

# Conditions of Happiness One-page Paper 1

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Despite happiness being such a nebulous concept which cannot seem to be adequately condensed into a mere few words, in my first attempt at its definition, I suggested that happiness is attained when reality matches or exceeds one's expectations. This was partly influenced by my upbringing as my parents often reminded me to anticipate worst-case scenarios and not to always expect the best to happen. In addition, this notion could plausibly be validated by my life experiences, such as the joy I felt when receiving a birthday surprise and the frustration that ensued a rejection email. However, do these trivial moments of delight and dissatisfaction really determine whether I am living a happy life in general?

I came to realise the limitations of my view when *Haybron* presents the *life satisfaction theory of happiness*. In this theory, one takes a global judgement of their life, and determines whether life is going well enough for them. An individual is deemed happy when life meets their own standards of satisfaction. This diametrically contrasts my view which focuses on the experiential aspects of happiness. My definition simplifies a concept which pervades long-term life into disjoint short-term events where expectation gaps are used to weigh happiness. It tells us whether we will experience joy at the moment when the actual event happens, and reality sinks in and competes with our prior expectations, but it says nothing about how these feelings will affect our life as time goes by. In contrast, life satisfaction is a retrospective and relatively holistic concept, allowing us to assess our life as a whole from past to present. We are able to reflect on our happiness based on our own notion of satisfaction. As a result, the life satisfaction theory expands the scope of happiness from fleeting feelings to long-term judgement.

It may be argued that these two concepts are essentially similar, that is life satisfaction also involves one measuring reality against expectations. If their expectations of life match what they really have in life, they attain satisfaction. However, I would contend that the key difference here lies in that life satisfaction is a retrospective concept whereas "expectation" is prospective. More specifically, we form expectations of an upcoming event *before* it takes place. According to my previous view of happiness, if the actual event (reality) fails to fulfill our expectations, we will not feel happy. On the other hand, in life satisfaction, when we think about what *has happened*, we are still able to experience contentment, with thoughts like "*although it didn't really go well, it*

*wasn't that bad and I got to learn something new!"*. After all, many of us have high expectations of our life, and we constantly push ourselves to achieve greater heights, but this certainly does not rob us of experiencing joy and satisfaction in life.

In conclusion, my initial representation of happiness, albeit applicable to how we derive happiness from everyday events, is relatively myopic. It unnecessarily narrows the scope of happiness and fails to consider the long-term aspect of life satisfaction. Nevertheless, this paper in no way intends to completely repudiate or endorse either theory. Instead, we should keep in mind that happiness is a multifaceted concept which requires us to approach from multiple angles in order to paint a more comprehensive picture of it.

#### Citations:

D. M. Haybron. *Happiness: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK. First edition, 2013.