

Dive Into SWB:  
history and philosophy  
major theories  
measurement

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## outline

why study happiness ?

common and ancient wisdom (related to the five theories)

history and philosophy

can we study it scientifically?

five major theories [just quick, properly next week!]

the classics, the pioneers [subjective]

# today

- we'll properly motivate "why happiness?"
- review some of the common and ancient wisdom
- have a snapshot of history and philosophy
- "prove" it is science: validity, reliability
- and start with the 5 theories, which we will dig deep into next week
- and only then, in few wks, get to pub pol/adm and community stuff

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## why?

- end in itself!
- "a prince who will not undergo the difficulty of understanding must undergo the danger of trusting"
- [everything, eg happiness experts, car mechanics, physicians]
- 
- a number of fascinating research questions to answer  
eg: can money buy happiness?

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# carpe diem

- “Happiness, not in another place but this place...not for another hour, but this hour.” Walt Whitman
- mindfulness: feeling/being without constructs and concepts
- being present, being now; no past or future, no TODOs etc
- v difficult! need vacation, nature, etc

## money

- Life is a progress from want to want, not from enjoyment to enjoyment. Samuel Johnson, 1776 [treadmill]
- People who claim that money can't buy happiness just don't know where to shop. Anonymous [livability v consumerism]
- A wealthy man is one who earns \$ 100 a year more than his wife's sister's husband. H.L. Mencken [comparisons]
- If thou wilt make a man happy, add not unto his riches but take away from his desires. Epicurus  
[aspirations/expectations; Carver/swb as motivator; human as center of universe/Jung/look inside, not outside]



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## history: McMahon D "Happiness: A history"

- From beginnings we were interested in happiness:
- essentially two ideas, "good life" v "happy life/pleasure"
- kind of like Apollo v Dionysus:
- Apollo: rational thinking and order, and appeals to logic, prudence and purity.
- Dionysus, the god of wine and dance: irrationality and chaos, and appeals to emotions and instincts.
- but more precisely:
- Aristotelian Eudaimonia (good life, living well)
- Benthamite Greatest Happiness for the Greatest Number

# Aristotelian Eudaimonia

- Eudaimonia=good life: virtue, good spirit
- Eudaimonia (happiness) = active, complete life inclusive of all that has intrinsic value
- perfection in respect of virtue; resources sufficient for a living creature
- <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/eudaimonia/>
- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eudaimonia>

# Benthamite Greatest SWB for the Greatest Num

- more pleasure than pain for as many as possible
- hedonic calculus: seek pleasure, avoid pain:
  - $\text{happiness} = \text{pleasure} - \text{pain}$
- have political and legal reforms to produce
  - Greatest Happiness for the Greatest Number
- this is what we're witnessing today!
  - early political advocates: [Stiglitz et al. \(2009\)](#), now even Sachs!
  - UK, New Zealand, UAE/Dubai, OECD, Bhutan, etc

# Epicurus

- all pleasure is good! (Annas, 1987)
- but not unnecessary desires (consumerism!), rather simple and frugal life; desire only the very basics, otherwise setting up yourself for hedonic treadmill (Weijers, 2011)
- overindulgence often leads to pain
- achieve inner tranquility
- <http://www.pursuit-of-happiness.org/history-of-happiness/epicurus/>
- (Brooks, 2021)
- be frugal and social, ie like a commune/hippie! (School of Life-Epicurus) [https://youtu.be/Kg\\_47J6sy3A](https://youtu.be/Kg_47J6sy3A) (fun; and others by school of life)

# Dionysus aka Bacchus

- god of the grape-harvest, wine making and wine, of fertility, ritual madness, religious ecstasy and theater
- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dionysus>
- on hedonism, pleasure,
- eg see doctoral thesis by Dan Weijers: <http://researcharchive.vuw.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10063/2370/thesis.pdf?sequence=2>

- "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied." (Mill, 2010) ""A being of higher faculties requires more to make him happy, is capable probably of more acute suffering"

[https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/chapter/pigs-or-socrates/#:~:](https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/chapter/pigs-or-socrates/#:~:text=It%20is%20better%20to%20be,own%20side%20of%20the%20question.)

[text=It%20is%20better%20to%20be,own%20side%20of%20the%20question.](https://open.library.okstate.edu/introphilosophy/chapter/pigs-or-socrates/#:~:text=It%20is%20better%20to%20be,own%20side%20of%20the%20question.)

- Wong (2018) grad sch— > bad menHea

and the winner is...

- which one do you like? Bentham or Aristotle?  
(a fascinating philosophical debate ([Nussbaum, 2005](#)))



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## “but it is in the clouds!”

- “happiness is something different for everyone”
- “one moment i am happy, another moment i am unhappy”
- “it doesn’t really matter; it’s just a silly fleeting emotion”
- nope! it’s solid science!

