WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT ABOUT HAPPINESS
Classic qualms in the light of recent research[1]

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ABSTRACT

Happiness has long been a subject for philosophers. A main question was whether greater happiness for a greater number is possible. Enlightened progress optimists envisioned that happiness can be furthered by the use of reason, but pessimists claimed that happiness is too elusive to grasp and that its pursuit will not bring us further, we will jump from the frying pan into the fire.

Armchair theorizing has not settled this debate. Empirical answers became possible in the 1960s, when the social indicator movement took off. Alex Michalos was a pioneer in this strand of research, in which happiness is commonly defined as the subjective enjoyment of one's life as a whole. Thus defined, happiness can be well measured using self reports. To date this has given us a solid body of knowledge, which can now be used to debunk several classic qualms.

Happiness, life-satisfaction, research synthesis, utilitarianism

1   INTRODUCTION

Over the ages philosophers have reflected on the good life, often denoted by the term 'happiness'. Though most philosophers thought of happiness as a morally good life, some focused on happiness in the sense of a pleasant life e.g. among the ancient Greek philosophers Democritus and among 18th century Enlightened thinkers Bentham (1789).

Several questions arose around this kind of happiness. A first question was whether a happy life is possible in the human condition. Are we not doomed to suffer? Isn't a happy life a mere dream? If not, a second question is whether we can become happier than we are. Isn't happiness too relative or too much bound to a set-point from which we can at best temporarily deviate? And, isn't happiness too idiosyncratic to be furthered by social policy? Philosophers addressed these questions in their armchairs, from which they could not provide definitive answers.

Developments in the social sciences with, in particular, the emergence of the social indicator movement in the 1960, opened the way to empirical answers to the questions. Happiness became a common topic in survey research and this resulted in a growing stream of research findings, see scheme 1. The results of this research strand are gathered in the World Database of Happiness (Veenhoven 2015), the bibliography of which lists currently some 10.000 scientific publications (Veenhoven 2015a). On the basis of this knowledge we can now settle several classic debates, among which the question of whether happiness is too elusive to be pursued.

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[1] This text draws on several of my earlier publications, most of which are mentioned on the list of references.

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2   CAN HAPPINESS BE DEFINED?

The word 'happiness' has long been used by philosophers to denote a 'good life' and was has commonly been used when giving moral advice on how one should live. Philosophers never agreed on what happiness is precisely and often mixed up happiness-as-such with conditions that promote happiness. As a result, happiness came to be considered an elusive concept, and scientific interest in the subject declined (Buijs 2007). The social indicator movement brought the subject back on the scientific agenda. The practice of measuring quality of life asked for conceptual specificity and required input and output to be distinguished. As a result different notions of the good life crystallized in the literature, one of which is the subject of this chapter.

Four qualities of life

The different notions of a good life can be ordered in a 2 by 2 classification as shown in scheme 2. The top-left quadrant of Scheme 2 represents the presence of good external living conditions; with the least livable conditions found in 'hell' and most livable conditions in 'paradise'. This notion is central in 'objective' conceptions of the good life, that is, a notion of conditions in which humans will thrive. This notion is the favorite of policy makers.

The top-right quadrant denotes the inner qualities required to deal with environmental conditions. This notion is central to the 'capability approach' and to the related notion of 'eudemonic happiness'. This meaning is favored by educators and therapists.

The bottom-left quadrant denotes the effects of one's life on the environment, for instance how supportive one is to one's fellow humans and what one contributes to human culture. This rather intangible meaning is favored by moralists.

All three the above notions of quality of life concern objective conditions, that is, conditions that are observable by outsiders of which individual persons are not necessarily aware. In contrast the fourth notion is essentially subjective. The bottom-right quadrant in scheme 2 denotes one's quality of life in the eye of the beholder. This meaning surfaced in social indicators research, among other things because the, in this field, much used technique of survey research involves a focus on subjective experience.

Four kinds of satisfaction

There are different kinds of satisfaction, which can also be charted in a fourfold classification, see scheme 3.

The top-left quadrant represents passing enjoyment of aspects of life. Examples are delight in a cup of tea at breakfast, one's fleeting satisfaction with a chore done or enjoyment of a piece of art. I refer to this category as *pleasures*, Kahneman et al. (1997) call it 'instant-utilities'.

The top right quadrant denotes enduring satisfaction with life-aspects, such as with ones marriage or job. This is currently referred to as *domain-satisfaction*. Although domain-satisfactions depend typically on a continuous flow of pleasures, they also have some

continuity. For instance, one can remain satisfied with one's marriage even if one has not enjoyed the company of one's spouse for some time.

The bottom right quadrant in Scheme 3 denotes the combination of passing experience and satisfaction with life-as-a-whole. This combination occurs typically in *peak-experiences*, which involve short-lived but quite intense feelings and the perception of wholeness.

