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1

Happiness and Meaningfulness: Some Key Differences

Thaddeus Metz

1. Introduction

In this chapter, I highlight the differences between the two goods of happiness and meaningfulness. Specifically, I contrast happiness and meaning with respect to six value-theoretic factors, among them: what the bearers of these values are, how luck can play a role in their realization, which attitudes are appropriate in response to them, and when they are to be preferred in a life. I aim not only to show that there are several respects in which happiness and meaning differ as categories of value, but also to bring out some of the logical relationships between the differences, for example, to note that the value's bearer affects its susceptibility to luck.

I begin by providing initial reason to believe *that* happiness and meaningfulness are distinct (Section 2), which will make it reasonable to enquire into exactly *how* they differ in the rest of the chapter. I then spell out what I mean by 'happiness' and 'meaningfulness' (Section 3), after which I critically explore several ways in which happiness and meaning exhibit distinct value-theoretic structures (Section 4). I briefly conclude with a summary (Section 5).

2. That happiness and meaning differ

To motivate investigation into ways in which happiness and meaningfulness differ in their value-theoretic structure, I start by providing intuitive evidence to think that they are indeed different. Most of those writing on life's meaning take a meaningful life to be both conceptually and substantively distinct from a happy life. First, the two are conceptually distinct in that the question of what makes a life happy does not ask

one and the same thing as the question of what makes a life meaningful. Talk of 'happiness' and of 'meaning' connotes different things, for, if it did not, then it would be logically contradictory to speak of an 'unhappy but meaningful life' or a 'happy but meaningless life', but it is not.

Even though to enquire about what makes a life happy and about what makes it meaningful is to address different questions, it could be that the answers to them are substantively the same. That is, it could be that whatever makes a life happy *just is* whatever makes a life meaningful and vice versa, that is, that 'happiness' refers to the very same thing as 'meaningfulness', even if these terms have different definitions. However, most who have reflected on the matter also reject such a property identity between happiness and meaningfulness,¹ for two major reasons.

First, there are many conditions that appear best described as 'unhappy meaningfulness', with examples including people who: take care of an elderly parent when doing so prevents them from engaging in activities they would find more rewarding and enjoyable (Hanfling 1987a, pp. 180–81); struggle against injustice at the cost of their own peace and harmony (Singer 1996, p. 101); create great works of art despite depression and other psychological torment; and choose to be bored so that others will avoid boredom (Metz 2007).

Second, there are many conditions that seem aptly construed as 'meaningless happiness', for example, being subject to great manipulation and forced passivity, but feeling upbeat because of psychotropic drugs (Huxley 1932) or consumer culture (Marcuse 1964); spending life in an 'experience machine' (akin to that in *The Matrix*), which gives the occupant the vivid impression he is doing sophisticated and interesting things that he is not (Nozick 1974, pp. 42–45); rolling a rock up a hill for eternity à la Sisyphus and enjoying it because of the way the gods have structured one's brain (Taylor 1987, pp. 679–81); and being taken in by charlatans who make one feel special, for example, falsely believing in the fidelity of one's beloved or in the divine status of a charismatic leader (Wolf 1997a, p. 218).

Aristotelian friends of an objective theory of happiness will question these cases, contending that happiness is not merely something mental, as the cases suggest, but is also a kind of activity.² In particular, some would say that the above cases of 'meaningless happiness' are not instances of the most desirable kind of happiness. The happiness most worth wanting, some will suggest, is the combination of positive psychological states consequent to virtuous deeds.

However, I am interested not in the best sort of happiness, but rather happiness as such; I address the nature of whatever it is that the best sort of happiness and the worst sort both have in common, which seems to be something subjective. Furthermore, the heavy and, in my view, crushing burden on friends of an objective account of happiness is to explain away the intuitions of a lack of happiness in the first group of cases and the presence of it in the second. Even if there is an objective side of happiness, the above cases indicate that there is a large subjective side to it, which is what I focus on in this chapter.

Supposing that (subjective) happiness and meaningfulness are different kinds of goods, there are nonetheless close links between them that should be acknowledged. For instance, in order to obtain meaning in life, one often must have a certain degree of happiness, namely, not be so depressed as to be unable to get out of bed. Not only can an absence of happiness prevent meaning, but a lack of meaning can also impede happiness; for one could become depressed in the first place from a failure to apprehend meaning in one's life. I am not concerned to deny that there are intimate causal relationships between happiness and meaningfulness – indeed, I am keen to affirm that there are, since happiness and meaningfulness would have to be distinct in order for causal relationships between them to obtain.