## definition

- self-reported
- subjective
- sometimes surprising
- life satisfaction  $\approx$  utility
- $\max(\text{life satisfaction}) \approx$  utilitarianism
- life satisfaction  $\neq$  happiness  
affect  $\neq$  cognition
- here, use interchangeably but remember distinction
- SWB (subjective wellbeing) is another popular term

## measurement

- wvs question: “all things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?” (1 to 10)
- gss question: “taken all together, how would you say things are these days - would you say that you are very happy, pretty happy, or not too happy?” (1-3)
- these measures were cross-validated using other measures: suicide, PET scans , other people ratings

(Layard, 2005, Di Tella and MacCulloch, 2006)

## **validity** (Diener et al., 2013)

- self-reported and subjective, but valid (people know whether they are happy) (Myers, 2000) and some reliability (precision varies)
- correlates with objective measures eg brain activity (PET scans) (Layard, 2005)
- correlates with suicide and mental health problems (Bray and Gunnell, 2006)
- not only correlates highly with other non-self reported measures, but also does not correlate with measures that are not theoretically related to it: happiness has discriminant validity (Sandvik et al., 1993)

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# five major theories

- genes/set point (eg Schnittker, 2008)
- adaptation/adjustment; hedonic treadmill (Brickman et al., 1978)
- needs/livability (Veenhoven and Ehrhardt, 1995)
- comparison/discrepancies (Michalos, 1985)
- happiness just a motivator (Carver and Scheier, 1990)

## genes/set point theory

- genes explain about half of everything, incl swb (eg [Schnittker, 2008](#))
- genes: bad rep in soc sci bc of Eugenics, Nazi, etc
- but shouldn't downplay the genes ([Pinker, 2003](#), [Haidt, 2012](#))
- indeed, some are just happy/unhappy no matter what!
- genes aka 'set point theory': you win lottery, lose a limb, doesn't matter, your swb comes back to its set point



## genes/set point theory

- a see homeostasis, eg cummins ch4 “wealth(s) and swb”
- swb, like any physiological system requires homeostasis, a stable narrow range to function properly
- about 70-90 on 0-100 scale; still some people are chronically low say due to arthritis or caring for an elderly; and some over time change is still possible
- not that set point is set in stone

## adaptation theory (Brickman et al., 1978)

- [related to genes/set point]
- adjustment to external circumstances
- 'hedonic treadmill'
- *the more one has the more one wants, since satisfactions received only stimulate instead of filling needs* (Durkheim, [1895] 1950)
- human adaptation is astonishing:
  - winning millions in a lottery, losing limbs, etc
  - 1b in poverty and somehow manage, don't commit suicide—people can adapt to just about anything

## needs/livability theory (Veenhoven and Ehrhardt, 1995)

- humans, like other animals have certain needs
- physiological needs like water, food, sleep; and other needs:
  - eg contact with other living organisms (biophilia, social capital, nature, etc)
  - and higher (human) needs eg belonging, selfactualization
- kind of like Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
- if needs are satisfied, then happiness follows
- then there are attr of places, environment, or ecology
- if it is "livable" then happiness follows
- this is optimistic for public policy—we can change needs and livability provision

## comparisons/discrepancies

- multiple discrepancy theory (Michalos, 1985)
- social comparison, eg co-workers, HS friends, relatives
- comparison to various standards, eg clothes, car expected in a given profession
- over-time: your swb now is determined by how you were doing in the past and what you expect in the future
- eg losing may be more felt than gaining (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979)
- “it is better to be a big frog in a small pond than a small frog in a big pond” (Davis, 1966)

## **happiness just a motivator** (Carver and Scheier, 1990)

- “Happiness is the feeling that power increases—that resistance is being overcome.” Nietzsche
- SWB merely signals that task at hand has been accomplished
  - then it dissipates and pain settles in so that the signal is that I can move to another task!
- Earth is not for comfort/happiness, humans have not evolved to be happy but to reproduce (Euba, 2019) see superb ‘Selfish Gene’ (Dawkins, 2006); (also Schopenhauer, eg <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0zmfNx7OM4>)
- it’s for struggle, and pain has its motivating place
- happiness-seeking/pain avoidance is complacency
- “The word ‘happiness’ would lose its meaning if it were not balanced by sadness” Jung

## happiness just a motivator (Carver and Scheier, 1990)

- no pain, no gain!
- one must struggle to succeed
- one must even struggle to discover oneself!
- see Nietzsche, eg: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/10/nietzsches-guide-to-better-living/568375/>
- people who are very emotionally stable may be too happy to feel the need to create
- “One must have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star.” Nietzsche