Lastly, the bottom-right quadrant represents the combination of enduring satisfaction with life-as-a-whole, that is, how much we like the life we live. The word 'happiness' is increasingly used in this sense. I have defined it as *the degree to which someone evaluates the overall quality of his or her present life-as-a-whole positively.* (Veenhoven (1984). This definition is close to what the enlightened philosopher Jeremy Bentham had in mind when he described happiness as 'the sum of pleasures and pains'.

2.3   Components of happiness

When appraising how much we like the life we live, we draw on two sources of information: 1) how well we feel generally, and 2) how well our life-as-it-is compares to standards of how-life-should-be. These sub-appraisals are seen as 'components' of happiness, respectively the *affective component* called 'hedonic level of affect' and the *cognitive component* called 'contentment'. This distinction is discussed in more detail in Veenhoven (2009), in which I propose a theory about difference in the determinants of these components. This distinction is depicted in Scheme 4.

Hedonic level of affect:
Like other animals, humans can feel good or bad, but unlike other animals, we can reflect on that experience, assess how well we feel most of the time and communicate this to others. This is the feeling-based part of happiness.

Contentment:
Unlike other animals, humans can also appraise their life cognitively and compare their life as it is with how they want it to be. Wants are typically guided by common standards of the good life and in this sense contentment is likely to be more culturally variable than affect level. This cognitive appraisal of life assumes intellectual capacity and for this reason this concept does not apply to people who lack this capacity, such as young children who cannot yet oversee their life-as-a-whole and thus can have no clear standards in mind.

In short: Happiness can be defined as a specific kind of subjective wellbeing

3   CAN HAPPINESS BE MEASURED?

Happiness was long reputed to be immeasurable and many things called 'happines' are indeed difficult to quantify. Yet happiness as defined above is measurable. When defined as the subjective appreciations of one's life, happiness is something we have in mind and what is on our mind can be assessed using questioning.

An overview of acceptable questions is available in the collection 'Measures of Happiness' of the World Database of Happiness (Veenhoven 2015b). To date (March 2015) the collection involves some 1000 slightly different questions. These questions are sorted using the conceptual distinction described above between overall life-satisfaction and its

'components'. Questions that tap overall life-satisfaction are coded 'O' (Overall), questions that address the affective component are coded ' A' (Affect) and questions about the cognitive component are coded 'C' (Contentment). Questions are also sorted by time-frame and rating scale. The collection contains links to studies in which particular questions have been used.

3.1   Measures of overall happiness
Questions on happiness can be framed in many ways, directly or indirectly, using single or multiple items. Some common questions are presented below.

Single questions

- "Taking all together, how happy would you say you are: very happy, quite happy, not very happy, not at all happy?"
  (A standard question in the World Values Surveys)

- "How satisfied are you with the life you lead? Very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, not at all satisfied?"
  (A standard question in Eurobarometer surveys)

Multiple questions (summed)

- Same questions are asked twice: at the beginning and at the end of an interview
  "How do you feel about your life-as-a-whole? Delighted, pleased, mostly satisfying, mixed, mostly dissatisfying, unhappy, terrible?"
  (Andrews & Withey's (1976) Life 3)

- Five questions can be used, rated on a 1-7 scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree".
   - In most ways my life is close to ideal
   - The conditions of my life are excellent
   - I am satisfied with my life
   - So far I have gotten the important things I want in life
   - If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.[3]
   (Diener's 1985 Satisfaction With Life Scale SWLS)

3.2   Measures of hedonic level of affect
There are several ways to ask people how well they feel generally. One way is to invite a person to make a general estimate, for instance using the question: 'How often have you felt happy during the past 6 weeks?" Questions of this kind are coded A-TH (Affect: Time Happy), in the above mentioned collection 'Measures of Happiness'.

A second method that can be used to assess hedonic level of affect is a multi-moment assessment. This involves a series of repeated questions such as: "How happy do you feel right now?" Measures of this kind are coded A-ARE, (Affect: Average Repeated Estimates), in the collection 'Measures of Happiness'.

A third approach to assessing an individual's hedonic level is to ask first about various

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[3.] I my view this last item is not appropriate. One can be quite satisfied with life, but still be open to the opportunity to try something else.

specific affects experienced by that individual in the recent past, both positive affects such as 'joy' and negative affects such as 'anger'. Next an 'affect balance score' is computed by subtracting reported negative affects from reported positive affects. Measures of this kind are coded A-AB (<u>A</u>ffect: <u>A</u>ffect <u>B</u>alance) in the collection 'Measures of Happiness'.

3.3   Measures of contentment
Contentment can be measured using a general question, such as: "How successful are you in getting what you want from life?" (code C-RW, <u>C</u>ontentment: <u>R</u>ealize <u>W</u>ants).

