose their impact on happiness levels.
- Wealth, which surely brings more possessions in its wake, has a surprisingly low correlation with happiness level. Rich people are, on average, only slightly happier than poor people.
- Real income has risen dramatically in the prosperous nations over the last half century, but the level of life satisfaction has been entirely flat in the United States and most other wealthy nations.
- Recent changes in an individual's pay predict job satisfaction, but average levels of pay do not.
- Physical attractiveness (which, like wealth, brings about any number of advantages) does not have much effect at all on happiness.
- Objective physical health, perhaps the most valuable of all resources, is barely correlated with happiness.

There are limits on adaptation, however. There are some bad events that we never get used to, or adapt to only very slowly. The death of a child or a spouse in a car crash is one example. Four to seven years after such events, bereaved people are still much more depressed and unhappy than controls. Family caregivers of Alzheimer's patients show deteriorating subjective well-being over time, and people in very poor nations such as India and Nigeria report much lower happiness than

people in wealthier nations, even though poverty has been endured there for centuries.

Together, the *S* variables (your genetic steersman, the hedonic treadmill, and your set range) tend to keep your level of happiness from increasing. But there are two other powerful forces, *C* and *V*, that do raise the level of happiness.

C (CIRCUMSTANCES)

The good news about circumstances is that some do change happiness for the better. The bad news is that changing these circumstances is usually impractical and expensive. Before I review how life circumstances affect happiness, please jot down your opinion about the following questions:

1. What percentage of Americans becomes clinically depressed in their lifetime? _____
2. What percentage of Americans reports life satisfaction above neutral? _____
3. What percentage of mental patients reports a positive emotional balance (more positive feelings than negative feelings)? _____
4. Which of the following groups of Americans report a negative emotional balance (more negative feelings than positive)?

Poor African-Americans _____

Unemployed men _____

Elderly people _____

Severely, multiply handicapped people _____

The chances are that you markedly underestimated how happy people are (I know I did). American adults answering these questions believe, on average, that the lifetime prevalence of clinical depression is 49 percent (it is actually between 8 and 18 percent), that only 56 percent of Americans report positive life satisfaction (it is actually 83 percent), and that only 33 percent of the mentally ill report more positive than negative feelings (it is actually 57 percent). All of the four disadvantaged groups in fact report that they are mostly happy, but 83 percent of adults guess the opposite for poor African-Americans, and 100 percent make

the same guess for unemployed men. Only 38 and 24 percent, respectively, guess that the most elderly and multiply handicapped people report a positive hedonic balance. The overall lesson is that most Americans, regardless of objective circumstances, say they are happy, and at the same time they markedly underestimate the happiness of other Americans.

At the dawn of serious research on happiness in 1967, Warner Wilson reviewed what was known then. He advised the psychological world that happy people are all of the following:

- Well paid
- Married
- Young
- Healthy
- Well educated
- Of either sex
- Of any level of intelligence
- Religious

Half of this turned out to be wrong, but half is right. I will now review what has been discovered over the past thirty-five years about how external circumstances influence happiness. Some of it is astonishing.

Money

"I've been rich, and I've been poor. Rich is better."

—Sophie Tucker

"Money doesn't buy happiness."

—Proverbial saying

Both of these seemingly contradictory quotes turn out to be true, and there is a great deal of data on how wealth and poverty affect happiness. At the broadest level, researchers compare the average subjective well-being of people living in rich nations versus those in poor nations. Here is the question about life satisfaction that at least one thousand respondents from each of forty nations answered; please answer it yourself now:

On a scale of 1 (dissatisfied) to 10 (satisfied), how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days? _____

The following table compares the average level of satisfaction in answer to this question to the relative purchasing power (100 = United States) of each nation.

