

# EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING AND MENTAL HEALTH

A GUIDE FOR COUNSELLORS AND PSYCHOTHERAPISTS

DIGBY TANTAM

FOREWORD BY  
EMMY VAN DEURZEN



Los Angeles | London | New Delhi  
Singapore | Washington DC

# 1

## Mapping the Territory: The Philosopher's Viewpoint – Living Well

Happiness and health are confusing. We all want them, but how we achieve them and even how we know that we have achieved them is more mysterious the more we look at it. We can say, 'I didn't realize how happy I was' or 'I thought I was happy, but it was all false.' So we can be unaware of or even be deceived about happiness. Similarly, we can say of someone who dies suddenly, 'He always seemed so healthy, and now this.' So we can be deceived about health, too.

When it comes to saying in what happiness consists, opinions differ, and the account given by the generality of mankind is not at all like that given by the philosophers. The masses take it to be something plain and tangible, like pleasure or money or social standing. Some maintain that it is one of these, some that it is another, and the same man will change his opinion about it more than once. When he has caught an illness he will say that it is health, and when he is hard up he will say that it is money.

Aristotle caught this in his opening to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and much of this chapter will be influenced by Aristotle's perspectives, and what more modern philosophers have made of them. As Aristotle also indicates in this quote, he did not think that health was a philosophically complex issue, unlike happiness. He, and other ancient philosophers, considered that it was a good, like money. You either had it or you did not. You knew when you did not, because as Aristotle writes, you had then 'caught an illness.' Ill health, like being wounded in battle, disabled, or losing all of your money, were the consequences of luck or the malign influence of the gods. Aristotle did accept that all of these things, and more unfortunate accidents besides, had a major impact on health. But he did not consider them as being under a person's control. They could not be aims, in the sense that happiness could be. Juvenal's tenth satire summarizes Aristotle's and his successor's opinions when he writes that we should pray for a healthy mind in a healthy body, and we should ask the gods to give us a stout heart that makes us uncaring about how long we live. All that a person can aspire to do, he concludes, is to live a virtuous life.

What virtue consists of continues to preoccupy us, and Aristotle is as relevant now as he was to the ancient world when considering what we should aim for. We continue to use lots of related but overlapping words for what we consider to be the aim of our lives. These include ‘good luck’ or being free of bad things happening to us; being free of pain; having as much pleasure as possible; being positively rewarded as often and as intensely as possible; experiencing well-being; living well; being satisfied with life; being well-regarded in our lives and after our deaths; and living forever in paradise. Each of these terms will come up in later chapters. They form a kind of sequence, from the most immediate satisfaction to the most long-term – indeed to a satisfaction that we can never experience in life but look forward to in death.

Health is conspicuously missing from this list. This is because it has not really been important in either ethics or politics – the two branches of philosophy to which happiness studies belonged, according to Aristotle – until quite recently, when modern medical science developed. Nowadays we recognize that our actions can increase our future risk of poor health; that our actions in relationship with others can affect another person’s mental health; and that our actions as citizens can create policies that increase or decrease social inequities that directly affect mental and physical health. Because of the relative recency of these ideas, the ethics and politics of health have not been integrated into personal morality as deeply as the kind of question that the ancients were asking – questions like ‘What does it mean to be a good person?’ Most of us probably worry about whether we should eat as many cakes as we do, or whether contributing to a private health insurance scheme damages the health services available to people less well off, but we do not wake up asking ourselves these questions, with our hearts in our mouths. The 3.00 am kind of thought is much more likely to be: ‘Did I do right? Am I a much worse person than I would like to think? What will people think of me?’ These are the questions that I deal with in this chapter, but I will return to health philosophy in the next chapter, on public health and the health economist (Chapter 2), and in the chapter on the politician’s viewpoint (Chapter 5).

## Feeling good

There is no definite feeling that goes with being healthy, but there is a feeling of happiness. Not only that but the same things that Aristotle thought made people happy – getting something we want and so feeling pleasure, being rewarded and feeling pleasure at that, recovering from some illness or adversity, or feeling proud of our social status – still make people happy. So it is, perhaps, surprising that we can be as unclear about it as Aristotle was. It didn’t seem so difficult when we were children. A Christmas morning with a stack of good presents seemed enough to give a lot of pleasure, and make one feel happy. But perhaps even that is an over-simplification of the kind that adults often make about their own childhoods. One of the few surveys of children (Chaplin, 2009) involved asking 300 children what made them happy. The children’s responses were grouped by the interviewers into five categories: people and pets, sports, academic achievements, material possessions (not their own, mainly, but those of their parents), and hobbies. There was no instance of even the youngest child saying ‘Eating my favourite ice-cream all day would make me happy’. Whether this reflects the interviewers’ values, that this would not really be happiness, or

whether it reflected the children's own values, vicariously adopting their parents' values, is not clear. What is clear is that, even in childhood, happiness is not purely based on pleasure.

One way that parents direct their children's desire for pleasure is by detaching pleasure from the moment, and summing it over the future instead. 'If you keep eating all those sweet things', a mother might say, 'your teeth will get really bad and you'll have to go to the dentist lots; you'll get fat and the other kids will call you names; and you'll probably end up being ill'. She might go on to say, 'But if you keep ice-cream as a special treat, it will taste all the better when you do have it'. Prudence shapes our ideas of what we have to do to be happy – that is, to be in a continuing state of happiness – and reduces the value of momentary pleasure.

We can only exercise prudence if we know what the future holds, however, and of course we cannot know, but we can turn to wise people who sometimes claim to do so.

### The priestly view

Some of the earliest recorded recipes for happiness leave the whole matter to God or the gods. The gods, it is assumed, know what is good for people, and sooner or later they will provide it, in the shape of the Elysian fields, or paradise or heaven (many of us still adopt this providential approach to our health). Priests can interpret what the gods want, and can also provide the appropriate ceremonials, prescribed activities and rules of conduct that will make the god(s) happy and he or she will, in turn, make the worshipper happy – in the long run, at least. It is easy to see that gods are not just there to make people happy: if they were, there would be a lot less suffering in the world. They are also there to make people good (or so the priests tell us). So the gods also devise unpleasant experiences as tests of the faithful. Extended accounts of tests like this can be found in many religions' holy books and in folk-tales: examples include the book of Job, the Ramayana, the Journey to the West and the labours of Hercules. Happiness, according to the priests, thus consists in doing what will please the gods.

This strategy depends on having gods that are just, and who repay their worshippers for their worship. But there are plenty of theologies, perhaps especially in Asia and Africa, that have gods that are unjust, mischievous or even malignant. Some cosmogonies, like Manicheism, believe that the world in which we live has been created by a malignant demon and not a god at all. Good people may therefore be punished and evil people rewarded. Many of the Mesopotamian city states seem to have such a cosmogony. It is described in one of the world's earliest known stories, now known as the epic of Gilgamesh which dates from 2150–2000 BCE, and describes the life of a possibly existent king of Uruk (now Iraq), Bilgamesh. Bilgamesh, or Gilgamesh as he is known in the later and fuller Akkadian version, was a hedonist. He took the virginity of every bride in his kingdom by *droit de seigneur*. Gilgamesh lived at a time when there was constant war between the city states of Mesopotamia, leading to cities being sacked, and when even militarily successful cities could be destroyed by flooding. The Epic of Gilgamesh makes reference to a great flood in the eastern Mediterranean that is thought by some to be the same flood mentioned in the Greek myth about Deucalion and the Hebrew myth about Noah. In Mesopotamia, the flood was put down to strife between the gods: Marduk

destroyed earlier gods (perhaps the gods of other city states) and made people out of the fragments, but Enlil was angry and tried to get back at Marduk by raising the flood to destroy mankind, Marduk's creation.