A more sophisticated method for measuring contentment requires three steps: First respondents are asked to list the things they want from life. Next they rate how successful they are in reaching each of these things. Finally the investigator computes the respondent's average success in meeting their wants, eventually weighed by importance. Measures of this kind are coded C-ASG (<u>C</u>ontentment: <u>A</u>verage <u>S</u>uccess in <u>G</u>oals) in the collection 'Measures of Happiness'.

A variant of the above approach does not ask respondents for personal 'wants', but rather refers to notions of the good life. The first step is to ask people what they think of as the 'best possible life' and next what constitutes the 'worst possible life'. After priming the respondents with these open questions, they are presented with a ladder and asked to imagine that the top of the ladder represents the best possible life as they have just described, and that the bottom of the ladder represents what they imagined as the worst possible life. As a last step respondents are asked to rate their present life on this ladder, in some variants of this approach this is done after the respondents have been asked to rate their life 5 years ago and how they envisage their life 5 years from now. This method is known as Cantril's (1965) 'ladder of life scale' and is coded C-BW (<u>C</u>ontentment: <u>B</u>est <u>W</u>orst) in the collection 'Measures of Happiness'.

3.4   Validity doubts
Critics have suggested that responses to questions on life-satisfaction actually measure other phenomena. Rather than indicating how much the respondent enjoys life, the answers to such questions reflect his normative notions and desires. These qualms have been the subject of a lot of research and have been proven to be false (Veenhoven 1993 chapter 5). The main indications for which are summarized below.

No notion
One of the misgivings about questions on happiness is that most people have no opinion at all of how satisfied they are, they will be more aware of how satisfied they are supposed to be, and report this instead. Though this may happen incidentally, it does not appear to be the rule. Most people know quite well whether or not they enjoy life. Eight out of ten Americans think about it every week. Responses to questions about happiness tend to be prompt. Non-response on these items is low; both absolutely (± 1%) and relative to other attitudinal questions. `Don't know' responses are also infrequent.

Reflected appraisal

A related assertion is that respondents mix up how happy they actually are, with how happy other people think they are, given their situation. If so, people considered to be well off would typically report they are very happy, and people regarded as disadvantaged should characterize themselves as unhappy. That pattern is sometimes observed, but it is not general. For instance, in The Netherlands a good education is seen as a pre-requisite for a good life, but the highly educated appear to be slightly less happy with their lives compared to their less educated counterparts.

Colored answers

Another objection concerns the presence of systematic bias in responses. It is assumed that questions on happiness are interpreted correctly, but that the responses to such questions are often false. People who are actually dissatisfied with their life would tend to answer that they are satisfied, both ego-defense and social-desirability will cause such distortions. This bias is seen to manifest itself in over-report of happiness; most people claim to be happy, at least in modern nations, and most perceive themselves to be more happy than average. Another indication of bias is seen in the finding that psycho-somatic complaints are not uncommon among those that say they are happy.

Yet the above findings allow for other interpretations Firstly, the fact that most people say they are satisfied with their life does not have to imply over-report. It is quite possible that most people are truly happy. Secondly, there are also good reasons why most people think that they are happier than average. One such reason is that most people think like critical scientists and think that unhappiness is the rule. Thirdly, the occurrence of head-aches and worries among happy people does not prove response distortion, life can be a sore trial some times, but can still be satisfying on balance.

The proof of the pudding is in demonstrating response distortion. This has been attempted in a number of clinical studies where responses to single direct questions have been compared with ratings based on in depth interviews and projective tests. The results for such in depth interviews are generally not different from responses made to single direct questions posed by an anonymous interviewer, see for example Wessman & Ricks (1966).

3.5   Reliability doubts

Though single questions on happiness seem to measure what they are supposed to measure, they measure it rather imprecisely. When the same question is asked twice in an interview, the responses are not always identical. Correlations are about +.70, while over a period of a week, test-retest reliability drops to circa +.60. Though responses seldom change from `satisfied' to `dissatisfied', switches from `very' to `fairly' are rather common[4]. The difference between response-options is often ambiguous and respondent's notions tend to be general, thus the choice for one answer-category or the next is sometimes haphazard when answering questions on life satisfaction.

As choice is often arbitrary, subtle differences in the interrogation environment can exert a considerable effect. Variations in the places where the interviews are held, the characteristics of the interviewer, the sequence in which the questions are asked and the precise wording of the key-item can all tip the scale to one response or another. Such effects

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[4] World Database of Happiness, Correlational Findings (Veenhoven 2015d) Earlier by later happiness (H5.2.1)

can occur in different phases of the response process; when the question is presented, during consideration of the answer and when communicating it.

Bias in appraisal
Though most people have an idea of how much they enjoy life, responding to questions on this matter involves more than just bringing up an earlier judgment from memory. For the most part, memory only indicates a range of satisfaction. Typically, the matter is re-assessed in an instant judgment. This re-appraisal may be limited to recent change: Are there any reasons to be more or less happy than I used to be? It can also involve quick re-evaluation of one's life: What are my blessings and frustrations? In making such instant judgments, people use various heuristics. These mental simplifications are attended with specific errors. For instance the `availability' heuristic involves orientation on pieces of information that happen to be readily available. If the interviewer is in a wheelchair, the benefit of good health is salient. Respondents in good health will then rate their life-satisfaction somewhat higher and the correlation with health variables will be more pronounced. Several of these heuristic effects have been demonstrated by Schwarz and Strack (1991).