In addition, some philosophers have gone a step farther and suggested that meaning is constituted by (subjective) happiness, and is not merely a cause of it or caused by it. According to this view, a condition is meaningful for a person only if she enjoys it or is otherwise pleased by it (Wolf 1997a). On this account, even if one were doing something objectively worthwhile, it would not confer any meaning on one's life if one were unhappy doing it.

I take damning counterexamples to this view to be many of the above cases of 'unhappy meaningfulness' as well as numerous actual lives such as those of John Stuart Mill and Vincent van Gogh.³ My own view is that happiness can enhance meaningfulness, but is not necessary for it.⁴ However, I am content to grant that satisfaction might be a small, essential *part* of what it is for a condition to confer meaning on life; even if meaning were to some degree made up of (subjective) happiness, it would not be exhausted by it, and my goal in this chapter is to bring out the differences between the two that remain.

3. Defining the two goods

Having shown in the previous section that happiness and meaningfulness are intuitively different, I now offer some definitions of these terms.

The definitions are intended to be ones that make sense of the intuitions canvassed in Section 2 and that serve the function of clarifying exactly which values are to be contrasted in Section 4. Talk of 'meaning' is notoriously vague, and speaking of 'happiness' also lends itself to some unclarities that I want to dispel before proceeding.

The examples in Section 2 implicitly rely on a modern sense of 'happiness' as signifying something largely, if not entirely, subjective, that is, dependent on the mind. It is the kind of feeling that most contemporary speakers of English would equate with synonyms such as 'gratification' or 'fulfilment'. It is the mood that is missing when one is depressed, sad, miserable or gloomy. It is the kind of thing that is accessed with relative ease from the inside, making the best (but not the sole) way to ascertain whether someone is happy to be a matter of asking her for a considered, sincere report on her state of mind. It is the kind of mental state that psychologists have shown does not vary closely with the state of one's health or finances (Baumeister 1991, pp. 211–13). It is also what psychologists have shown tends to be higher when one has interpersonal relationships or holds false, overly positive views of oneself and the world, and what tends to be lower when one is isolated or has an accurate picture of reality (Baumeister 1991, pp. 213, 221–25). It is the kind of reaction most people have to being at a party, succeeding on the job, eating a sumptuous dinner with one's beloved, witnessing the flourishing of one's child, winning a competitive sport and having great sex.

In addition to being subjective, by 'happiness' I mean something fundamentally affective, having to do with feelings, instead of conative, relating to desires. The analytical ethics literature standardly divides subjective accounts of happiness into experientialist and desire satisfaction theories. Experientialism is the view that happiness is constituted by positive experiences, while the desire satisfaction theory is the view that happiness is simply a matter of obtaining whatever one wants. For the purposes of this chapter, 'happiness' indicates something more the former than the latter. I think stock counterexamples to the desire satisfaction theory are conclusive, for example, if a blind man wants a red house, his house is painted red one night, and he is never told of that fact, then he is not any happier for having had his desire satisfied.

If desires matter with regard to one's happiness, I believe they do so only insofar as the objects of a person's desires are certain experiences. So, it might be that the blind man is no happier for having a red house since he has not yet fulfilled a desire for pleasure. However, another plausible explanation of why he is not any happier is that he has not yet felt the pleasure period (even if he did not desire it). In this discussion,

I remain neutral between an account of happiness in terms of having certain experiences that a particular person in fact desires and having certain experiences regardless of whether they are in fact desired. What is key is that happiness is a function of positive experiences.

Hedonism is the most plausible and influential particular instance of this general experientialist view, taking all experiences constitutive of happiness to be ones that are pleasant in some way, whether physically or mentally. Although I cannot here rule out the possibility of experiences that partially constitute happiness in virtue of something other than their pleasantness, I will often equate a happy person with one who is pleased.

It is not my concern to argue with those who find this subjective, experientialist, hedonist meaning of 'happiness' too narrow. Instead, I simply note that the analysis that I conduct in this chapter does not ultimately hang on an attachment to the word 'happiness'. I could qualify things, saying that I compare the value of 'experientialist happiness' or 'hedonic happiness' with that of meaning in life. And I could go even farther and give up the word entirely, saying that I compare the value of 'pleasant experiences' with the value of meaning. However, since I think my rendition of 'happiness' fits with most laypeople's and many philosophers' use of the term, I continue to invoke it.

Here is one last clarification of 'happiness', before turning to the meaning of 'meaningfulness'. Sometimes theorists construe talk of 'happiness' as essentially including some kind of holistic element, so that happiness is by definition a matter of, say, many good experiences had over a lifetime, consistent contentment, or the positive feeling one has upon appraising one's life as a whole. From what I have said above, it is clear that I do not restrict the meaning of 'happiness' in this way. I think it is reasonable to think of happiness occurring at a particular phase, so that it can make just as much sense to speak of a 'happy time in one's life' as it does to speak of a 'happy life' on balance.