Gilgamesh's hedonism is perhaps unsurprising in such a chaotic world, and his abuse of power is what we would expect – although perhaps wrongly – of a primitive ruler. However, the gods did not approve and sent an agent, Enkidu, to oppose Gilgamesh. Enkidu needed a bit of humanizing, duly provided by a temple prostitute, but is then ready to oppose Gilgamesh. They became fast friends, and Gilgamesh abandoned the brides to go on a quest with Enkidu. They succeeded in it, but the goddess Ishtar was so impressed that she wanted to make Gilgamesh her consort. He knew that Ishtar, the goddess of fertility, killed her consort every year, just when the wheat is harvested. So he refused and she, miffed, sent a bull to ravage Uruk (Iraq). Gilgamesh and Enkidu killed it, but Ishtar then killed Enkidu – and Gilgamesh's quest became a quest for immortality. He asked the way of another goddess, Siduri, the goddess of alcohol. She told him just to have a good time, and not bother about life and death, which are issues for the gods.

The epic of Gilgamesh illustrates the evolution of human ideas about gods, but also illustrates a shift in values linked to this. Perhaps the invention of writing played a role, as rulers' actions have, from that time, been recalled and commented on by subsequent generations. Rulers started to think about accountability, and could no longer simply use their power to pursue their own personal pleasure. They started to value using their power to protect the weak (killing the divine bull that ravaged Uruk) and pursue transcendent values (overcoming death). Intoxication plays an important role in the story, too, as a means for the gods to keep the rulers content to be pleasure seekers, and thereby stop them trespassing on to divine territory.

Another point illustrated by the Gilgamesh story is that society needs to regulate the powerful if they are not to become too damaging. Hobbes thought that this was achieved by a social contract, but the Gilgamesh story suggests that it is the temple that does it, by formulating the rules that will allow immortality, in paradise.

## The philosopher's perspective

The ancient Greek philosophers, on whose work Western philosophy is still largely based, seem to have had little faith in an after-life, but did think that it was possible to nearly reach complete happiness in this life. Their attitude to suffering was curiously fatalistic. The gods, they thought, were no more moral than other beings and could easily make people suffer in the interests of their own jealousies and rivalries, as indeed the Gilgamesh story conveys. The only kind of human behaviour that the gods would not tolerate was hubris: the attempt of a human being to become god-like, and therefore a rival to themselves. Even this notion, though, was relaxed and heroic humans could be turned into stars and other immortal, if ineffectual, entities.

Greek philosophy was the product of a lucky few full citizens of Greek cities. They were protected from the sudden reversals of fate that influenced Mesopotamian cultures

that were developed on flood plains. They could, and did, discount everyday pain and suffering from disease or overwork, or the hopelessness of leading a life controlled by other people. Their focus was on how people could rule themselves.

Aristotle is the Greek philosopher who is most influential in modern day happiness studies. Aristotle (384–322 BCE) was born and brought up as an Athenian citizen in the Chalcis peninsula. His father was physician to the King of Macedon, Amyntas. Aristotle moved to Athens to study in Plato's Academy, getting there some 15 years after Socrates had been executed. He stayed there until Plato died some 20 years later, and was then headhunted to be tutor to Amyntas's grandson, Prince Alexander of Macedon (later to be known as Alexander the Great). When Alexander was 16, Aristotle returned to Athens and formed his own philosophical school, the Lyceum.

Like that of Master Kong (Confucius), a retired chief police officer in a small Chinese kingdom, Aristotle's philosophy was directed at warriors, the up-and-coming aristocracy, rather than at priests. The Rig Veda, dating to the early iron age, and possibly originating in the Indus valley civilization, seems to have been similarly targeted at this new group of powerful members of civilized societies. It refers to the importance of honour to well-being. This is more thoroughly worked out in a tale of dynastic succession, the Mahabharata, written in the 5th century BCE and therefore roughly contemporaneous with Socrates. It chronicles the struggle between brothers to be able to perform the horse sacrifice reserved for kings. The Mahabharata includes one of the most famous Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, which sets out the correct means for a person to achieve well-being. It is especially relevant to the various ways that *rita*, or rightness, and the rules or *dharma* that typify *rita*, apply to kings and warriors. In fact, the Sanskrit word *rita* is the origin of the English word 'right', the Greek word 'arete' and probably the name of the god of battles, Ares. *Arete* in Greek originally meant excellence, presumably with something of the sense of 'rightness about it' (in Yorkshire, 'right' is still used in this sense, for example something that is excellent is 'right good').

Socrates was a friend of the famous Athenian mercenary captain Xenophon, with whom Socrates had served in a famous campaign in the Middle East. Socrates was a pugnacious character, as well as being an ex-soldier. One of the grounds for Socrates' execution was that he did not believe in the gods. He argued that living well would not just result in a person being given a place in heaven – he may not have even believed in heaven – but lasting happiness, which Socrates termed *eudaimonia* (we would probably now call this life satisfaction although it means, literally, good spirits). The key to this was to make the right choices. This is illustrated in the parable of the choice of Herakles, formulated by another friend, the sophist Prodikos. In this parable, Herakles was out walking and came to a crossroads. Two women stood there. Prodikos' description is lost, but this is how Xenophon, who had heard Prodikos' lecture, described one of the women: she was sluttish in her dress and manner but introduced herself as pleasure or happiness, although some knew her as *Kakia* (badness or vice). She says:

Herakles, I see that you are in doubt which path to take towards life. Make me your friend; follow me, and I will lead you along the pleasantest and easiest road. You shall taste all the sweets of life; and hardship you shall never know. First, of wars and worries you shall

not think, but shall ever be considering what choice food or drink you can find, what sight or sound will delight you, what touch or perfume; what tender love can give you most joy, what bed the softest slumbers; and how to come by all these pleasures with least trouble. And should there arise misgiving that lack of means may stint your enjoyments, never fear that I may lead you into winning them by toil and anguish of body and soul. Nay; you shall have the fruits of others' toil, and refrain from nothing that can bring you gain. For to my companions I give authority to pluck advantage where they will. (Marchant, 1923; this translation is taken from the Marchant edition and translation of Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, book 2, chapter 1, section 12)

Xenophon goes on to describe the argument between two influential Greek philosophers of happiness over the interpretation of this parable. Socrates argued for arete and against vice, as can be inferred from the slanted way that Xenophon and his Victorian translator Marchant (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.1.21) set the parable out. Another, African, philosopher, Aristippus, argued for pleasure, as I will discuss below.

Herakles' choice is cleverly constructed. It is realistic in that young, physical men like Herakles are likely to be easily turned from the path of duty by a pretty ankle (although, for obvious reasons, Xenophon took care not to portray Karkas as pretty), and that is a bugbear for military commanders (Aristotle wrote in his *Ethics* that young men were not 'fit students of moral philosophy', perhaps for this reason). But it presents moral choices in a skewed fashion. Had Herakles been starving, and had he to choose between an ignoble animal like a pig that he could run down and kill, or a noble animal like a stag whose hunt would give him glory, but likely no dinner, we would think badly of him if he chose the stag. Aristotle defined 'good' in the *Nicomachean Ethics* as that which all things aim at, and all things aim at survival. Had Herakles deliberated about his decision, both pig and stag would have run away. Had he told himself that he should consult his reason, and not his stomach, ditto. Had he said, 'I will not be like an animal', but will set aside my immediate desire in favour of a higher goal, he would have died of starvation. So most of us would think that a starving Herakles was right to give in to bodily sensation, and impulsively and unreasonably so, focusing on immediate satisfaction rather than long-term glory. It was good that he did so.

