

13 Haybron

1. Haybron's Basic Idea: Happiness as "Psychic Affirmation"

- Happiness (for Haybron) = a person's overall emotional condition is broadly positive.
- More specifically: happiness is psychic (emotional) affirmation of one's life:
 - To emotionally respond to your life as if things are going well for you.
 - It is about moods and emotions, not about explicit judgments or beliefs.

Contrast:

- Cognitive affirmation: judging or thinking "my life is going well."
- Emotional (psychic) affirmation: feeling settled, secure, fulfilled, joyful, engaged, etc.

Haybron's project: analyze this emotional condition into three main dimensions.

2. The Three Dimensions of Happiness

Haybron says happiness has (at least) three dimensions:

1. Endorsement
2. Engagement
3. Attunement

Each is a different emotional way of responding to one's life.

2.1 Endorsement

Basic idea: emotional approval of your life; "thumbs up" feelings.

- Characteristic affects:
 - Joy vs sadness
 - Cheerfulness vs irritability
- When endorsement is high:
 - You often feel happy, cheerful, delighted, joyful about your life.
- When endorsement is low:
 - You feel sad, dejected, gloomy, frequently irritated with life.

Example (high endorsement):

- Someone who frequently feels joy when thinking about their relationships and work, laughs easily, and generally "feels good" about how life is going.

Example (low endorsement, but other dimensions OK):

- A professor deeply absorbed in meaningful work (high engagement) and at peace with life (high attunement) but going through a short period of mild sadness about a recent disappointment.
-

2.2 Engagement

Basic idea: being energetically involved in your life and activities.

Two key forms:

1. Vitality / Exuberance vs Lethargy
 - Feeling energetic, alive, spirited vs sluggish, listless.
2. Flow vs Boredom
 - Flow: being fully absorbed in challenging, meaningful activities; lose track of time and self-consciousness.
 - Opposite: boredom/enui – feeling empty, disengaged, going through the motions.

Examples:

- High engagement:
 - An athlete, artist, or doctor who often gets into flow while training, creating, or treating patients; feels vital and absorbed.
 - Low engagement:
 - An office worker constantly bored and listless, watching the clock, feeling that nothing is worth investing energy in.
-

2.3 Attunement

Basic idea: being at home in your life; inner settledness and security.

Haybron breaks attunement into three main components:

1. Peace of mind vs anxiety
 - Calm, inner peace vs pervasive worry, nervousness, stress.
2. Confidence vs insecurity
 - Deep emotional surety and inner stability vs feeling shaky, unsure, emotionally off-balance.
3. Uncompression vs compression
 - Feeling spiritually expansive, free, open vs cramped, pressured, small-souled (see section on compression below).

High attunement:

- You feel:
 - Psychically at home in your life
 - Relaxed, secure, unthreatened
 - Free to be yourself; defenses are down; you're not living in a state of constant vigilance.

Low attunement (disattunement):

- You feel:
 - Anxious, stressed, on edge
 - Alienated from your circumstances, as if you don't really fit or belong
 - Under threat or constant pressure.

Example (high attunement):

- Someone with a modest job and modest income, but:
 - Has a stable community and routine;
 - Sleeps peacefully;
 - Rarely feels stressed;
 - Feels deeply at home in their environment and relationships.

Example (low attunement, but maybe high endorsement):

- A person in a high-paying job who often feels cheerful when things go well (some endorsement), but is:
 - Almost always stressed, worried about deadlines, reputation, and performance;
 - Emotionally “on guard.”
 - Haybron would say: despite some positive feelings, this person is not really happy, because attunement is badly damaged.
-

3. Which Dimension Is Most Important for Happiness, and Why?

According to Haybron, attunement is the most important dimension.

Reasons:

1. Biological priority:
 - For any creature, first priority is safety and security: being able to let down defenses.
 - Only once that's in place does it make sense to:
 - Pursue projects energetically (engagement),
 - Or rejoice about successes (endorsement).
2. Dependence of other dimensions:
 - Serious anxiety, stress, or insecurity make it very hard to:
 - Enter flow or feel vital, and
 - Experience deep joy or fulfillment.
 - So attunement is a precondition for rich engagement and endorsement.
3. Judgment about real-life cases:
 - A cheerful, energetic but deeply anxious person still does not seem genuinely happy.
 - But a person who is calm, confident, uncompressed, even without constant cheerfulness, plausibly is happy.