Having clarified what I mean by 'happiness', I now turn to 'meaningfulness', synonyms of which include 'significance' and 'importance'. In the present context, these terms pick out a property of an individual's life, and not of, say, human life as such. And this property is not the mere perception or judgement that one's life is meaningful, which would be possible in an experience machine of the sort mentioned in Section 2; it is instead the feature that would make such a belief true. In other words, determining whether someone's life is meaningful is not merely or even primarily an internal matter, but is largely a mind-independent matter that could be best judged from the outside. Looking

back upon another person's life, should one venerate it, or would a sense of accomplishment be reasonable for her to have? As noted in Section 2, conditions that many think would not reasonably ground such reactions include: living in an experience machine, being a slave, rolling a rock up a hill for eternity, and interacting with people on the basis of grossly inaccurate beliefs about them. In contrast, many would deem the following to constitute meaning in life: advancing justice, achieving something on the job, understanding deep facets of nature, having loving relationships, helping others and being creative.

In what follows, I take the latter two activities to be representative instances of meaningfulness. Nearly all those currently philosophizing about meaning in life would deem beneficence and creativity to confer meaning on a life, regardless of theoretical commitments in the background. For instance, most supernaturalists would say that meaning in life comes from fulfilling God's purpose for us, which is to imitate God by being creative and helping others. A majority of objective naturalists believe that creativity and beneficence are independent sources of meaning apart from their relation to any spiritual realm. And even most subjective naturalists would say that people usually believe that their lives are meaningful in virtue of helping others or being creative, or that most people have the strong desire or higher-order aim to do such things.

Of course, some theorists, particularly thoroughgoing subjectivists, will deny that creativity and beneficence invariably confer meaning on a life in such a way that they are to be considered part of meaning's definitional essence. It is therefore true that the meaning of 'meaning' that I work with in this chapter is not entirely neutral among interlocutors. I could restrict my terminology to say that I compare happiness with 'non-subjective meaning' or 'the goods of beneficence and creativity', without losing the substance of my project. However, since a large majority of those currently writing on life's meaning reject a purely subjective approach, I think that it is fair merely to speak of 'meaning'.

As with happiness, there are those in the literature who restrict talk of 'meaning' to lives as a whole. That is, some believe that the only bearer of meaning is a person's entire spatio-temporal existence, and not any subset of it. However, I do not work with such a narrow understanding of what can exhibit meaning. I agree that the pattern of a life as a whole can affect the meaning it has, so that, say, a very repetitive life (as in the movie *Groundhog Day*) would have less meaning than one that is not, simply in virtue of the repetition. I presume, though, that parts of a life, separate from their relationship to one another, can also determine

the meaningfulness of a life. A time of engaging in prostitution to feed a drug addiction would be fairly characterized as a ‘meaningless period in one’s life’, as something distinct from a ‘meaningless life’ all things considered.

This sketch of what I stipulate talk of ‘happiness’ and ‘meaningfulness’ to connote should be enough for us to compare the two goods. My aim in the rest of the chapter is to systematically articulate several value-theoretic differences between pleasant experiences, on the one hand, and creativity and beneficence, on the other.

4. How happiness and meaning differ

I have already suggested one major difference between happiness and meaning, namely, that happiness is largely subjective, while meaning is largely objective. In what follows, I address six additional differences, supposing that pleasant experiences are at the heart of happiness, and beneficence and creativity are characteristic of meaningfulness.

4.1. Bearer: sensation *v* action

The subjectivity of happiness is obviously due to its experientialist basis, but in what is the objectivity of meaning grounded? I submit that, whereas a life is happy strictly or at least largely in virtue of feeling, that is, sensation, a life is meaningful principally in virtue of action. By ‘action’ I mean in the first instance volition, but not merely that, for I here deem productive thinking, that is, deliberating or reasoning (as opposed to, say, merely perceiving), to be a type of ‘action’. What it is about a life that has meaning is mainly action in this sense. The least controversial elements of meaning such as creativity and beneficence are actions, and discussions of meaning in life typically note that it inheres in conditions such as autonomy, authenticity and relationships in which one treats others in certain ways.⁵

Some might object that merely exhibiting certain attitudes can be sufficient for a meaningful life. For instance, in the following, Viktor Frankl can be read as suggesting that some people led meaningful lives in Nazi concentration camps simply by virtue of their mental states.

(T)here is also purpose in that life which is almost barren of both creation and enjoyment and which admits of but one possibility of high moral behavior: namely, in man’s attitude to his existence, an existence restricted by external forces [...]. The way in which a man accepts his fate and all the suffering it entails, the way in which he

takes up his cross, gives him ample opportunity—even under the most difficult circumstances—to add a deeper meaning to his life. It may remain brave, dignified and unselfish.