A criticism of the notion of good desire just put forward might be that only some desires are necessities. Hunger prompts animals to feed and, without food, they would die. Sexual desire prompts copulation, and without copulation the species would die out. But very few instances of copulation are required to maintain the species. Sexual desire may also provoke people, and other primates, to non-reproductive sexual activity (here I leave out the much more complex relationship of intercourse to procreation, the biological importance of sexual competition for genetic health and the survival function of sexuality's role in reconciliation). Most of the time, sexual desire is not driven by a biological need and no longer meets the definition of a 'good' in being something that all things aim at. But many people might consider that regular sex between loving partners, even without the possibility of reproduction, is a 'good', not least in that it gives one partner the opportunity to provide the gift of pleasure to another. However, I am anticipating the kind of objection that Aristippus made to

Socrates' pious attitude to sex, and I should wait until I introduce Aristippus more formally below.

Aristotle made 'arete' a key element in his formulation of eudaimonia, which is often nowadays translated as 'happiness' but literally means 'good spirits', in the sense that people might say that someone is fine-spirited. Socrates has Arete, the personification of arete, in telling Herakles that pleasure is short-lived and appetites get jaded. Aristotle makes a more principled argument. He argues that 'Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim' (first sentence, book 1 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*). This must have seemed all the more obvious to Aristotle as his name translates as 'good aim'. Aristotle goes on to discuss what is good. Lower-class people, he says, think that pleasure is good. More refined people think that honour is good. But one can be honoured when one is asleep, he noted, and anyway being honoured for one's arete is generally more desirable to people than being honoured for anything else; so, Aristotle concluded, the possession of arete is more important than honour. Aristotle thinks that arete is the satisfaction of a job well done. A particular job is part of a larger project. So, developing arete for all of the jobs in this wider project, and indeed in the project itself, must be more valued than doing a single job well. Each project can itself be subsumed into an even bigger project – living a life. So the arete, or skill with which one lives all aspects of one's life, is the greatest source of satisfaction. One of the important contributions to this skill is the acquisition of phronesis or practical wisdom.

It might seem obvious when one exercises a skill 'rightly'. One can look at one woman's dressmaking and see that she has done it excellently, or one man's digging in the garden and see that he has been sloppy. But it's much less clear what the criteria should be for more abstract tasks. Aristotle falls back on prior values, particularly nobility. Nobility is a set of values that we look for in warriors or rulers, but not so much in monks or dentists. So Aristotle's claim to be setting out universal values looks over-ambitious. Even so, many of his successors have sought to specify lists of values that will lead to life satisfaction, and they constitute one of the three main philosophical approaches to happiness and well-being. They are sometimes called objective list theorists, as opposed to hedonists, and desire satisfaction theorists.

Aristotle considers three objections to his idea that virtue is sufficient to lead to life satisfaction. The first is that misfortune makes people unhappy and feel less satisfied with their lives, which seems to undermine his notion that what a person does with their circumstances is the key to happiness. He brushes this off with the idea that 'when the going gets tough, the tough get going' or, rather, when nobility is hard pressed, then true nobility is expressed. Later, he admitted that some suffering is so extreme that it ruins life satisfaction: no one can be expected to be happy on the rack (the Stoics thought that they could). This is, therefore, a limit to his theory of happiness although others who follow Aristotle have not always conceded this.

A second objection is related. Only some people are in a situation, or have the character, or have been given the right parenting, to be 'noble'. Without this basic stuff of nobility, no amount of work on oneself (no amount of accumulated practical wisdom) will result in eudaimonia. Aristotle considers this and by implication restricts his theory to



those people who are born to the right parents, and with the right advantages, and who, as a result, have acquired the right 'moral' virtues (David Hume called these 'passions') to direct their intellectual virtues of practical reason.

A final objection is that some people, despite seeing the path to virtue, fail to take it. They are incontinent or show 'akrasia'.

There may have been another reason that Aristotle opposed reason or virtue and pleasure. As we have seen, arete derives from the ethics taught to warriors who were almost entirely men, and the word may have even derived from the name of the male god of battles, Ares. Arete also means strength in Greek and virtue is derived from 'vis' meaning strength in Latin, itself derived from 'vir' meaning man. Socrates and Aristotle both taught men and fraternized with soldiers. Women were excluded from the Academy and the Lyceum. Few Greek women were recognized as wise in Athens or later, in its philosophical successor, Rome. They were either graces, or furies, like Medea, Clytemnestra or Socrates' wife, Xanthippe. Aristotle's version of happiness was 'manly' in the sense that 'manliness' became a virtue of the English public school. It was the result of struggle, of freeing oneself from urges and desires, and of companionship with other free individuals, who had won the right to have their needs met by others.

The values behind Aristotle's philosophy included the belief that men were superior to women and children, citizens to private individuals, or idiots, both to slaves, and Greeks to barbarians, i.e. Persians. Men were superior because they were the only group to be politically, i.e. publicly active, and this was rationalized by the notion that men were dominated by reason, and women by emotion. Emotions were linked to the body: this must have seemed obvious as bodily states such as being wounded, being pregnant, having a period, being ill are all associated with strong emotions. So Aristotle's culture not only opposed men and women, but also body and mind or soul, emotions and reason, and sometimes conflated each of these polarities into one: weak and strong.

Religious writers have agreed. The Iranian, Mani, thought that the body was evil and the mind was good (BeDuhn, 2000), pushing the argument further in favour of dualism. St Augustine, himself a Manichean before his conversion to Christianity, considered that the body was a source of temptation that had to be disciplined, and 'pleasures of the flesh' continue to be distrusted by many Christians who, like the followers of Opus Dei, may use self-wounding or 'mortification' as a means of obtaining goodness.

## The perspective of the dispossessed

Persian culture was voluptuous and its men effeminate, so far as the Greeks were concerned. There was no recognition that the Persians could be virtuous except when they imitated the Greeks. Greek cities were separated by mountains or deep inlets and were often at war. The Persians built an enormous empire held together by good roads, and an excellent messenger service. Autonomy was a virtue to the Greeks, connectedness to the Persians. Women could rise to power in the Persian empire or in its remains: Cleopatra in Egypt and the legendary Sheba in Sudan are examples. The most famous

Greek woman to be recognized for her wisdom, Cassandra, lived in what is now Asia, in the far west of Turkey, and so was almost within the Persian empire. She was wise, and, like other Eastern women, she could foretell the future. But like a Greek woman, her prophecies fell on deaf ears (there were exceptions to this, of course, including the Pythia at Delphi, although here utterances were interpreted by male priests, and the queen of the Ionian state of Halicarnassus who commanded a fleet in the naval battle at Salamis that stopped Xerxes invasion of Greece) (an exception to this generalization is Artemisia). Iranian culture and the cultures that assimilated its values, the Sassanids, the Arabs and the Moors, the Turks and the Moghuls, placed a much higher value on pleasure, which resulted in a very different conception of happiness. This stressed connectedness or mergence over autonomy.

Wine was first developed in Turkey and spread from there into Europe, including into Greece. The use of wine became the basis of the cult of Dionysus or Bacchus, one of whose high points was a yearly orgy of drinking and, reputedly, sexual indulgence. Contemporary accounts of this are filtered through the dramatic requirements of the Greek theatre, but they suggest that Bacchic rites particularly involved women, often had a strong androphobic element and broke down social barriers amongst women. Women considered that they had been taken over by the divine, anarchic spirit of Dionysus: 'enthusiasm'. The Greeks seem to have considered the Bacchae in their revels something like French intellectuals thought of the Parisian rioters of the 1870s or we think of crowds of football hooligans now. Bacchic rites have not completely disappeared: modern versions include 'raves' and even drunk nights out in South Yorkshire (Bennett, J. personal communication). Enthusiasms have also been noted in the animal world, too, with monkeys and other mammals converging on trees whose fallen fruit has fermented, and showing apparent signs of inebriation once they have eaten it.

Enthusiasm is as much a kind of happiness as the practice of the skilled craftsman or the philosophical practice of contemplation (Aristotle's highest form of satisfaction). But it is associated with mergence rather than skill. Hinduism has strongly recognized mergence as a source of well-being. For example, the Bhagavata Purana claims that supreme happiness and true joyfulness follow from mergence with Brahman.