## happiness just a motivator (Carver and Scheier, 1990)

- also like the earlier equation (Carver, 2003):  
$$\text{swb} = \text{achievement/experience} - \text{expectations/aspirations}$$
  - if rate of progress below the reference rate: negative affect
  - if above: positive affect
- also if doing well: become satisfied, comfortable, possibly complacent (Carver, 2003)
- until you fall below the reference line and it goes over again
- note: winner-take-all capitalism raises the reference line  
(Frank, 2012)

## dark side of happiness [follows from Carver]

- too much of happiness is not a good thing
- or perhaps even that there's a dark side to happiness
- Gruber et al. (2011) and <https://positivepsychology.com/dark-side-of-happiness/>
- (also Gilbert's "Stumbling on happiness")
- "too much of a good thing is a bad thing"
- food makes us thrive physically, happiness makes us thrive psychologically—but like food, swb not always good
- (like fame, success or even money—to get them—pursue other stuff like curiosity)
- "Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful" Herman Cain



## dark side of happiness

- always being very happy may result from being out of touch with reality; and this may lead to dysfunction
- moderate happiness allows room for unpleasant emotions, which enable us to learn and grow and move forward
- if constantly very happy, why would you do anything?
- being too happy can make you:
  - pay less attention to details
  - less creative
  - take more risks [binging food and alc, drugs etc,sex]

## dark side of happiness

- too much happiness can be dysfunctional and maladaptive
- extreme positive emotion is like mania; during mania can't experience negative emotions (that may be necessary, even for survival, such as fear)
- (btw flow seems similar to mania)

## dark side of happiness

- you set some goal, say academic achievement
  - and then you fail
- disappointment/discontent/unhappiness is relatively fine for most goals
- but if your goal is happiness, then failure kills the goal!
- so the more you strive for happiness, the more likely it is that you will be unhappy
- say you are in a positive situation, a birthday party, and your goal is happiness, but you don't feel happy, then you fail your goal, and feel disappointed and even less happy!!
- instead, accept or not try to decrease negative feelings—be mindful and accept

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## key people by the field

- Veenhoven; aka the Godfather of Happiness [soc; sir]

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruut\\_Veenhoven](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruut_Veenhoven)

- Diener (and Seligman) [psy]
- Easterlin (and Oswald) [eco]
- Radcliff [polSci]
- Cantril came up with the famous ladder
- it is important because it is self-anchoring:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK189562>

# Campbell

- not just an early scholar, a pioneer
- but also comprehensive and indepth
- indeed, his book is not only relevant
- but many of the findings remain cutting-edge!
- also, it's about the US

# Maslow

- a humanist, and into spirituality
- (like Jung, Fromm, and Marcuse)
- really great books:
- Toward a Psychology of Being

[https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=jcKbDAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT15&dq=maslow&ots=eTsQFrXdED&sig=UlvB9X\\_8k3NCfVa-Nc08Zvw0zeo#v=onepage&q=maslow&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=jcKbDAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT15&dq=maslow&ots=eTsQFrXdED&sig=UlvB9X_8k3NCfVa-Nc08Zvw0zeo#v=onepage&q=maslow&f=false)

- and Peak Experience (kind of like flow) [https:](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religions,_Values,_and_Peak_Experiences)

[//en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religions,\\_Values,\\_and\\_Peak\\_Experiences](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religions,_Values,_and_Peak_Experiences)

# Freud

- eg see his “Civilization and its discontents”
- (civ is based on suppressed or delayed gratification/happiness)
- [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=AW3z38T3u7YC&oi=fnd&pg=PP13&dq=freud+civilization+and+its+discontents&ots=6emidLE-nd&sig=6sA07tnq7Rk8\\_i1R2G4hLg4sq9o#v=onepage&q=freud%20civilization%20and%20its%20discontents&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=AW3z38T3u7YC&oi=fnd&pg=PP13&dq=freud+civilization+and+its+discontents&ots=6emidLE-nd&sig=6sA07tnq7Rk8_i1R2G4hLg4sq9o#v=onepage&q=freud%20civilization%20and%20its%20discontents&f=false)
- note, i did psychoanalysis of city :)
- <https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/52123/PDF/1/play/>



# Fromm and Marcuse

- in general and short: joy, fun, spontaneity, no harm, positive attitude, kindness, equality, freedom, etc
- see google scholar for their writings, eg:

# Fromm and Marcuse writings

- “Escape from freedom”

[https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=d2g8L1sLykwC&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&dq=info:WPqc-LXi3BUJ:scholar.google.com&ots=JnDgRDoiLn&sig=dX7ipJr\\_fK8R6sxnrytdUYkIkMg#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=d2g8L1sLykwC&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&dq=info:WPqc-LXi3BUJ:scholar.google.com&ots=JnDgRDoiLn&sig=dX7ipJr_fK8R6sxnrytdUYkIkMg#v=onepage&q&f=false)

