

Happiness Theory of Wellbeing & Long-Term Pleasure Theory of Happiness

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Well-being has been a subject of fascination of many people, including philosophers and scholars across disciplines, as it is central to human experience. Different theories of well-being attempt to define what it means to lead a fulfilling life and to identify the key factors that contribute to human flourishing. The happiness theory of well-being emphasizes a holistic approach to living a meaningful life. And the pleasure theory of happiness focuses on measuring the level of happiness by equalizing it with one's hedonic level. This essay declares that the happiness theory of well-being is the strongest among all theories when combined with the pleasure theory of happiness, which is a theory that assesses the nature of happiness. To examine those theories' implications for understanding human happiness and well-being, this essay will be exploring the conceptual foundations, strengths, and limitations of these theories.

First of all, I would like to briefly introduce the happiness theory of well-being (HTWB) and the pleasure theory of happiness (PTH), as well as their definitions. This theory claims that: a) All and only happiness is non-instrumentally good for us, b) all and only unhappiness is non-instrumentally bad for us, and c) a person's overall level of well-being is determined solely by their overall level of happiness. However, the first difficulty of examining this theory is in term

of the terminology used. While happiness itself holds various meanings in different fields across philosophy, psychology etc., it would be confusing to view the terms well-being and happiness, and sometimes pleasure, as interchangeable. Furthermore, when we intend to examine one's well-being level with the HTBW theory, the standard of measuring one's happiness level is in itself quite vague and challenging. Therefore, combining this theory with another theory that looks at the nature of happiness is necessary to defend the HTWB. After contrasting multiple theories of happiness that could be combined with the HTBW proposed by Fletcher in Chapter 5, it could be concluded that the PTH is the most supportive one that leads to the conclusion that the HTBW is the strongest theory among all other theories of well-being.

The PTH originally is defined as: a) to be happy just is to have hedonic level of H or above, b) to be unhappy just is to have a hedonic level of U or below. The points of H and U here refer to certain thresholds on the hedonic scale that sets the boundary of being happy, unhappy and neutral. This theory draws a very direct relation between one's hedonic level and their level of happiness as those two scales are in positive correlation. However, there are quite a few problems with this combination of theories, which are all worrying. Among the problems, overlapping with hedonism and thus having the risk of collapsing into the hedonism theory of well-being, which is a simple theory that views the pleasure as the only thing with prudential value, is probably the most outstanding one. And I will briefly talk about this issue later in this essay as well. Therefore, to improve the theory and make it a more plausible one, the PTH could be changed to the: long-term pleasure theory of happiness. This new theory measures one's happiness level by looking at their long-term hedonic level instead of the usual hedonic level defined by the hedonists. The definition of a long-term hedonic level claims that: any singular event or change that merely provides a momentary stimulus to an individual's feelings lacks

lasting impact will not affect this level in any way. An example of this would be one bite on his tongue and feels a very short moment of pain. A minute later, that feeling of pain is gone and the person is well again. Under a typical hedonism framework, it is fair to say that this person's hedonic level drops a bit by that moment. However, for a long-term hedonic level, such temporary events has no impact on an individual's hedonic level, unless something happened is profound and long-lasting for this person.

Next, I would like to explain why this combination of theories makes the HTWB the strongest theory among all. Although as mentioned earlier in this essay, one challenge of studying happiness theory is the use of terminology, the positive aspect is that the definition of happiness is broad, and the nature of happiness is very inclusive. While I defend the HTWB, happiness is this philosophical theory of well-being could be defined as: a deep psychological condition that includes emotional and dispositional states, which involves pleasure as well, rather than being limited to transient pleasurable experiences. Therefore, to some extent, it encompasses all profound and long-lasting positive and affirmative feelings. Also, borrowing from Fletcher's(2016) view of the HTWB, it could be that "being happy just is having a certain balance of pleasure over pain" (p.96). Also, because of its inclusiveness in terms of its definition, it is plausible to claim that all and only happiness is non-instrumentally good for us instead of other candidates. The second strength of this theory is that it is very attitude dependent, which I believe is essential when we discuss the well-being of people, for which definition could vary a lot. Because of this, each individual is authoritative with respect to whether we are happy, and this is to say that one's life is going well equal to feeling one's life is going well. This characteristic naturally eliminates the concern of individuals misperceiving their level of happiness. Meanwhile, this trait closely ties to the definition of prudential value, which is one of

the major elements that we think about when valuing well-being. As prudential value is a personal, non-instrumental value, it is evaluated based on one's personal feeling and viewed from one's personal standpoint, just like viewing one's level of happiness. With all the nature of the happiness theory described above, we could then come to the conclusion that the HTWB is in fact a straightforward method to assess well-being as a better life simply refers to having more long-term pleasure.

Nonetheless, in this following paragraph, I would like to discuss two major objections that are usually proposed against the combination of HTWB and PTH. The first states that this theory been too identical with the hedonism theory and therefore risks collapsing into the hedonism theory. And the second objection is ambiguity of where the threshold of point H and U should lie on the hedonic scale. For the rest of the essay, I shall then argue against those two objections. To address the first objection, it is necessary to first look at the nature of happiness. It should be acknowledged one does not necessarily need to be happy at all times to be called a happy person. In most cases, if a person spends the majority of their life feeling happy, even though we acknowledge that there may be a few short moments of unhappiness in their life, we can still say that this person is a happy individual. This is because their mood base determines whether they are fundamentally happy or unhappy person, and those short moments of pain and unhappiness do not outweigh the mood base of feeling happy. On the other hand, hedonism seems to include every moment of pleasure that an individual experiences in the total sum and calculates such an individual's level of well-being based on the final value. This is very different from how happiness is viewed in the HTWB as this theory frames pleasure as a holistic and qualitative experience, not just a quantity of pleasure-pain calculations, the pleasure derived from

achieving a goal of life or building meaningful relationships is deeper and more sustainable than momentary indulgences.

Nevertheless, where to set the threshold for point H and U in the PTH is an open question is probably a bullet that happiness theorist might have to bite. When assessing the combination of HTWB and PTH, Fletcher (2016) originally offered two ways to set the point H and U. The first one is to set the threshold of being happy very high and the threshold of being unhappy very low. Another one is to set the boundaries slightly above and below the point of hedonic neutrality. The first one is more problematic than the latter in my opinion because it would then make leave a huge space of one being neither happy nor unhappy, which is even less plausible. Therefore, to set the boundaries of point H and U being very close to the hedonic neutrality seems to work with these two theories better. Some may suggest that this case has the risk of underestimating the value of happiness. But since the altered theory of PTH only takes long-term hedonic level into account, it would naturally solve this worry. However, it is still unclear of how and where we should set the boundaries of the thresholds of being happy and unhappy. It would be necessary to take a step back and admit that there must exist a certain gap between being happy and unhappy that represents neither happy nor unhappy.

In conclusion, the happiness theory of well-being and the pleasure theory of happiness both provide valuable insights into the pursuit of human well-being. By integrating long-term PTH, these theories address their individual limitations and provide a holistic understanding of happiness theory and how it is quantified. Although this combination still faces challenges in measuring happiness accurately, in most respects, such as in terms of the nature of happiness and the emphasis on autonomy, this theory should be the most plausible one among all theories of well-being.