Drink stops people thinking clearly: it overpowers the reason that Aristotle thought was so essential to a person achieving arete. To return to Aristotle's illustrations from craftwork, the arete of a leather worker required a nice bit of leather to work on, and then the knowledge that comes from long practice to work it to the final product. The latter kind of practical knowledge, or phronesis, is what alcohol subverts. Drunk leather workers do not produce good bridles. Alcohol increases incontinence or akrasia: a lack of willingness to apply and follow through on practical reasoning. It also increases the risk of blunders in that reasoning.

Alcohol is not the only factor that adversely affects reasoning. Aristotle supposed, like many philosophers, that women, children and the lower classes are incontinent and therefore defective in reason. This is one reason that the ancients thought that women could not be allowed to vote, and why we still do not give the vote to children. The Bacchic rites would simply have reinforced this view.

However, Aristotle's idea that women are more incontinent than men does not fit with the facts. Men are generally more impulsive and unbridled. Men commit more crimes than women, are heavier users of alcohol and drugs and have a lower life expectancy (Y. Zheng & Cleveland, 2013). There are famous examples in literature of men being put to death for interrupting Bacchanals, but of course it is not possible to obtain accurate information about how dangerous they were, or whether they led to better or worse behaviour long term, or to greater or lesser happiness. Livy brought a case to the Roman Senate of violence and rape (Riedl, 2012) of a young man during a Roman Bacchanalia, but there is reason to suppose that this was politically motivated. Livy describes this particular Bacchanal in detail, confirming that it was organized by women, that women outnumbered men and that it particularly attracted people who were not Roman citizens. The modern equivalent of the Bacchanal, the rave, in which ecstasy usually replaces alcohol, is not associated with violence.

Bringing together a lot of men, for example in a football crowd, is associated with a heightened risk of violence. So this suggests that, contrary to Aristotle and subsequent male philosophers, women are less and not more likely to act out their passions, their emotions, than men, and that the Bacchanal is not primarily an excuse for lust, but provides the experience of mergence, referred to in the Bhagavata Purana (Anon, 2009). The followers of Dionysus or Brahman attribute the effect to the diminution of self-consciousness – just acting spontaneously or not thinking about oneself, as it is sometimes described.

Aristotle conceded that temperament extends 'autos' or self to include other people, for 'man is by nature adapted to a social existence', but when he starts to enumerate who should be included within the self – he mentions parents, children, wife, friends, and countrymen – he then realizes that there is a problem and notes that 'some limit must be fixed: for if one extends it to parents and descendants and friend's friends, there is no end to it'. But he does not see a solution: 'This point must be left however for further investigation', he writes.

Aristotle is here raising the issue of what Auguste Comte was later to term 'altruism' (*vivre pour autrui*): why we should take account of other people's happiness in our own. Aristotle tries to deal with it as an aspect of practical reason, but, as is obvious from the previous paragraph, he fails. Nor does practical reasoning explain the kind of enthusiastic joining with other people that characterized the Bacchanal or currently characterizes the rave. The love of a mother for her child is often cited as the most intense example of altruism, and some psychologists have suggested that women have a particular skill in, and disposition towards, this kind of fellow feeling. An alternative explanation is that we are emotionally linked to other people in an unreasoning, reflexive way. Hume called this sympathy, Schleiermacher shared subjectivity, Husserl intersubjectivity and Lipps and Stein 'Einfühlung', translated by Titchener as 'empathy'. I call it the 'interbrain' (Tantam, 2009). Empathy means that other people's emotions automatically impinge on our own, unless we make a conscious effort to cut them off. If we have empathy for someone, we cannot be fully happy if they are sad, or really sad if they are happy.

## The perspective of the man or woman in the street

Xenophon was an officer, and his account of Socrates gives an officer's viewpoint. We would probably have considered him a bit of a toff nowadays, and Socrates a bit common. The latter's father was a stonemason, and he may have also worked as a mason before becoming a soldier. Plato's account of Socrates' views of happiness was a lot closer to Aristotle's views of what the vulgar thought: that one should take pleasure where one finds it. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates (Plato, 1959) indicates that pleasure is not necessarily bad, even if it is self-indulgent (he specifically mentions food, drink and sex) and only becomes bad, i.e. worth avoiding, if in the long run it leads to greater pain. However, he does also say that one has to be satisfied with just living out one's life as pleasantly as possible and with the minimum of pain. Not everyone will be satisfied.

Many people turn to pleasure without thinking that, in the long run, it may lead to pain: health awareness programmes often focus on this, enjoining us to 'Think...' about the consequences of whatever issue is current, such as sex without condoms. Clearly for Socrates, as for many of us, prudence seems an important requirement of happiness. Deferring pleasure in accordance with prudence requires self-control and psychological research has linked this to self-reported happiness (Hofmann et al., 2013).

If the future is likely to be short and uncertain, as Gilgamesh thought it might be, given the flooding that had wiped out Mesopotamian civilization, then it is prudent not to delay gratification but to take one's pleasure whilst you can. Suppose one had AIDS, and it had become resistant to all of the antivirals, one could see that it would make sense to spend one's last few months trying to have as much sex as possible, perhaps with as many people as possible, if one believed that pleasure can produce happiness. Most other people would, however, regard that as an act of desperation, rather than of a well-lived life. Nor would it be living well in the sense of taking other people into account, as promiscuous sex when one has HIV is likely to spread the virus to other people.

Socrates considers this kind of situation in the *Philebus* (21 a-d) when he asks Philebus if he would accept a life spent entirely in the enjoyment of the greatest pleasures (Plato, 1975). Philebus says that he would, but then asks Philebus to imagine living this life without thought, memory, knowledge and true belief. Without memory, Socrates pointed out, Philebus would not have the pleasure of recalling past pleasure, and without thought would not have the pleasure of anticipating future pleasure. Philebus agrees that he would not prefer a life of pure pleasure, without reason, thus opening the door for Aristotle's idea that reason itself can lead to happiness, not through pleasure but through satisfaction.

This is not entirely a knock-down argument. Philebus could have retorted that he wanted reason and memory precisely because they increased the opportunity for pleasure; that, at the end of the day, maximizing pleasure is what drives all animals, including people. This is the position of the hedonist, exemplified by Socrates' opponent in the discussion of the choice of Herakles, the Cyrenian and Aristippus the elder, and by the younger Epicurus.

Hedonists may seem uninterested in the difference between pleasure and happiness, but, as Philebus' discussion with Socrates indicates, they are not the same. Not all pleasures are associated with happiness. Aristotle cites the pleasure of recovering after an illness. One could say of this, 'I am happy to have survived' but if one were asked before getting ill, 'Would it make you happy to be ill in the near future?' the answer would obviously be 'no'. So hedonism is more than fatalism. Hedonists want to increase their pleasure as much as possible, and so choose a greater pleasure over a lesser, in this case the greater pleasure of having full health over the lesser pleasure of getting better from illness. Bringing choice into the situation makes it explicit that hedonists also make pleasure an aim and interpret the aim of having a happy life to mean having a maximally pleasurable life rather than a good life.

Most of us think of pleasure like Philebus. It involves food, drink or sex (one might add money to this, and perhaps, too, the exercise of power and control over other creatures).

Hedonists are therefore up against an existential problem: this kind of pleasure is nice but, like the proverbial Chinese meal, it's often not very satisfying. An hour after you've eaten, you feel hungry again. Having a lot of money often makes people want to have even more. In fact, biology is such (I will consider the evidence in a later chapter) that the more one indulges in this kind of pleasure – often called 'reward' in the biological sphere – the greater the tolerance one develops for it, the less pleasure given by the same level of reward, and the harder it is to regain the same heights of pleasure as previously.