Bias in response
Once a respondent has formed a private judgment with respect to their happiness, the next step is to communicate it. At this stage reports can also be biased in various ways. One source of bias is inherent to semantics; respondents interpret words differently and some interpretations may be emphasized by earlier questions. For example, questions on happiness are more likely to be interpreted as referring to `contentment' when preceded by questions on success in work, rather than items on mood. Another source of response-bias is found in considerations of self-presentation and social-desirability. Self reports of happiness tend to be slightly higher in personal interviews than that for anonymous questionnaires[5]; however, direct contact with an interviewer does not always inflate reports. If the interviewer is in a wheel-chair, modest self-presentation is encouraged.

Much of these biases are random, and balance out in large samples. So in large samples, random error does not affect the accuracy of happiness averages. Yet it does affect correlations, random error 'attenuates' correlations. Random error can be estimated using multiple-trait-multiple-method (MTMM) studies, and correlations can be corrected (disattenuated) on this basis.

Some biases may be systematic; especially bias produced by the interrogation technique and sequence of questions. Bias of this kind does affect the reliability of distributional data, yet in principle it does not affect correlations, unless the measure of the correlate is biased in the same way, i.e. correlated error.

3.6   Comparability across nations
Average happiness differs markedly across nations. In the 1990s average happiness in Russia was 5.4 on a 0-10 scale, while in Canada the average was 7.7. Does this mean that Russians really took less pleasure in life? Several claims to the contrary have been advanced. I have checked these doubts Veenhoven (1993), and the results of that inquiry are summarized below.

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[5] World Database of Happiness, Correlational Findings (Veenhoven 2015d) Method of interrogation (I5.1.3)

The first objection is that differences in *language* hinder comparison. Words like `happiness' and `satisfaction' do not have the same connotations in different tongues. Questions using such terms will therefore measure slightly different matters. I checked that hypothesis by comparing the rank orders produced by three kinds of questions on life-satisfaction: a question about `happiness', a question about `satisfaction with life' and a question that invites a rating between `best- and worst possible life'. The rank orders appeared to be almost identical in all languages. I also compared responses to questions on happiness and satisfaction in two bi-lingual countries, and found no evidence for linguistic bias.

A second objection is that responses are differentially distorted by *desirability-bias*. In countries where happiness ranks high in value, people will be more inclined to overstate their enjoyment of life. I inspected that claim by checking whether reports of general happiness deviate more from feelings in the past few weeks in these countries; the former measure being more vulnerable for desirability distortion than the latter. This appeared not to be the case.

A third claim is that *response-styles* distort the answers dissimilarly in different countries, for instance, a collectivistic orientation would discourage `very' happy responses, because modest self-presentation is more appropriate within this cultural context. I tested this hypothesis by comparing life-satisfaction in countries differing in value-collectivism, but found no effect in the predicted direction. The hypothesis also failed several other tests.

A related claim is that happiness is a typical *western concept*; unfamiliarity with it in non-western nations would lead to lower scores. If so, we can expect more `don't know' and `no answer' responses in non-western nations, however, that appeared not to be the case.

Many more sources of cultural measurement bias can be involved. If so, there must be little correlation between average life-satisfaction and the actual livability of nations; in section 6 we will see that this is not the case. Using a dozen indicators of societal quality we can explain 75% of the differences in average life-satisfaction in nations, which means that measurement error can be no more than 25%. If we had more and better indicators of societal quality, we could probably explain some 90% of the variation and the error-component would then be no more than 10%. If we take into account that there is also an error component in the measures of societal quality, the estimate shrinks to some 5%.

The issue of `cultural bias in the measurement' of happiness must be distinguished from the question of `cultural influence on the appraisal' of life. Russians could be truly less satisfied than Canadians, because living conditions are less good in Russia and there is much evidence that this is indeed the case. This issue is discussed in more detail in Veenhoven (2008).

In short: Happiness appears to be well measurable

4   IS HAPPINESS RELATIVE?

Much of the research on happiness is prompted by the hope that greater happiness for a greater number can be achieved by the use of reason, such as by scientifically informed social policy. In this context researchers looked for ways to create greater happiness for a greater

number, however, several theories of happiness imply that this hope is an idle one. One of these is the theory that happiness is relative.

4.1   Theoretical assumptions

This theory holds that we assess how happy we are by comparing life-as-it-is to standards of how-life-should-be. Standards of how life-should be are seen to draw on perceptions of what is feasible and with reference to others. Standards of comparison are thought to adjust. The more money we earn and the more our neighbors have, the higher the amount of money we would deem necessary for a decent living. Together these assumptions imply that it is not possible to create lasting happiness, neither at the individual level, nor the societal level.