NATION	LIFE SATISFACTION	PURCHASING POWER
Bulgaria	5.03	22
Russia	5.37	27
Belarus	5.52	30
Latvia	5.70	20
Romania	5.88	12
Estonia	6.00	27
Lithuania	6.01	16
Hungary	6.03	25
Turkey	6.41	22
Japan	6.53	87
Nigeria	6.59	6
South Korea	6.69	39
India	6.70	5
Portugal	7.07	44
Spain	7.15	57
Germany	7.22	89
Argentina	7.25	25
People's Republic of China	7.29	9
Italy	7.30	77
Brazil	7.38	23
Chile	7.55	35
Norway	7.68	78
Finland	7.68	69
USA	7.73	100
Netherlands	7.77	76
Ireland	7.88	52
Canada	7.89	85
Denmark	8.16	81
Switzerland	8.36	96

This cross-national survey, involving tens of thousands of adults, illustrates several points. First, Sophie Tucker was partly right: overall national purchasing power and average life satisfaction go strongly in

the same general direction. Once the gross national product exceeds \$8,000 per person, however, the correlation disappears, and added wealth brings no further life satisfaction. So the wealthy Swiss are happier than poor Bulgarians, but it hardly matters if one is Irish, Italian, Norwegian, or American.

There are also plenty of exceptions to the wealth-satisfaction association: Brazil, mainland China, and Argentina are much higher in life satisfaction than would be predicted by their wealth. The former Soviet-bloc countries are less satisfied than their wealth would predict, as are the Japanese. The cultural values of Brazil and Argentina and the political values of China might support positive emotion, and the difficult emergence from communism (with its accompanying deterioration in health and social dislocation) probably lowers happiness in eastern Europe. The explanation of Japanese dissatisfaction is more mysterious, and along with the poorest nations—China, India, and Nigeria—who have fairly high life satisfaction, these data tell us that money doesn't necessarily buy happiness. The change in purchasing power over the last half century in the wealthy nations carries the same message: real purchasing power has more than doubled in the United States, France, and Japan, but life satisfaction has changed not a whit.

Cross-national comparisons are difficult to disentangle, since the wealthy nations also have higher literacy, better health, more education, and more liberty, as well as more material goods. Comparing richer with poorer people within each nation helps to sort out the causes, and this information is closer to the comparison that is relevant to your own decision making. "Would more money make me happier?" is probably the question you most usually ask yourself as you agonize over spending more time with the children versus spending more time at the office, or splurging on a vacation. In very poor nations, where poverty threatens life itself, being rich does predict greater well-being. In wealthier nations, however, where almost everyone has a basic safety net, increases in wealth have negligible effects on personal happiness. In the United States, the very poor are lower in happiness, but once a person is just barely comfortable, added money adds little or no happiness. Even the fabulously rich—the *Forbes* 100, with an average net worth of over 125 million dollars—are only slightly happier than the average American.

How about the very poor? Amateur scientist Robert Biswas-Diener, the son of two distinguished happiness researchers, traveled on his own

to the ends of the earth—Calcutta, rural Kenya, the town of Fresno in central California, and the Greenland tundra—to look at happiness in some of the world's least happy places. He interviewed and tested thirty-two prostitutes and thirty-one pavement dwellers of Calcutta about their life satisfaction.

Kalpana is a thirty-five-year-old woman who has been a prostitute for twenty years. The death of her mother forced her into the profession to help support her siblings. She maintains contact with her brother and sister and visits them once a month in their village, and she supports her eight-year-old daughter in that village. Kalpana lives alone and practices her profession in a small, rented concrete room, furnished with a bed, mirror, some dishes, and a shrine to the Hindu gods. She falls into the official A category of sex worker, making more than two and a half dollars per customer.

Common sense would have us believe that Calcutta's poor are overwhelmingly dissatisfied. Astonishingly this is not so. Their *overall* life satisfaction is slightly negative (1.93 on a scale of 1 to 3), lower than Calcutta University students (2.43). But in many domains of life, their satisfaction is high: morality (2.56), family (2.50), friends (2.40), and food (2.55). Their lowest satisfaction in a specific domain is income (2.12).

While Kalpana fears that her old village friends would look down on her, her family members do not. Her once-a-month visits are times of joy. She is thankful that she earns enough to provide a nanny for her daughter and to keep her housed and well-fed.