### The perspective of the egotist

Aristippus was a contemporary of Socrates. His daughter, Arete (an ironic choice of name on the part of her father, no doubt), and her son, Aristippus the younger, are collectively known as the Cyreniads as they all lived in Cyrene, in modern-day Libya. They argued against quietism and for a kind of robust hedonism. Like the song-bird who sings on a glorious summer day, they thought that we should make the most of happy moments and allow our happy feelings to swell. However, they did accept the Epicurean argument that most people are not satisfied with feeling happy; most also want it to last as long as possible and, if it doesn't, most people feel disappointment, anger or regret. The Cyreniads argued that this was a kind of faulty thinking. It's best to take happiness wherever and however you find it, without expecting it or believing that one has a right to it or that it will last forever. And when it does go, don't repine, but take steps to lead life so that one has the best chance to be happy again.

Aristippus had considerable self-confidence, which was probably not misplaced. There is a story about him being washed up in Rhodes, having lost all his belongings when the ship he was voyaging on foundered. He blithely walked into the city, into the gymnasium, got chatting to other people there, who liked his company and gave him a helping hand, and within a short while he was once again profiting from his advisory services (he was a paid professional philosopher or sophist) and on his way back to prosperity. He had the post-modern idea that all a person needed to get on was what they had

between their ears. Little accurate is known about his life, or even about his philosophy, since the main sources wrote centuries after he lived. But he is also credited by these sources with actions that are less attractive, such as exposing his infant son because he was not wanted, or toadying to his regal sponsor, by cross-dressing and dancing.

The Cyreniacs shared with Pyrrho and other sceptics the idea that we never grasp the world as it is, but only as it is influenced by our perspective and our emotional dispositions. Pyrrho likely adopted this from Vedic or Buddhist philosophers that he encountered in India, whilst serving with Alexander's army. The Hindus and the Buddhists would have added that our emotional attachments can be put aside, to reveal the world as it is. The Cyreniacs rejected this: they believed that our sensuality is the only thing that we can really take to be real. Since past and future pleasures are only ghosts of our present feelings, then it is present pleasure or pain that is most real, and so only this present pleasure and not some future, vague and possibly misleading expectations of future pleasure that should concern us. The Cyrenians would therefore have agreed with one modern well-being guru, who advocates living in the now.

Cyrenian hedonism is often opposed on irrational grounds, for example that living to excess is always going to be bad for your health, or that indulgence is intrinsically wrong. But even so, our instincts do seem to be against it.

The Cyreniacs' belief that present pleasure is much stronger than past or future pleasure could be interpreted to justify the 'James Dean' effect or Maslow's (1968) peak experience.

## The perspective of the undemanding

The other major branch of hedonism was first developed by Epicurus. He had a very systematic philosophy, although much of it has been lost. He thought of pleasure as being of two kinds: 'static' and 'kinetic'. Static pleasure was exemplified by eudaimonia, but Epicurus thought that life satisfaction was the result of achieving tranquillity and not perfecting arete. Tranquillity – ataraxia – can be achieved by overcoming anxiety, particularly what Epicurus thought was the main anxiety for most people – the fear of death. Kinetic pleasures arise, according to Epicurus, from satisfying desires, and are therefore always preceded by a want or need, a source of anxiety. Hence, kinetic pleasure is a perturbation that should be avoided if we aim for tranquillity. Epicurus therefore advocated a modest lifestyle, without any pleasure-seeking but with the aim of reducing anxiety of all kinds.

Epicureanism is a form of what is now called 'desire satisfaction theory': that life satisfaction comes about from getting what we want (and when we want it). There is a thread of hedonism in this, too, since it suggests that we will be more satisfied if we want more, and have those greater wants satisfied. But common sense tells us that this is exactly the situation Epicurus warned about when he argued that kinetic pleasure is always associated with a period of wanting, and therefore displeasure, and may even, summing over the period of wanting and then being satisfied, be a negative or unpleasant experience.

## The Tathagata's Epicureanism

For Buddhists, as for Sakyamuni Buddha, the only kind of lasting happiness is the absence of suffering, and this can be achieved by the abolition of desire. This, Buddhists argue, need only pierce the veil of illusion that envelopes reality in our eyes, since it is the veil, and not the reality, that arouses our desire. The Buddha was perhaps thinking particularly of male sexual desire. The veil is, after all, one of the classic male turn-ons. A man may desire a skimpily dressed woman more than the same woman unclothed because he desires to undress her, not because he desires the woman for herself. In fact, some men find completely naked women disturbing rather than arousing. Inadequate clothing, no good for protection from the weather or from dust, but only designed for allurements, create the illusion that the woman has no needs of her own; that she exists only to please the man. The man relates not to the woman alone, but his emotional reaction is a generalized one to 'women in skimpy clothes'. So the desire is for, or so Buddhists think, the image of 'women in skimpy clothes' and not the woman herself. When our car breaks down in a storm on a lonely moor, we are frightened partly of our feelings about 'lonely moors', 'darkness' and 'storm'. We might even think that there is a malign presence that is working against us. We have to work to pierce this threatening haze over the situation, and start to think about this particular moor, this particular car and our particular resources. When we win a game of cards, we feel that luck is on our side. We may have to consciously remind ourselves that this instance of success has no bearing on the probability of future instances of success. We hope to propitiate the fate that is against us, or we imagine that luck has been drawn to us by some special personal attraction. So our peace of mind is disturbed by our efforts to propitiate, hold on to or otherwise secure a special relationship that we have invented.

The Buddha's argument is very similar to that of his approximate contemporary in Greece. Epicurus, like Buddha, created a kind of monastic following, although it petered out in the sceptical soil of Greece rather than flourishing as Buddhism did in the fertile soil of the land of the Vedas. Epicurus, whose name is ironically associated with the pleasures of the table, and whose philosophy of hedonism is, in another irony, applied nowadays to the pursuit of pleasure, was actually an advocate of self-denial. Like the Buddha, he argued that seeking pleasure meant wanting pleasure, and it was just a fact of life that wants are more often frustrated than satisfied. A happy life is one where the positive emotions outweigh the negative or, to put it another way, the hedonic balance is in the green and not the red. An obvious way to achieve that is to keep the number of things one wants to a minimum. As one tends to want to repeat a pleasurable experience, it is best to avoid pleasurable experiences. Epicurus did think that there were some pleasurable experiences that did not lead to disappointment, and these he called 'kastematic' although that has sometimes been translated as 'static'. They are the quiet pleasures that this section began with. The kinetic pleasures are the ones we get used to, want more of, for which we feel a growing need until we satiate them, and then we wonder why the pleasure seems so little after all – these pleasures are the ones that cause pain and in the long run push the hedonic balance into the red.

## The public health perspective

It will have become obvious so far that happiness means different things to different people. One person may aim to be famous, another to be loved, another to be untroubled. One person may want pleasure now, another pleasure in a more lasting form in the future. An ascetic may want to feel hunger, knowing that they are gaining the satisfaction of self-denial.

Jeremy Bentham, as a Victorian philanthropist, wanted to benefit whole groups of people, and not just individuals (1876). It was, as Walter Benjamin noted, the age of the crowd. When Bentham considered how to do this, it must have seemed obvious that if you add all these different versions of happiness together, the differences average out. Whilst one could not be certain what an individual meant by happiness, if you asked 1000 or 10,000 people, a consensus would develop. It's the ballot box approach that we have adopted in democratic politics.