At the individual level, this theory predicts that happiness is a short-lived phenomenon. We would be happy when life comes close to ideal, but in coming closer to ideal we set higher demands and end up as equally unhappy as before. Likewise, social comparison can impede lasting happiness. When we have surpassed the Jones, our reference drifts upward to the Petersons, and we feel unhappy again. This theory has many variations, which are nicely combined in Michalos' Multiple Discrepancy theory of happiness (Michalos (1988).

At the societal level, the theory implies that average happiness will fluctuate around a neutral level; because individual citizens oscillate between happiness and unhappiness, the average will be in between. Social comparison is also likely to result in a neutral average; the happiness of the citizens who do better is neutralized by the unhappiness of the ones who do worse. Consequently, average happiness should be approximately the same in all countries.

4.2   Empirical evidence

Some often-cited investigations claim support for this theory. Easterlin (1974) saw the theory proved by his observation that happiness is as high in poor countries as it is in rich countries. Brickman et al (1978) assert that happiness is relative because they found that lottery-winners are no happier than paralyzed accident victims are.

Elsewhere I have exposed these sensational claims (Veenhoven 1991). Happiness appears not to be the same in poor and rich nations and economic growth is typically followed by rising happiness (Veenhoven & Vergunst 2014). Neither are accident victims equally happy as lottery winners. The differences may be smaller than one might have thought, but they undeniably exist.

I also checked some other implications of the theory that happiness is relative. One such implication is that changes in living-conditions, to the good or the bad, do not lastingly affect our appreciation of life, however, there is good evidence that we do not adjust to everything. For instance, we do not adjust to the misfortune of having a handicapped child or the loss of a spouse. Another implication I checked is that earlier hardship favors later happiness. Survivors of the Holocaust have been found to be less happy than Israelis of the same age who had not suffered at the hands of the Nazi.

All in all, there is no empirical support for the theory that happiness is relative.

4.3   Theoretical flaws

Proponents of the theory that happiness is relative see happiness as a purely cognitive matter and do not acknowledge affective experience. In terms of Scheme 4 the proponents focus on 'contentment'. This raises the question of how important this cognitive component is in the overall evaluation of life. The available research findings suggest that the affective component dominates, see Scheme 5.

In my view affective experience signals the gratification of basic needs. Contrary to `wants', `needs' are not relative. Needs are absolute demands for human functioning, that do not adjust to all conditions; in fact, they mark the limits of human adaptability. To the extent that it draws on need-gratification, happiness is not relative.

4.4   Difference with life-aspect evaluations

The theory that happiness is relative applies better to some domain-satisfactions; cf. the right top quadrant in Scheme 3. For instance, income-satisfaction appears to be largely a matter of comparison, and standards of reference on this matter have been shown to drift (VanPraag 1989). There are also indications for comparison processes in satisfaction with health and satisfaction with job, the evaluation of these specific life-domains tend to follow the right hand route in Scheme 5. However, evaluations of life-as-a-whole typically follow the left-hand route. Therefore, the theory does not apply to overall happiness.

In sum: Happiness depends largely on need-gratifications and is as such not wholly relative.

5   IS HAPPINESS AN IMMUTABLE TRAIT?

Another theory that denies hope of creating greater happiness for a greater number holds that happiness is a fixed disposition. This theory figures at the individual level and the societal level.

5.1   Personal character trait?

The individual level variant of this theory sees happiness as a psychological trait; a general tendency to like or dislike things. This tendency can stem from an inborn temperament and from early experience. In this view, an improvement in living conditions will not result in greater happiness. The evaluative reaction will remain the same; the discontented will always be disgruntled and the satisfied will always see the sunny side of things.

Elsewhere, I have taken stock of the empirical evidence for this fixed disposition theory (Veenhoven 1994). I inspected whether happiness is 1) temporally stable, 2) cross-situational consistent and 3) inner caused. None of these appeared to be the case. Firstly, happiness does not remain the same over time, particularly not over the length of a lifetime. Individuals revise their evaluation of life periodically. Consequently, happiness changes quite often, both absolutely and relatively towards others. Secondly, happiness is not insensitive to change in living-conditions.

An improvement or deterioration in one's conditions is typically followed by a rise or decline in one's appreciation of life. These changes to the worse appear for instance as a sequel to

widowhood and divorce. Thirdly, happiness is not entirely an internal matter. It is true that evaluations of life are influenced by personal characteristics; however, these inner alignments modify the impact of environmental effects rather than determine them.

5.2   National character trait?

The societal variant of this fixed disposition theory (folklore-theory) assumes that happiness is part of the national-character. Some cultures will tend to have a gloomy outlook on life, whereas others are optimistic. France is often mentioned as an example of the former kind, and the USA of the latter. In this view, there is also little perspective greater happiness for a greater number. Even if the quality of life in France was improved substantially, French misanthropy would prevent the French from taking more pleasure in life. Elsewhere I have examined the empirical evidence for this theory (Veenhoven 1994).