When Biswas-Diener compares the pavement dwellers of Calcutta to the street people of Fresno, California, however, he finds striking differences in favor of India. Among the seventy-eight street people, average life satisfaction is extremely low (1.29), markedly lower than the Calcutta pavement dwellers (1.60). There are a few domains in which satisfaction is moderate, such as intelligence (2.27) and food (2.14), but most are distressingly unsatisfying: income (1.15), morality (1.96), friends (1.75), family (1.84), and housing (1.37).

While these data are based on only a small sample of poor people,

they are surprising and not easily dismissed. Overall, Biswas-Diener's findings tell us that extreme poverty is a social ill, and that people in such poverty have a worse sense of well-being than the more fortunate. But even in the face of great adversity, these poor people find much of their lives satisfying (although this is much more true of slum dwellers in Calcutta than of very poor Americans). If this is correct, there are plenty of reasons to work to reduce poverty—including lack of opportunity, high infant mortality, unhealthy housing and diet, crowding, lack of employment, or demeaning work—but low life satisfaction is not among them. This summer Robert is off to the northern tip of Greenland, to study happiness among a group of Inuit who have not yet discovered the joys of the snowmobile.

How important money is to you, more than money itself, influences your happiness. Materialism seems to be counterproductive: at all levels of real income, people who value money more than other goals are less satisfied with their income and with their lives as a whole, although precisely why is a mystery.

Marriage

Marriage is sometimes damned as a ball and chain, and sometimes praised as a joy forever. Neither of these characterizations is exactly on target, but on the whole the data support the latter more than the former. Unlike money, which has at most a small effect, marriage is robustly related to happiness. The National Opinion Research Center surveyed 35,000 Americans over the last thirty years; 40 percent of married people said they were "very happy," while only 24 percent of unmarried, divorced, separated, and widowed people said this. Living with a significant other (but not being married) is associated with more happiness in individualistic cultures like ours, but with less happiness in collectivist cultures like Japan and China. The happiness advantage for the married holds controlling for age and income, and it is equally true for both men and women. But there is also something to Kierkegaard's cynical (and non-anatomical) "better well-hung than ill-wed," for unhappy marriages undermine well-being: among those in "not very happy" marriages, their level of happiness is lower than the unmarried or the divorced.

What follows from the marriage-happiness association? Should you run out and try to get married? This is sound advice only if marriage

actually causes happiness, which is the causal story most marriage researchers endorse. There are two more curmudgeonly possibilities, however: that people who are already happy are more likely to get married and stay married, or that some third variable (like good looks or sociability) causes both more happiness and a greater likelihood of marriage. Depressed people, after all, tend to be more withdrawn, irritable, and self-focused, and so they may make less appealing partners. In my opinion, the jury is still out on what causes the proven fact that married people are happier than unmarried people.

Social Life

In our study of very happy people, Ed Diener and I found that every person (save one) in the top 10 percent of happiness was involved in a romantic relationship. You will recall that very happy people differ markedly from both average and unhappy people in that they all lead a rich and fulfilling social life. The very happy people spend the least time alone and the most time socializing, and they are rated highest on good relationships by themselves and also by their friends.

These findings are of a piece with those on marriage and happiness, in both their virtues and their flaws. The increased sociability of happy people may actually be the cause of the marriage findings, with more sociable people (who also start out happier) being more likely to marry. In either case, however, it is hard to disentangle cause from effect. So it is a serious possibility that a rich social life (and marriage) will make you happier. But it could be that people who are happier to begin with are better liked, and they therefore have a richer social life and are more likely to marry. Or it could be that some “third” variable, like being more extroverted or being a gripping conversationalist, causes both a rich social life and more happiness.

Negative Emotion

In order to experience more positive emotion in your life, should you strive to experience less negative emotion by minimizing bad events in your life? The answer to this question is surprising. Contrary to popular belief, having more than your share of misery does not mean you cannot have a lot of joy as well. There are several lines of sound evi-

dence that deny a reciprocal relation between positive and negative emotion.