Jeremy Bentham was a social reformer first and a philosopher second. He assumed that the world should be a better place, and that this could be achieved if there was more happiness and less pain. Bentham's basic premise to his philosophy can be found in *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Bentham, 1876): 'Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do as well as to determine what we shall do' (1876: 225). Bentham never married, despite falling in love with all four daughters of his patron, Lord Lansdowne, but it would be wrong to conclude that in his private life he was a Benthamite. He wrote the following in one of his letters:

Create all the happiness you are able to create: remove all the misery you are able to remove. Every day will allow you to add something to the pleasure of others, or to diminish something of their pains. And for every grain of enjoyment you sow in the bosom of another, you shall find harvest in your own bosom; while every sorry which you pluck out from the thoughts and feelings of a fellow creature shall be replaced by beautiful peace and joy in the sanctuary of your soul. (Bentham in a birthday letter to a friend's young daughter, quoted in Layard, 2011: 235–236)

Like his fellow utilitarian, J. S. Mill, his heart was in the right place, even if he did not march in step with his peers. He thought that as dogs and horses were more intelligent than human babies they deserved at least as much consideration as babies. In the same rationalist spirit, he supported equal rights for women, the separation of church and state, the abolition of physical punishment for children, money lending, greater access to divorce, the decriminalization of homosexuality, the French revolution (but not the Terror), free trade and university entrance for Protestants who would not swear their commitment to the articles of the Church of England ('Dissenters'). He said that he took the principles of the 'greatest good for the greatest number' from the Unitarian – and therefore, Dissenting – chemist, Joseph Priestley, whose own support for the French revolution had led to his house and his chapel being attacked with fire bombs.



Although Bentham, in the passage quoted above, described two masters, one of pleasure and one of pain, he did not pursue their independence but treated them as partners who were so conjoined that pain could be considered a negative amount of pleasure. This is much the same step that the Cyreniacs took, and it suffers from the same inconsistency that their philosophy did, not least that people do not simply base their happiness on pleasure received. Happiness has an aspirational element. As Aristotle said, it is a goal. Pleasure does not motivate us in the same way. This is demonstrated by some famous experiments by two psychologists, Kahneman and Tversky. They showed (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974) that simply adding the pleasure of an experience and subtracting its pain does not predict motivation, as well as a more complicated calculus that takes account of factors like recency and risk. For example, people prefer to repeat the experience of having their hand in very cold water (just above 14°C) for a minute, leaving it there for a further 30 seconds whilst the water is very slightly warm, than to repeat having their hand in very cold water (again, just above 14°C) for a minute, and then removing it immediately. The former provides less pleasure but also makes people less unhappy and so is preferred. Kahneman and Tversky argue that a calculation about which situations make us more or less happy is not based on the sum of the pleasure or pain of an experience, but is based on our feelings at the peak of the experience averaged with our feelings at the end of the experience.

Bentham was focusing on averages, and particularly group averages. He devised a metric, the felicific calculus that he thought would enable a calculation of the amount of pleasure an event would produce, taking account of such factors as how long the pleasure would last, how strong the sensation was, how likely it was that it would be followed by pain, and so on. Probably no one used the 'felicific calculus' to work out how to act but it has proved a very useful tool to consider how the average man, or group, should act when coupled with Bentham's other idea that the best action is the one that provides the greatest good to the greatest number.

Bentham's calculus works much better as a means of calculating the balance of pleasure and pain that many people feel about an experience because, like large-scale surveys or polls, the effect of individual variation becomes less and less important as the sample gets larger. In fact, so consistent does the opinion of masses of people become that Bentham seems to have forgotten that pleasure and pain are values that individuals place on things, and spoke about them as if they were caused by some property of the things themselves. He called this property a 'utility' (Bentham, 1876), defined as 'that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness ... or ... to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness'. (ibid., p. 2)

Bentham's derivation of a common property that would explain any pleasure and any pain seems a brilliant stroke in one way, but it seems weird in another. After all, it's not the property of an object to produce pain or happiness, rather it's our reaction to it. Handing someone a very hot piece of metal might cause pain, and that would be due to a property of the metal, i.e. its heat. But handing a person a photograph of their wife who was shortly due back from a long trip abroad might well cause pleasurable anticipation, or the pain of separation, but hand the same photo to a stranger and it is unlikely that it will cause any strong feeling. The pleasure or pain is not a property of the photograph,

but a consequence of our reaction to it. This reaction will not be a fixed quality: not like the heat of the metal in the first example, but like the photo, to which the husband's reaction is likely to be different on the day after his wife has left to that on the day that she is due back.

His assumption that utility resides in the object rather than in its evaluation is precisely the kind of error that critics think that quantitative researchers make: that they ignore the meaning of what they study. As I showed in the discussion of democracy, individual meaning is not so relevant for policy making which has to apply to many different individuals for whom meaning tends to average out. Bentham's approach appeals much more to the rulers than the ruled.

Meaning is relevant though for most of us having to make a decision for ourselves or our loved ones. A health organization might be willing to introduce a new drug for cancer even if a small proportion of people will die as a result of taking the drug – say, as an example, 0.5% – if the benefits of the drug are very great; 0.5%, 1 in 200, does not sound so great and as far as the vitality of the total population taking the drug is concerned, that has only been reduced to 199/200. But if I am considering taking the drug, my vitality is not going to be reduced by that amount: I will either survive or my vitality will be reduced to 0/200. I will die.

### The gentleman's viewpoint

John Stuart Mill was a gentleman among philosophers. He mastered classical languages as a child and was familiar with the company of great men. He was in love with Harriet Taylor, and she with him, but they did not become a couple until 21 years later, after her husband had died. Harriet lived for seven years longer, and following her death in Avignon, Mill bought a house in the city, where she had died and he had spent half his year, to be near her grave. He, like David Hume, was fluent in French and, again like Hume, was influenced by French philosophy, particularly that of Comte. He believed in equality for women, the emancipation of slaves and respect for individual human rights. He was an active MP, trying to make the world a better place. He was also a Benthamite, except that he could not accept that any pleasure of equal value on Bentham's hedonic calculus was necessarily of equal value in ethical terms. Say that one person rated their pleasure in being present at a cockfight as X, and another their pleasure at reading Shakespeare as Y, and  $X = Y$  in the amount of pleasure received, X could not equal Y in value. Some pleasures were higher and some lower. Higher pleasures were moral or intellectual and lower pleasures more obviously appetitive. Higher pleasures were higher because people had to learn to appreciate them (for a modern restatement of this, see Grayling, 2007).

This is now a widely held view. It is one reason that there is strong support for the Arts Council to subsidize opera or symphony orchestras, even though they are much more costly, and less popular, than, say, music festivals. Mill asserted that higher pleasure was more pleasurable, presumably explaining why people would undergo pain (learning) to achieve them. It is hard to find evidence for this. A more plausible idea is that intellectual

or moral pleasures are less subject to tolerance or to craving. Going to a fine performance of the opera *Wozzeck* does not normally lead to an increased desire to hear Berg's music every day of the week. Nor is it followed by initial satiation and then a craving for more. If anything, it is an experience that one can look back on and savour, but perhaps never want to repeat. Eating an ice-cream sundae may have a similar consequence, but is more likely to lead to a desire to repeat the experience, with a guilty feeling that one would like to have four scoops and not just three, and two sauces rather than one.

In *The Subjection of Women* (which, of course, he opposes), Mill (1970: 11) writes about situations in which men understand their wives:

The woman must be worth knowing, and the man not only a competent judge, but of a character sympathetic in itself, and so well adapted to hers, that he can either read her mind by sympathetic union, or has nothing in himself which makes her shy of disclosing it. Hardly anything can be more rare than this conjunction.

Both Mill and Bentham seem to have had the 'character sympathetic in itself' to which Mill refers in this quotation, and, as I noted previously, Bentham's personal experience was that giving others pleasure gave him pleasure. However, his formulation of utilitarianism did not account for this. Mill thought that other people's pleasure did impact on each of us in three ways. First, he accepted Hume's idea that our upbringing gives us lasting emotional dispositions, so that a well brought-up person, who was told off by their mother for upsetting a playmate, would continue to feel the same pain of being criticized as an adult if they found that they had upset someone. Second, he thought that we often need other people to cooperate with us in achieving our pleasures, and the chances of them doing that are increased if we make sure that they also gain pleasure in the process (this principle has been accepted in social psychology, where it goes under the name of social exchange theory). Neither of these explanations of why we take others into account feels much better than enlightened selfishness.