I first inspected whether the differences in average happiness in nations are unrelated to variation in objective quality of living-conditions in these nations. This is not the case. People are clearly happier in the nations that are most affluent, safe, free, equal and tolerant. Together, these societal qualities explained no less than 75% of the variation seen in average happiness! Improvements in societal conditions tend to be followed by a raise in average happiness in nations. This is for instance visible in the rising happiness in Western Europe after World War II.

Next I regressed subjective happiness on objective livability of nations and considered the residuals. If French misanthropy reduces happiness, the French must report less happiness than their level of living would predict. In the regression chart, France must be situated below the regression line. Likewise, we can expect the USA to be situated above that line. No such pattern was found.

Lastly, I considered the happiness of migrants. I compared their appreciation of life with average happiness in their country-of-settlement and with average happiness in their country-of-origin. If happiness reflects the quality of the conditions one lives in, the happiness of migrants in a country must be close to the level of autochthons. If, however, happiness is a matter of socialized outlook, the happiness of migrants must be closer to the level in their motherland. First generation migrants in two nations were considered: in Australia, migrants from Britain, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands and Yugoslavia; in Germany, migrants from Greece, Italy, Spain, Turkey and Yugoslavia. The trait-theory also failed this test.

In sum: Happiness is more a 'state' than a 'trait'

6   IS HAPPINES TOO IDEOSYNCRATICTO BE PURSUED COLLECTIVELY?

The cognitive theory of happiness feeds the idea that conditions for happiness differ widely across persons and cultures. If happiness depends on getting what one wants it will be as variable as human wants are. Policies aimed at the general public will therefore often fail to meet peculiar personal demands, see scheme 5. The bold arrows at the left of scheme 5 suggest that conditions for happiness are typically a matter of fit with human nature, and thus, that there will be much similarity in conditions for happiness I have inspected the empirical

evidence for this view elsewhere (Veenhoven. 2010a). I found that the conditions that promote happiness are quite similar across the world. Likewise the consequences of enjoying life or not appeared to be almost universal. There is more cultural variation in how happiness is valued and in cultural beliefs about conditions for happiness. The greatest variation is found in how happy people are across populations.

6.1   Much similarity in societal requirements for happiness
Average happiness differs markedly across nations: the highest average on a 0 to 10 scale is currently (2015) observed in Denmark (8.4) and the lowest in Zimbabwe (3.2). There is a clear system in these differences. People live more happily in the most modern nations, in particular in nations characterized by economic development, freedom, rule of law, and good governance. These societal characteristics explain no fewer than 75% of the differences in average happiness in nations.

Interestingly, the societal conditions that make people happy are not always the conditions they value. For instance, average happiness is markedly lower in nations where women are discriminated against, but this practice is widely approved in most of these countries (Chin-Hon-Foei 2007). Likewise, corruption reduces happiness, even in societies where favoritism is seen as a moral obligation.

6.2   Much similarity in required living conditions within nations
There are also differences in individual happiness within nations. In a happy country like Denmark, 5 percent of the people still rate their happiness at 5 or lower on the 0–10 scale, and in an unhappy country like Zimbabwe, some 13 percent score 8 or higher. Are the reasons for high and low scores similar across nations? I consider some living conditions for which cross-national data are available below.

Freedom
Not only is average happiness higher in free countries, within countries individuals are happier the more control they have over their life. This appears, among other things, in strong correlations between personal happiness and perceived freedom and control all over the world.

Social rank
People are typically happier on the upper steps of the social ladder than at the bottom. This appears in findings on relative income position, occupational prestige, subjective class, identification and indexes of socio-economic status. These differences tend to be bigger at the lower end of the hierarchy, and, although the correlations with happiness differ in size, they are positive all over the world. This finding fits the view that we have an innate need for social respect. Like other animals that live in groups, we are hardwired to avoid a bottom position.

Marriage

Adults are typically happier when living with a spouse than when single. The difference is around half a point on scale from 0–10 and is largely independent of income, gender, and age. Again the size of the difference varies somewhat across time and nations, but the pattern is clearly universal. This finding fits the view that we are social animals and hardwired to form pairs.

Personality

Cross-national research on the relationship between happiness and personality is limited as yet, but the available data suggest that extroverted people tend to be happier across a variety of nations (Lucas et al., 2000) and that neurotics tend to be less happy in all cultures. Once more, there is a difference in the size of the effects. For instance, the effect of self-esteem appears to be stronger in individualistic cultures than in collectivist cultures (Oishi et al., 1999). Still the direction of the trend is the same everywhere.