Norman Bradburn, a distinguished professor emeritus from the University of Chicago, began his long career by surveying thousands of Americans about life satisfaction, and he asked about the frequency of pleasant and unpleasant emotions. He expected to find a perfectly inverse relation between them—that people who experienced a lot of negative emotion would be those who experienced very little positive emotion, and vice versa. This is not at all the way the data turned out, and these findings have been repeated many times.

There is only a moderate negative correlation between positive and negative emotion. This means that if you have a lot of negative emotion in your life, you may have somewhat less positive emotion than average, but that you are not remotely doomed to a joyless life. Similarly, if you have a lot of positive emotion in your life, this only protects you moderately well from sorrows.

Next came studies of men versus women. Women, it had been well established, experience twice as much depression as men, and generally have more of the negative emotions. When researchers began to look at positive emotions and gender, they were surprised to find that women also experience considerably more positive emotion—more frequently and more intensely—than men do. Men, as Stephen King tells us, are made of “stonier soil”; women have more extreme emotional lives than they do. Whether this difference lies in biology or in women’s greater willingness to report (or perhaps experience) strong emotion is wholly unsettled, but in any case it belies an opposite relation.

The ancient Greek word *soteria* refers to our high, irrational joys. This word is the opposite of *phobia*, which means high, irrational fear. Literally, however, *soteria* derives from the feast that was held by Greeks upon deliverance from death. The highest joys, it turns out, sometimes follow relief from our worst fears. The joys of the roller-coaster, of the bungee jump, of the horror movie, and even the astonishing decrease in mental illness during times of war testify to this.

All in all, the relation between negative emotion and positive emotion is certainly not polar opposition. What it is and why this is are simply not known, and unraveling this is one of the exciting challenges of Positive Psychology.

Age

Youth was found to consistently predict more happiness in Wilson's landmark review thirty-five years ago. Youth is no longer what it was cracked up to be, and once researchers took a more sophisticated view of the data, the greater happiness of young people back then vanished as well. The image of crotchety old people who complain about everything no longer fits reality, either. An authoritative study of 60,000 adults from forty nations divides happiness into three components: life satisfaction, pleasant affect, and unpleasant affect. Life satisfaction goes up slightly with age, pleasant affect declines slightly, and negative affect does not change. What does change as we age is the intensity of our emotions. Both "feeling on top of the world" and being "in the depths of despair" become less common with age and experience.

Health

Surely you would think health is a key to happiness, since good health is usually judged as the single most important domain of people's lives. It turns out, however, that objective good health is barely related to happiness; what matters is our subjective perception of how healthy we are, and it is a tribute to our ability to adapt to adversity that we are able to find ways to appraise our health positively even when we are quite sick. Doctor visits and being hospitalized do not affect life satisfaction, but only subjectively rated health—which, in turn, is influenced by negative emotion. Remarkably, even severely ill cancer patients differ only slightly on global life satisfaction from objectively healthy people.

When disabling illness is severe and long-lasting, happiness and life satisfaction do decline, although not nearly as much as you might expect. Individuals admitted to a hospital with only one chronic health problem (such as heart disease) show marked increases in happiness over the next year, but the happiness of individuals with five or more health problems deteriorates over time. So moderate ill health does not bring unhappiness in its wake, but severe illness does.

Education, Climate, Race, and Gender

I group these circumstances together because, surprisingly, none of them much matters for happiness. Even though education is a means to

higher income, it is not a means to higher happiness, except only slightly and only among those people with low income. Nor does intelligence influence happiness in either direction. And while sunny climes do combat seasonal affective disorder (winter depression), happiness levels do not vary with climate. People suffering through a Nebraska winter believe people in California are happier, but they are wrong; we adapt to good weather completely and very quickly. So your dream of happiness on a tropical island will not come true, at least not for climatic reasons.

Race, at least in the United States, is not related to happiness in any consistent way. In spite of worse economic numbers, African-Americans and Hispanics have markedly lower rates of depression than Caucasians, but their level of reported happiness is not higher than Caucasians (except perhaps among older men).

Gender, as I said above, has a fascinating relation to mood. In average emotional tone, women and men don't differ, but this strangely is because women are both happier *and* sadder than men.