Mill never quite brought himself to think of sympathy as simply built into us, as Hume did. His detailed consideration in Chapter 3 of *Utilitarianism* (John Stuart Mill, 1867) starts from the premise that we would not have discord in society if sympathy were 'entire', but that many people do not have it. However, those who do have it consider it a 'natural feeling' that is not imposed on them by society or a 'superstition of education' but an attribute, possibly the consequence of social development. Most importantly it is, according to Mill, the 'ultimate sanction of the greatest happiness morality'.

### 'I feel happy'

The utilitarians were focused on welfare: the happiness of populations, and Aristotle on life satisfaction. Both are more about being rather than feeling happy. I have headed this section with the title of a famous song from the musical *West Side Story* which combines Sondheim's expressive lyrics about happiness and love with music that is infectiously happy. Bernstein's music achieves this by mimicking behaviour we associate with happiness: a quick tempo

(young people who are happy often work more quickly), an unusually emphatic beat towards the end of a phrase (an upbeat) that mirrors the emphasis that happy or very confident people put on each word in an utterance, and a lilting dance-like memory that caters for a wish to dance that is often associated with joy.

Feelings of joy that are intense enough to demand our attention are rare. They are exhilarating 'peak experiences' when they come, but they are typically transitory. One can make efforts to prolong them or make them more frequent, but these are usually artificial, and often involve taking drugs, having a lot of sex or doing other risky things. These activities can become ends in themselves as they are often addictive. This means that they require higher 'doses' of the rewarding experience, and that the experience becomes narrower and more idiosyncratic, in which case other people may need to be coerced into participation since the experience is less likely to be rewarding to them. Other people may view the activities as sordid or demeaning and the highs that result promote less and less happiness, however rewarding they remain. Prolonged joy may even become a kind of disease, when it is associated with bipolar disorder.

Maria in *West Side Story*, like her Shakespearean model Juliet, is overwhelmed by her joy and stops thinking about all of the complications of her love for a hated enemy. Feelings obtrude into consciousness when our thoughts are weak or confused. Intense happiness and thoughtlessness often go hand in hand as they do in Maria/Juliet. Joy is often linked to overcoming a deeply felt concern: eating when we are starving, for example, or solving a problem that has been troubling us for some time. Joy narrows our behavioural repertoire so that we focus our attention on resolving the concern. It is motivational. But in this process it may also be, as Sartre described, 'magical'. It reshapes our perception of the world, but sometimes, as Maria/Juliet found, in destructive ways.

## Reward

Joy belongs to a cluster of words that includes fun, laughter, gaiety, pleasure, excitement, exhilaration and ecstasy. All of these words would be indications to most people of having a good time, with 'good' meaning 'rewarding' rather than ethically superior. 'Reward' in this context is anything that positively reinforces behaviour: that is, if an animal performs an action that results in, say, being given a food pellet, they are likely to perform the action again, to get another food pellet.

What is pleasing, or rewarding, changes according to the state of our organism. Some things are rewarding because they satisfy a lack, that is an appetite or a desire: when we are thirsty, we are likely to think largely of the pleasure of having a drink. Other things are rewarding because they provide relief from tension, discomfort or pain (Seaford, 2011). On those occasions we may focus on relief. The fact that both can be described as rewards, and that relieving either can be described as making someone feel happy, is confusing, and I will come back to this when I look at 'being happy' in the next chapter.

Rewards, and pleasure, are subject to satiety, unlike happiness. One day of happiness does not reduce the intensity of the next day of happiness, should someone be lucky enough to have two together, any more than one day of sunshine and blue skies reduces

the intensity of the sun or the blueness of the sky on a subsequent summer day. But I may take less pleasure from the second day because my appetite for sunshine and blue skies has been diminished. I 'habituate' to my good fortune, to use jargon.

It may be a good thing that we get used even to paradise. Habituation does not occur in the clinical condition of hypomania and untreated hypomania is associated with increased mortality, aggression, relationship breakdown, poor health and injury.

Nor does reward necessarily lead to happiness. We would not suppose that everyone who gets an Olympic Gold medal feels happy, even though all of them receive the same reward. Some winners might be resentful that their race was not properly organized, and that they nearly lost. Others may have just had bad news, which makes their medal seem unimportant. The situation may be even more complicated for winners of the silver medal, who may feel bitter about not winning the gold.

### Is happiness just a feeling or a judgement?

We use happy to mean a feeling, and we use it to mean life satisfaction. Unfortunately for our purposes, we can use it to label other people's emotions, too. There is even a signal for it – smiling – so that other people know when we are happy. People being people, it is possible to fake a smile, but this kind of 'social' smiling differs from the involuntary smile associated with happiness. The difference was first noted by the French electrophysiologist Duchenne (Duchenne (de Boulogne), 1876). Social smiles involve the mouth only. A happy smile spreads to the eyes and we can feel that, even if we can't see it. We call it an infectious smile or even, sometimes, a happy smile.

Babies smile from birth. When the author was a baby this was attributed to 'indigestion': to something purely from within, and it is true that the stimulus to these early smiles is unknown. These baby smiles do not necessarily involve the eyes. They are produced fleetingly amidst other similarly fleeting facial expressions, as if these expressions are being practised. However, this kind of smiling quickly changes into responsive smiling, from 2 months old or so. These are 'Duchenne' or true smiles, involving both the eyes and face. Babies smile at this age when their desires are being satisfied, for example after they have been fed, and also when their needs are attended to: after they have been burped or had their nappy changed, for example.

Smiling babies are often called happy babies but, as they get older, different smiles develop that do not indicate happiness. Children learn appeasing smiles, designed to turn away anger or criticism. Girls begin to smile more than boys in adolescence, possibly for this reason (Dodd et al., 1999). This suggests that smiling becomes a less reliable indicator of inner state, and more controlled by social expectation, for which there does appear to be evidence (LaFrance et al., 2003). Smiling is not just culturally but genetically influenced. Children with a more active variant of a gene for a protein that transports a metabolite of serotonin, a transmitter in the brain that is particularly important in the frontal and evolutionarily newer area of the brain, smile more than children with a less active transporter (Grossmann et al., 2011).

So does smiling indicate happiness in adults? Two scientists video-recorded winners of Olympic gold medals when they were on the podium being awarded their medals. They certainly did smile then, but only when they were interacting with someone. Their smiles disappeared when they were just standing there (Fernandez-Dols & Ruiz-Belda, 1995). That might be a consequence of the display rules discussed in the previous paragraph, one of which is that smiling when you are not engaged with someone else is 'fatuous'. It may be that the winners felt a smile welling up inside them, but only allowed it to show when they were interacting, as a kind of thanks to the officials who were rewarding them. So, perhaps, even if displaying a smile might not always be a good indication of happiness, feeling smiley inside might be.

There are inner smiley feelings we might not want to call happy. We might secretly smile because of someone else's misfortune, for example. This kind of feeling, that Nietzsche called by the French term 'ressentiment' but is usually known by the German word, Schadenfreude, has as much anger and contempt about it as it does happy feeling. It is however enough of a positive feeling that people seek it out. We take pleasure in cartoons or stories where someone gets their 'come-uppance', possibly because it is a kind of relief. It is a relief because we might have unpleasant negative feelings like envy or humiliation when we see someone more fortunate than ourselves, and these feelings dissipate if we see that same person in an unenviable or humbling situation.

Smiles are themselves rewarding but, oddly enough, especially if they are fleeting. A brief smile from someone in whom a smile is rare is often more precious than a fixed smile on the face of someone who is perpetually smiling. Not just smiles, but everything connected with pleasure has this same fleeting quality. So much so that Mill wrote in his autobiography, 'Ask yourself whether you are happy, and you cease to be so' (J. S. Mill, 1909: 94).