This is not to say that all conditions for happiness are universal. One notable exception is "education." Although there is a correlation between average happiness and level of education in countries, the most highly educated individuals are not always happier. Correlation between happiness and education vary between –.08 and +.27.

In sum: there is much similarity in conditions for human happiness

7   HAVE WE BECOME ANY HAPPIER?

In the 18th century, enlightened progress optimists foresaw that social reform would result in greater happiness for a greater number. Has this promise come true? Systematic measurement of happiness started in the 1960s in some western nations, long after implementation of many of the policies based on enlightened thinking. Most people appeared to be happy when the surveys began, average happiness in nations ranging from 6 to 8 on scale 0-10 (Veenhoven 2015c). Analysis of the trend in average happiness over the next 50 years has shown that averages have increased in most countries, though not in all. See scheme 6. The average yearly increase, on scale 0-10 was 0,012 for all analyzed nations and at this rate it will take about 80 year for average happiness to raise one full point in a nation. This is comparable to the gradual rise in longevity in modern nations.

In sum: Happiness is rising in contemporary society

8   CONCLUSION

The social indicator movement, since its emergence in the 1970s, has provided answers to the question of whether greater happiness for a greater number is possible. We can now answer this question affirmatively. Thanks to Alex Michalos this research strand is now well established and the way is paved for further gains in our knowledge of our quality of life in the future.

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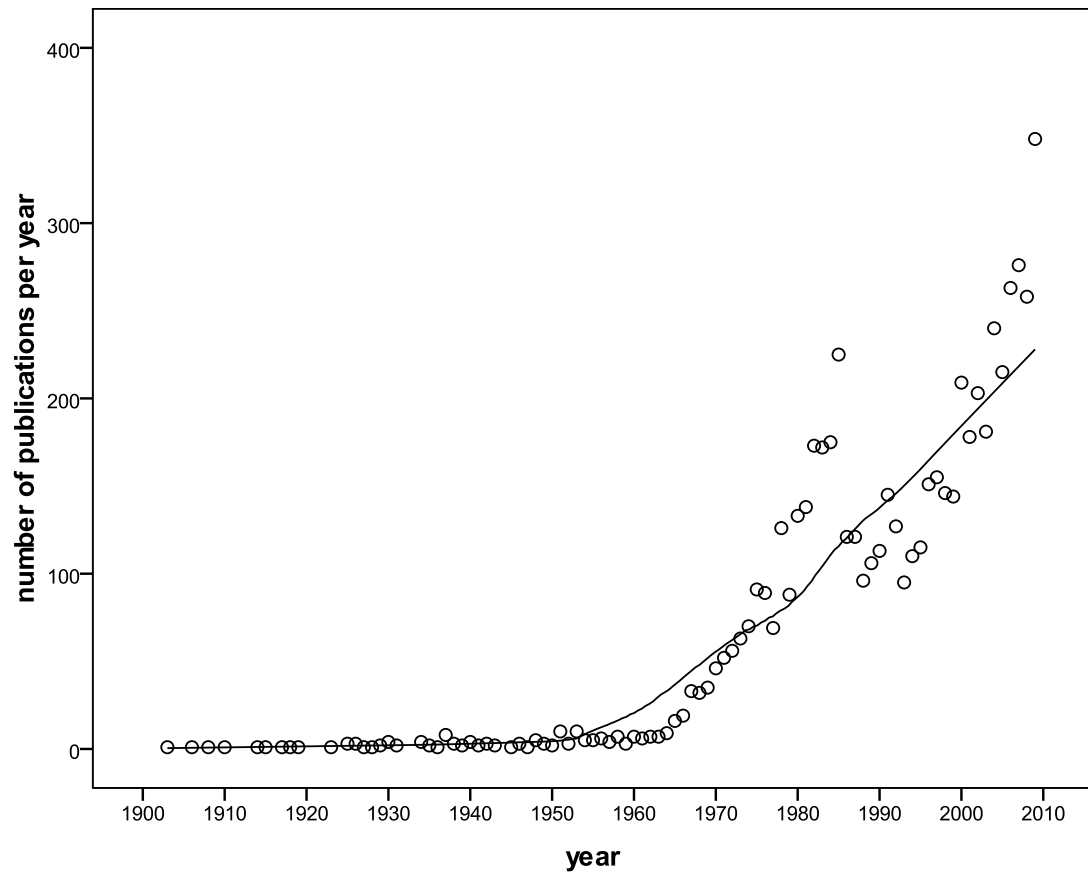International Journal of Happiness and Development, in press

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Scheme 1

Source: Veenhoven

Source: Bibliography of Happiness (Veenhoven 2015a)

Scheme 2
Four qualities of life

	Outer qualities	*Inner qualities*
Life chances	Livability of environment	Life-ability of the person
Life results	Usefulness of life	**Satisfaction with life**

Source: Veenhoven 2000

Scheme 3
Four kinds of satisfaction with life

	Passing	Enduring
Life domains	Pleasure	Domain-satisfaction
Life as a whole	Peak experience	**Life-satisfaction**