Exam tip: If forced to choose, Haybron ranks: - 1st: Attunement - 2nd: Engagement - 3rd: Endorsement

4. Compression and Its Place in the Three Dimensions

4.1 What Is Compression?

Compression = a pattern of affective or “spiritual” shrinking:

- Feeling:
 - Pressed upon, crowded, trapped
 - Emotionally flattened, deflated, small, like a “caged animal” or “worker ant”
- Living in a reactive mode:
 - Constantly responding to external demands;
 - Not living from your own nature or priorities.

Haybron’s label: - Uncompression: feeling expansive, free, large-spirited. - Compression: feeling pinched, constrained, small-souled.

4.2 Sources of Compression

Two main sources:

1. Imposition / repression
 - Life is largely dictated by external forces:
 - Heavy social pressure to conform;
 - Over-scheduling and impossibly long to-do lists;
 - Work or survival demands that leave little room for self-expression.
2. Threat
 - Persistent sense of being under threat or scrutiny:
 - Fear of failure;
 - Hostile or unstable environment;
 - Need to stay constantly cautious and on guard.

In both cases: - You can't act naturally or freely; - You “hunker down” emotionally.

4.3 How Compression Fits into the Three Dimensions

Compression belongs primarily to attunement, but also affects engagement:

- Attunement:
 - Compression = a kind of disattunement:
 - * You are not at home in your life.
 - * Your emotional “stance” is defensive and reactive, not relaxed and confident.
- Engagement:
 - Compression tends to kill exuberance and reduce flow:
 - * It's hard to feel vital, playful, or deeply absorbed when you're constantly pressured and on edge.

So:

- Attunement component: uncompression vs compression.
- Engagement component: compressed people are often listless or just pushing themselves mechanically, not genuinely engaged.

4.4 FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) and Compression

FOMO leads people to:

- Try to do as much as possible:
 - Say “yes” to every opportunity, social event, and activity.
 - Fill every spare moment.

This encourages:

- Quantity over quality:
 - Aim: maximizing the number of experiences,
 - Instead of getting the most depth out of a smaller number of meaningful activities.

Result:

- Life becomes overcrowded and externally driven.
- You end up:
 - Stressed, rushed, and compressed;
 - Rarely having the time or psychic space to relax into attunement or deep engagement.

4.5 “Junk” Activities

In this context, “junk activities” are:

- Activities you do mainly to fill time, avoid FOMO, or keep up appearances:
 - Endless social media scrolling
 - Parties you don’t enjoy but attend for status
 - Mindless errands and busywork
- They may bring small, fleeting pleasures, but:
 - Contribute little to deep emotional well-being.
 - Crowd out time for activities that foster:
 - * Attunement (calm, confidence, uncompression)
 - * Engagement (flow, meaningful projects)
 - * Endorsement (genuine joy and fulfillment).

4.6 Central vs Peripheral Affective States

Haybron distinguishes:

- Central affective states:
 - Deep, pervasive moods/emotions that shape your overall emotional condition.
 - Examples:
 - * Chronic anxiety or peace of mind (attunement),
 - * Long-term vitality or lethargy (engagement),
 - * Deep fulfillment or entrenched sadness (endorsement).
- Peripheral affective states:
 - Brief, superficial feelings that do not significantly affect how happy you really are.
 - Examples:
 - * A quick laugh at a meme;
 - * Enjoying a tasty snack;
 - * Annoyance in traffic that quickly passes.

Compression mainly damages central states:

- It shapes your baseline mood:
 - Ongoing stress, feeling small, constrained, reactive.
- “Junk activities” mostly add peripheral pleasures:
 - They may feel nice short-term, but do little for your central emotional condition.

Exam-useful summary: A compressed, stressed life: - Raises peripheral pleasures (lots of small hits), - But undermines central happiness (especially attunement, and often engagement).

5. Are the Three Dimensions Incommensurable?

Incommensurable = not easily measurable on a single scale; not simply tradeable against each other.

Haybron's view (roughly):

- The three dimensions represent different ways of emotionally responding to life.
- They are not reducible to a single “more or less happy” feeling.
- You can:
 - Be high in one dimension and low in another (e.g., energetic but anxious).
 - Have various ideals emphasizing different dimensions:
 - * Stoic ideal: attunement (tranquility, peace).
 - * Aristotelian/“flow” ideal: engagement.
 - * Democritean/cheerfulness ideal: endorsement.