Religion

For a half century after Freud's disparagements, social science remained dubious about religion. Academic discussions of faith indicted it as producing guilt, repressed sexuality, intolerance, anti-intellectualism, and authoritarianism. About twenty years ago, however, the data on the positive psychological effects of faith started to provide a countervailing force. Religious Americans are clearly less likely to abuse drugs, commit crimes, divorce, and kill themselves. They are also physically healthier and they live longer. Religious mothers of children with disabilities fight depression better, and religious people are less thrown by divorce, unemployment, illness, and death. Most directly relevant is the fact that survey data consistently show religious people as being somewhat happier and more satisfied with life than nonreligious people.

The causal relation between religion and healthier, more prosocial living is no mystery. Many religions proscribe drugs, crime, and infidelity while endorsing charity, moderation, and hard work. The causal relation of religion to greater happiness, lack of depression, and greater resilience from tragedy is not as straightforward. In the heyday of behaviorism, the emotional benefits of religion were explained (away?) as

resulting from more social support. Religious people congregate with others who form a sympathetic community of friends, the argument went, and this makes them all feel better. But there is, I believe, a more basic link: religions instill hope for the future and create meaning in life.

Sheena Sethi Iyengar is one of the most remarkable undergraduates I have ever known. Entirely blind, she crisscrossed the United States in her senior year at the University of Pennsylvania while doing her senior thesis. She visited one congregation after another, measuring the relation between optimism and religious faith. To do this, she gave questionnaires to hundreds of adherents, recorded and analyzed dozens of weekend sermons, and scrutinized the liturgy and the stories told to children for eleven prominent American religions. Her first finding is that the more fundamentalist the religion, the more optimistic are its adherents: Orthodox Jews and fundamentalist Christians and Muslims are markedly more optimistic than Reform Jews and Unitarians, who are more depressive on average. Probing more deeply, she separated the amount of hope found in the sermons, liturgy, and stories from other factors like social support. She found that the increase in optimism which increasing religiousness brings is entirely accounted for by greater hope. As a Christian mystic, Julian of Norwich, sang from the depths of the Black Plague in the mid-fourteenth century in some of the most beautiful words ever penned:

But all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well. . . . He said not “Thou shalt not be tempested, thou shalt not be travailed, thou shalt not be diseased,” but he said, “Thou shalt not be overcome.”

The relation of hope for the future and religious faith is probably the cornerstone of why faith so effectively fights despair and increases happiness. The relation of meaning and happiness, both secular and religious, is a topic I return to in the last chapter.

Given that there is probably a set range that holds your present level of general happiness quite stationary, this chapter asks how you can change your life circumstances in order to live in the uppermost part of your range. Until recently it was the received wisdom that happy people

were well paid, married, young, healthy, well educated, and religious. So I reviewed what we know about the set of external circumstantial variables (C) that have been alleged to influence happiness. To summarize, if you want to lastingly raise your level of happiness by changing the external circumstances of your life, you should do the following:

1. Live in a wealthy democracy, not in an impoverished dictatorship (a strong effect)
2. Get married (a robust effect, but perhaps not causal)
3. Avoid negative events and negative emotion (only a moderate effect)
4. Acquire a rich social network (a robust effect, but perhaps not causal)
5. Get religion (a moderate effect)

As far as happiness and life satisfaction are concerned, however, you needn't bother to do the following:

6. Make more money (money has little or no effect once you are comfortable enough to buy this book, and more materialistic people are less happy)
7. Stay healthy (subjective health, not objective health matters)
8. Get as much education as possible (no effect)
9. Change your race or move to a sunnier climate (no effect)

You have undoubtedly noticed that the factors that matter vary from impossible to inconvenient to change. Even if you could alter all of the external circumstances above, it would not do much for you, since together they probably account for no more than between 8 and 15 percent of the variance in happiness. The very good news is that there are quite a number of internal circumstances that will likely work for you. So I now turn to this set of variables, which are more under your voluntary control. If you decide to change them (and be warned that none of these changes come without real effort), your level of happiness is likely to increase lastingly.