

Conditions of Happiness One-page Paper 3

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Word count: 596 words

In the emotional state theory, Haybron¹ argues that people's happiness constitutes in their overall emotional condition manifested in three broad dimensions: attunement, engagement and endorsement. Attunement results from internal confidence, tranquility and security. Engagement signifies that a person actively and passionately participates in activities he or she enjoys. Moreover, endorsement deals with the cheerful experiences or "smiley-face feelings" in everyday life. It is noteworthy that he stresses these three dimensions occur in descending order of importance for happiness. In particular, attunement is fundamental to the attainment of the other two. However, this notion is too restrictive in view of the disparate ways people derive happiness and implies that everyone, regardless of one's circumstances, has an identical formula to happiness. I would therefore contend that the order of fundamentality may not hold true in all cases and I hope this will broaden our view about how we should pursue happiness in life.

Firstly, I would argue that it is possible for someone to achieve sustained happiness without attaining attunement. Attunement requires one to feel settled and unperturbed. More importantly, one's circumstances should not be alien, imposing or threatening. However, in some cases, people may derive happiness from engagement even in the absence of attunement. Let us suppose an adventurer, such as Bear Grylls², who finds an immense passion in exploring the wild. He is constantly on unfamiliar terrains awash with potentially life-threatening uncertainties. Basic needs such as food and shelter are luxuries to which he has no guaranteed access. As a result, it is unrealistic to claim that he enjoys attunement. Yet, no one can conclusively judge he is unhappy, for he is truly living his life to the fullest. He is passionately engaged in what interests him and willingly continues being so even though it may encroach on his supposed "attunement". In this case, what makes him happy is primarily the engagement aspect of happiness. Therefore, contrary to Haybron's theory, attunement is not always necessary for the attainment of other aspects of happiness.

¹ Haybron, Daniel, "Emotional State", *The Pursuit of Unhappiness. The Elusive Psychology of Well-Being*, Oxford University Press, pp. 105-122.

² Edward Michael Grylls, better known as Bear Grylls, is a British adventurer, writer and television presenter. He is widely known for his television series *Man vs. Wild*. In his post on Twitter on 22 August 2011, he listed "follow your dreams" as part of "Bear's key to happiness".

Having illustrated that the lack of attunement can coexist with the other modes such as engagement, I would like to further suggest that the importance of various dimensions of happiness largely depends on people's priorities at different stages of their lives. In the pursuit of various life goals, people may value a certain mode of happiness more than the others which are less relevant to them in view of their life circumstances. For instance, a university freshman may find herself "disattuned" initially as she has just entered an alien environment filled with unfamiliar faces. She may be uncertain about her upcoming university life and stressed by the overwhelming curriculum. However, at the same time, she may also be actively participating in various activities which she believes bring joy to her. We can even say that through this process of engagement, she starts to grow more *attuned* to her new life. In this case, her priority is to receive an education that allows her to develop holistically. This implies she has to derive happiness through engagement without attunement, and attunement actually comes as a result of engagement. This shows that the order of importance may vary for people under different life circumstances.

In conclusion, the order of fundamentality of attunement, engagement and endorsement to achieving happiness is more flexible in reality, as it is not always necessary to achieve attunement first and the order of importance ultimately boils down to how one values one's life priorities. We should, therefore, be brave to step out of our comfort zone and explore what makes us happy.