- “One dimensional man” [https://books.google.com/books?id=eXlTAQAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=One-dimensional+man:](https://books.google.com/books?id=eXlTAQAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=One-dimensional+man:+Studies+in+the+ideology+of+advanced+industrial+society&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiImdSzn83dAhVNGt8KHShSBI8Q6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q=One-dimensional%20man%3A%20Studies%20in%20the%20ideology%20of%20advanced%20industrial%20society&f=false)

[eXlTAQAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=One-dimensional+man:](https://books.google.com/books?id=eXlTAQAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=One-dimensional+man:+Studies+in+the+ideology+of+advanced+industrial+society&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiImdSzn83dAhVNGt8KHShSBI8Q6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q=One-dimensional%20man%3A%20Studies%20in%20the%20ideology%20of%20advanced%20industrial%20society&f=false)

[+Studies+in+the+ideology+of+advanced+industrial+society&hl=en&sa=](https://books.google.com/books?id=eXlTAQAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=One-dimensional+man:+Studies+in+the+ideology+of+advanced+industrial+society&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiImdSzn83dAhVNGt8KHShSBI8Q6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q=One-dimensional%20man%3A%20Studies%20in%20the%20ideology%20of%20advanced%20industrial%20society&f=false)

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[One-dimensional%20man%3A%20Studies%20in%20the%20ideology%20of%](https://books.google.com/books?id=eXlTAQAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=One-dimensional+man:+Studies+in+the+ideology+of+advanced+industrial+society&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiImdSzn83dAhVNGt8KHShSBI8Q6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q=One-dimensional%20man%3A%20Studies%20in%20the%20ideology%20of%20advanced%20industrial%20society&f=false)

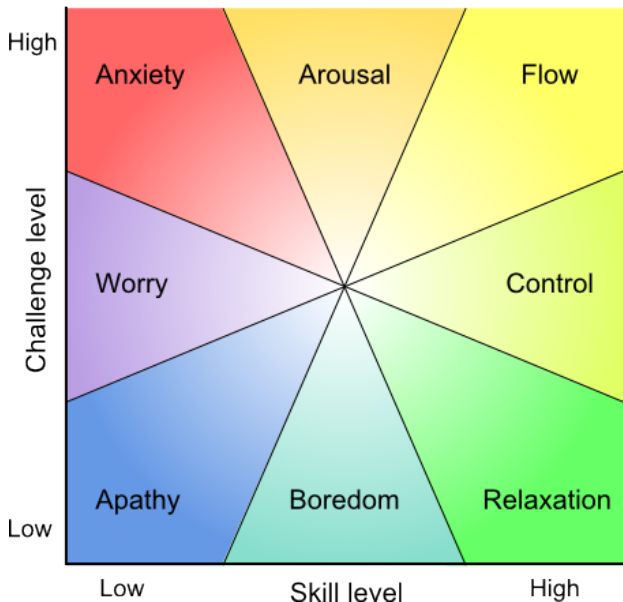
[20advanced%20industrial%20society&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=eXlTAQAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=One-dimensional+man:+Studies+in+the+ideology+of+advanced+industrial+society&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiImdSzn83dAhVNGt8KHShSBI8Q6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q=One-dimensional%20man%3A%20Studies%20in%20the%20ideology%20of%20advanced%20industrial%20society&f=false)

- “Eros and civilization” [https://books.google.com/books?id=eT2UCgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Eros+and+civilization&hl=en&](https://books.google.com/books?id=eT2UCgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Eros+and+civilization&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiImfTPn83dAhXoV98KHVRaA8UQ6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q=the+classics+the+picture+of+the+human+mind)

[eT2UCgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Eros+and+civilization&hl=en&](https://books.google.com/books?id=eT2UCgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Eros+and+civilization&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiImfTPn83dAhXoV98KHVRaA8UQ6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q=the+classics+the+picture+of+the+human+mind)

[sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiImfTPn83dAhXoV98KHVRaA8UQ6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q=](https://books.google.com/books?id=eT2UCgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=Eros+and+civilization&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiImfTPn83dAhXoV98KHVRaA8UQ6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q=the+classics+the+picture+of+the+human+mind)42/45

## Flow: the psychology of optimal experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991)



# happiness equation

- happiness =  
achievement or experience — expectations or aspirations
- 
- that's one reason why educ doesn't help with happiness

## some more key studies

- describe in few sentences
- (the need to belong) (Baumeister and Leary, 1995, Maslow, [1954] 1987)
- 
- evolution/genes:
- Birds of a feather: Homophily in social networks (McPherson et al., 2001)
- The social cage: Human nature and the evolution of society (Maryanski and Turner, 1992)
- The Compass of Pleasure: How Our Brains Make Fatty Foods, Orgasm, Exercise, Marijuana, Generosity, Vodka, Learning, and Gambling Feel So Good (Linden, 2011)

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