Scheme 4
Components of happiness

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global assessment   **Satisfaction with life-as-whole**

sub-totals: **Hedonic level of affect**   **Contentment**

                     Balance of pleasant and   Perceived realization
            unpleasant affect   of wants

information basis   Affective experience   Cognitive comparison

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Source: Veenhoven 1984: section 2/3

Scheme 5
Assessment of life-satisfaction: significance of two causal paths

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global assessment	**OVERALL HAPPINESS**

sub-assessment:	**Hedonic level of affect**	**Contentment**
	Balance of pleasant and unpleasant affect	Perceived realization of wants
Information basis	Affective experience	Cognitive comparison
underlying process	Need gratification	Standard setting
substrate	Human nature	Culture

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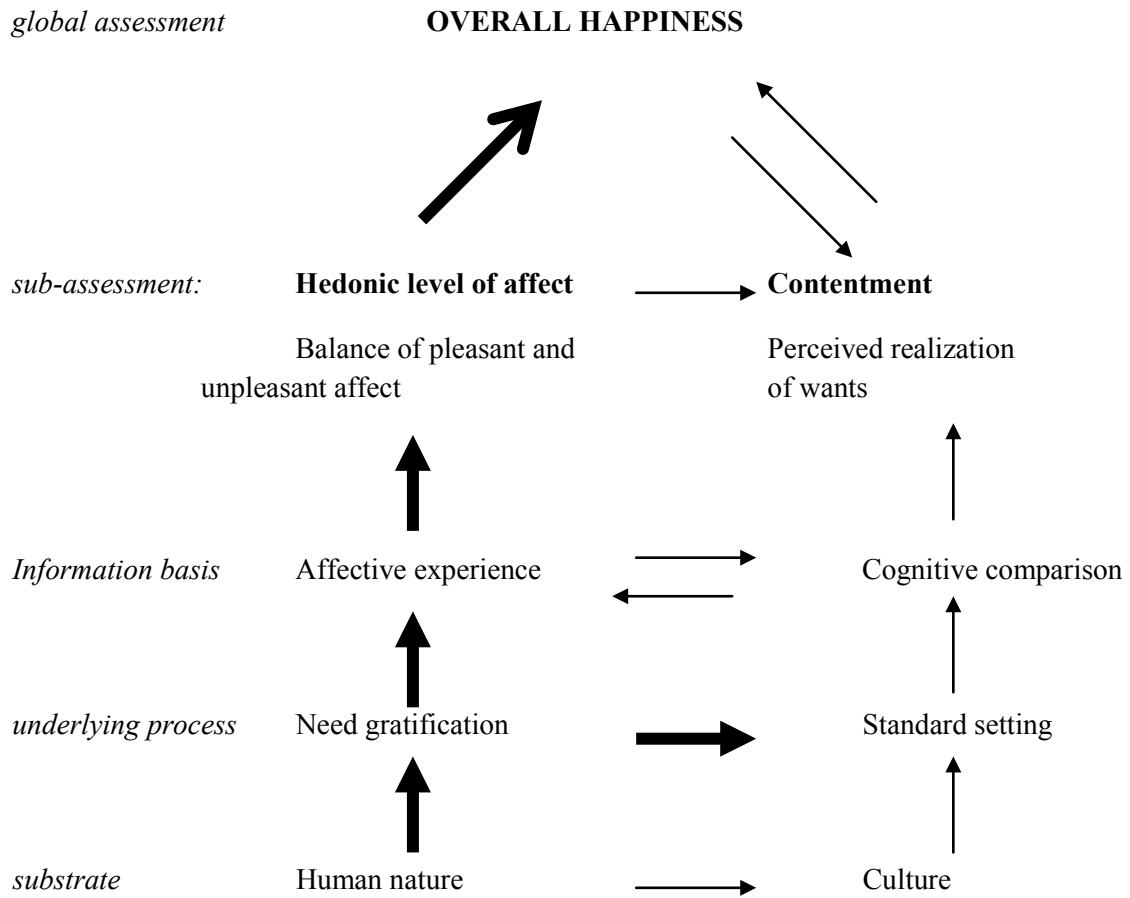
Source: Veenhoven 2009

Scheme 6

Change of average happiness in 67 nations
Average yearly change in points on scale 0-10, split-up by length of period

Period	Number of nations	Yearly change
10-20 years	31	+0.010
20-40 years	27	+0.009
40 years and more	9	+0.30
All	**67**	**+.012**

Source: Veenhoven 2014

[3.] I my view this last item is not appropriate. One can be quite satisfied with life, but still be open to the opportunity
to try something else.

[4] World Database of Happiness, Correlational Findings (Veenhoven 2015d) Earlier by later happiness (H5.2.1)
[5] World Database of Happiness, Correlational Findings (Veenhoven 2015d) Method of interrogation (I5.1.3)