So:

- The dimensions are partly incommensurable:
 - You cannot always say “3 units of endorsement = 3 units of attunement.”
 - There are different legitimate patterns of happiness.
 - But they also interact:
 - Strong disattunement undermines the other two.
 - Very high engagement can sometimes coexist with moderate attunement, etc.
-

6. Cognitive vs Emotional (Psychic) Affirmation

6.1 Definitions

Cognitive affirmation:

- To respond cognitively (with beliefs/judgments) to your life as if it is going well.
- Involves:
 - Reflective thoughts like: “Overall, my life is going well,” “I approve of my life.”
- Roughly corresponds to:
 - Life satisfaction judgments in psychology (“How satisfied are you with your life as a whole?”).

Emotional (psychic) affirmation:

- To respond emotionally (in moods/emotions) to your life as if it is going well.
- Involves having:
 - Positive patterns of attunement, engagement, and endorsement:
 - * Peace of mind, confidence, uncompression (attunement),
 - * Vitality, flow (engagement),
 - * Joy, cheerfulness, fulfillment (endorsement).

Haybron's thesis:

- Happiness = emotional / psychic affirmation, not cognitive affirmation.
- You can sincerely judge life is going well but still be unhappy if your emotional condition is poor.

6.2 Do Cognitive and Emotional Affirmation Go Together?

They can go together, but they can also come apart.

Haybron emphasizes that:

- They often diverge:
 - People are bad at self-assessing their own emotional condition.
 - Social pressures encourage us to say we're satisfied even when emotionally troubled.
- Therefore:
 - Cognitive affirmation ≠ Happiness.

6.3 Examples of “Together” and “Come Apart”

Think of four basic combinations:

1. Both cognitive and emotional affirmation high
(Judgment and feelings say: “Things are going well.”)
 - Example:
 - A person who:
 - * Reflectively believes they have a good life (supportive relationships, meaningful work),
 - * Feels calm, confident, often in flow, and experiences genuine joy.
 - This is paradigmatic happiness for Haybron.
2. High cognitive, low emotional affirmation
 (“Life is going well” in thought, but emotionally unhappy.)
 - Example:
 - A successful lawyer who thinks:
 - * “I’ve achieved everything: money, status, family stability. I should be happy.”
 - But:
 - * Is chronically anxious and stressed (low attunement),
 - * Rarely feels engaged or in flow at work (low engagement),
 - * Experiences little joy or fulfillment (low endorsement).
 - They have cognitive affirmation without happiness.
 - This is particularly important for Haybron: it shows why life satisfaction ≠ happiness.
3. Low cognitive, high emotional affirmation
 (“My life is not going well” in thought, but emotionally quite happy.)

- Example:
 - A graduate student who thinks:
 - * “I’m a failure; others are more accomplished. My life is a mess.”
 - Yet actually:
 - * Has strong friendships, is often in flow doing research/teaching,
 - * Feels relaxed, confident, and often joyful.
 - They are, emotionally, pretty happy, even if cognitively they misjudge their life.
- 4. Both cognitive and emotional affirmation low
(Judgment and feelings agree: “Things are not going well.”)
 - Example:
 - Someone with severe work problems and family conflict, who:
 - * Judges their life is bad,
 - * Feels anxious, depressed, disengaged, and joyless.
 - Clearly unhappy by Haybron’s standard.

Key exam point:

- Haybron’s position:
 - Happiness just is emotional (psychic) affirmation of one’s life.
 - Cognitive affirmation is neither necessary nor sufficient for happiness:
 - * Not necessary: you can be emotionally happy while wrongly judging your life badly.
 - * Not sufficient: you can judge your life great but be emotionally miserable.
-

6.4 Connection to Central vs Peripheral Affects

- Emotional affirmation, for Haybron, is about your central emotional condition:
 - Long-term patterns of attunement, engagement, endorsement.
 - A person might:
 - Think life is good (cognitive affirmation),
 - And have many peripheral pleasures (nice meals, entertainment),
 - But still lack central emotional affirmation (be anxious, compressed, unfulfilled).
 - Such a person is not genuinely happy in Haybron’s sense.
-

These notes cover:

- The three dimensions of happiness and key examples.
- Compression, its relation to stress, FOMO, “junk activities,” and central vs peripheral affective states.
- Why attunement is the most important dimension.
- Cognitive vs emotional (psychic) affirmation, how they relate, and how they can come apart.