Feeling joy is what Gilbert Ryle called a 'pang' (Ryle, 2009: 83). It is gone almost as soon as you register it, although because of its intensity the memory of pleasure can often linger. Every aspect of the embodiment of pleasure seems to conduce to this result. Scents are often pleasurable and sometimes give one joy as a result. But nasal mucus contains an enzyme that rapidly oxidizes aldehydes to acids and splits esters to acids and alcohols (Nagashima & Touhara, 2010). Since many floral and fruity scents are either aldehydes or esters, and their corresponding acids and alcohols have much less scent, this means that the perfume of a flower is lost almost as soon as we detect it. We quickly get used to touch, and no longer feel it as pleasurable, although not so quickly to touch in the erogenous areas. Our attention wanders away from the pleasures of eating; and we quickly become tolerant of the pleasurable effects of the most euphoriant drugs, needing to take larger and larger doses to get the same high as we once did. The relief of discomfort can be equally transient.

## Is feeling happy any sort of indication of being happy?

It is perhaps for the above reasons that many philosophers have concluded that feeling pleasure is a kind of accident or by-product of living and that, although it may be an indication of whether or not one is living in the right way, to make feeling pleasure as much as possible one's aim is doomed to failure.

Even if genetic engineering made it possible to prevent happiness spontaneously decaying, there are only a few philosophers who would advocate this (one of the advocates is Nick Bostrom who also argues for cybernetic enhancement). Most philosophers would share the intuitions of Robert Nozick. He imagined an 'experience machine' into which we could be hooked, and which would give us continuous pleasure, whilst being unaware of the real world around us (Nozick, 1974). His sense was that few people would actually choose to be in the machine.

Nozick suggests that a world without unhappiness would not be a good world. Other philosophers who take this position often argue that unhappiness is a kind of psychic pain. Pain has survival value. It is essential to our health. People who have no pain receptors in a limb overextend their joints, leading to damage, and wound themselves more severely and with greater risk of neglecting the wound and developing an infection. Negative mental emotions may have a guardian function in our personal and social dealings, comparable to the guard that pain provides to our bodies. Without anxiety or worry, we take too many risks and act without preparation or precaution. Without depression, we over-estimate our energy and capacity, trade too much on other people's esteem for us, and do not learn from our losses to realize what we truly value. George Bernard Shaw voiced the scepticism that many of us have about euphoria, or persistent happiness, when he put this into the mouth of his alter ego, John Tanner, in *Man and Superman*: 'A lifetime of happiness! No man alive could bear it: it would be hell on earth' (from Act 1, scene 2).

This is not to say that we should be careless about unhappiness. Unremitting unhappiness or fear would be as damaging to our health as unremitting happiness. Habituation normally prevents us from feeling persistently unhappy, just as it prevents persistent happiness. But habituation does not always work. Habituation is slower to strong stimuli than to weak, and it can be reversed by other stimuli that lead to the same response as the one that has become habituated (Thompson, 2009). If we apply this to emotion, we might expect that extreme unhappiness does not habituate, and that repeated but different causes of unhappiness prevent habituation.

## Neurophilosophy and experimental philosophy

Happiness is, according to many of the philosophers considered in this chapter, tied up not just with pleasure but with life satisfaction, and that is in some way tied up with living well – with the moral approbation of other people. So there is a strong tie-in of happiness and personal morality, and of prescriptions about how to be happy with ethics.

Neurophilosophy (Churchland, 1986) sets out to consider these associations using neuroscience and not speculation. Not everyone is convinced this is wise. Such people argue that the essence of a feeling, its qualia, has, like other aspects of consciousness and indeed psychology, eluded the scanner (Miller, 2010). My discussion of fundamental approaches to happiness ends with the Victorians, not because the discussions have not continued since then, but because most of the main concepts that will figure in this book had been presaged by philosophers by that time. Where philosophers have made subsequent important contributions, I will come back to them in the relevant text.

One of neurophilosophy's most striking paradigms is sometimes formulated as 'the trolley problem', first put forward by Phillipa Foot (Foot, 1967). It tests the extent to which people make utilitarian decisions.

The trolley, and the reverse trolley, problem (there are many variants) is discussed extensively by Peter Singer, who has summarized much of the research, including that by neuroscientists, into the problem in the 20 years since Foot put it forward (Singer, 2005). This is the trolley problem: you are standing on a bridge; you see a trolley rolling down a track that will take it into five people working on the track. It is heavy and will kill at least some of them if you cannot stop it, but there is nothing to stop it with, except the very heavy man standing next to you. Do you throw him over? A variant of the trolley problem, the reverse trolley problem, is that the very heavy man is not standing next to you, but you are standing next to a railway point control switch. The heavy man is still in the problem, but standing across the rails in a siding. You can divert the runaway trolley into the siding with your switch, but doing so will almost certainly kill the heavy man. However, it will spare the five people who are still working on the main track. So, do you divert it?

Pushing the man off the bridge was the preferred option for only 10% of a large sample collected for one study (Bartels & Pizarro, 2011). The reverse trolley solution was much more likely to be chosen. In fact, a majority would have diverted the train into the siding.

In accordance with Mill's idea that one can rely on sympathy to temper the application of the greatest happiness, non-utilitarians who are unwilling to sacrifice the one for the many, are more likely to have compassionate feelings towards other people (Gleichgerrcht & Young, 2013), whilst the utilitarians are more likely to be highly rational, callous, 'Machiavellian' and with a lack of meaning in life. But what is, perhaps, more interesting is not that psychology supports philosophy but that there are links with brain function, suggesting that these reactions are not, as Mill suggested, something we have to think about but something that is wired into our brains, as Harvard academic Joshua Green has advocated in a series of papers. As with all current neuroscience, there are dangers of over-generalizing from the evidence provided by increases or decreases of blood flow in one area or another of the brain, which is what much neuroscience is currently based on (Kahane & Shackel, 2010). There is, though, converging evidence that reduced function in the ventromedial (on the underside and towards the middle) of the prefrontal cortex (the part of the brain above our eyes) is required for the utilitarian judgement inasmuch as people with damage to this part of the brain are more likely to make utilitarian judgements (Moll & de Oliveira-Souza, 2007). It would be wrong though to consider that non-utilitarian judgements are somehow 'higher', as repeated transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) to the dorso-lateral prefrontal cortex increases the likelihood of non-utilitarian choices, at least in women (Fumagalli et al., 2010). This part of the brain is also involved in another kind of emotional decision making: paying people back for perceived injustice. In laboratory conditions, in games in which the participants gain financial rewards for cooperative or competitive behaviour, volunteers will pass up some part of their own financial reward in order to reduce the reward of another player who they deem to be unfair. This payback is reduced if the dorso-lateral prefrontal cortex is subject to repeat TMS (Knoch et al., 2008).



The dorso-lateral prefrontal cortex is probably the part of the brain that comes closest to being the substrate of our 'inner voice' or, perhaps even, our 'super-ego'. Of course, these are inappropriate attributions. An inner voice is a subjective experience. The dorso-lateral prefrontal cortex is just a very complicated bit of machinery embedded in a bigger machine. But it seems to need something like 'energy' (probably related to dopaminergic afferents from reward circuits becoming depleted) and when this is at a low level in chronic dieters, they are less likely to control their impulse to eat high-calorie food (Wagner et al., 2013). To my mind, this suggests that the kind of self-control, or at least self-training, promoted by the warrior philosophers presupposes a level of continuous reward that gives them the mental energy to maintain this control. The less powerful may have to make do with only intermittent levels of reward sufficient to maintain self-control and ensure justice and fairness. For them, therefore, immediate reward may be a much greater priority.