(Frankl 1984, p. 88)

Now, there are facets of Frankl's discussion indicating that he believes that the relevant mental states are only ones that are under a person's control and that hence count as 'actions' for the purposes of this chapter. Sometimes Frankl speaks, for instance, of 'the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances' (Frankl 1984, p. 86). However, there are some attitudes that are not under much direct control but that plausibly confer meaning on a person's life, perhaps being emotionally affected by others' well-being (viz., compassion, sympathy). Is it possible to live a meaningful life simply in virtue of such action-independent mental states?

While I am willing to grant that a life might be *pro tanto* more meaningful for exhibiting certain attitudes that are independent of our control, I resist the idea that a life could be meaningful *all things considered* merely in virtue of such dispositions. Most would hesitate to call someone's life 'meaningful' on balance just insofar as she wished that others would be helped and were glad when they were helped; a life as a whole that is meaningful with regard to help requires doing some helping oneself. Consider that one major reason to hate the prospect of being stuck in a concentration camp is that it would rob one's life of potential for meaning, in particular, would prevent one from engaging in beneficent and creative actions.

Note that reflection on life in a concentration camp suggests that, while action on one's part is necessary in order to have a meaningful life, no action on one's part is necessary in order to have a meaningless one. Indeed, an effective way to prevent someone from having a meaningful life is to undercut her ability to reason and to engage in sophisticated, skilled activity. This claim helps explain why we abhor the prospect of becoming an Alzheimer's patient; for although we could then have certain caring emotions about others, we would be incapable of doing very much and hence would lose out on substantial opportunities for meaning in life.

4.2. Source: intrinsic v relational

It seems apt to distinguish between the *bearer* of happiness or meaning, on the one hand, and their *source*, on the other. I have claimed that a happy life consists of certain experiences that are good for their own

sake, while a meaningful life is (largely) made up of certain actions that are good for their own sake. Experiences and actions are in what these values respectively inhere, and they are to be contrasted with the source of these values, that is, on what the values logically depend in order to inhere.⁶ For a value *X* to logically depend on *Y* is either for *Y* to be necessary or sufficient for *X*, or for *Y* to enhance some degree of *X*. Again, *Y* is a source of *X* insofar as either *X* cannot exist without *Y* or has to exist once *Y* does, or some amount of *X* is realized upon *Y*. The source of happiness appears to be intrinsic to its bearer, so that happiness covaries with positive experiences alone, whereas the analogous structure does not seem to hold with regard to meaning. Let me spell this out.

In the case of happiness, its source and its bearer are one and the same thing, namely, positive experiences. Happiness inheres in positive experiences, cannot exist without them, must exist once they do, and its magnitude is determined solely by them. In other words, positive experiences constitute happiness regardless of their relationship to other things, and do so purely in virtue of their nature *qua* experience. In particular, neither what has caused an experience nor what it will cause affects the respect in which the experience is a happy or unhappy one. The cause of an experience can affect whether the experience is *appropriate* in some way or not, for example, joy upon a successful theft, but not whether the experience confers some *happiness* on a person's life.

One might object that the distinction between higher and lower pleasures indicates a respect in which the source of happiness is relational, that is, in which happiness logically depends for its existence on something other than its bearer, positive experience. If lower pleasures are 'purely' bodily ones such as getting suntans and eating doughnuts, and if higher pleasures are ones that have been caused in certain, mental ways, for example, the gratification that results from doing supererogatory deeds or listening to music, then happiness is not strictly intrinsic to its bearer; for the cause of an experience is extrinsic to the experience itself.

However, I submit that the distinction between higher and lower pleasures is not best understood in terms of any cause of the pleasures. It can instead be well captured in terms of differential *qualia*, that is, what the content of the pleasures is, or how the pleasures feel. The pleasant sensations of listening to music and of going beyond the call of duty would constitute happiness – and perhaps a higher form of it that differs in kind from merely physical sensations – even if there were no actual music or good deed. As the experience machine thought experiment indicates, in principle any sensation can be caused merely by the

manipulation of brain states and need not follow from any particular engagement with the world. There is no difference in *happiness* when the sensation of listening to music is caused by eardrums or by electrodes.

In contrast, it appears that the source of meaning is often relational, that is, logically depends on something beyond an action, which is (typically) the bearer of meaning. An action can be more or less meaningful because of something outside of it, and, especially, what has caused it and what it will cause.⁷ For example, consider creative behaviour (Metz 2005, p. 327). Imagine in one case that it is a result of substantial education, training and effort, whereas in another case it is a consequence of taking a pill. Or imagine in one case that creative behaviour results in a novel art-object that others appreciate, whereas in another one it does not. In both pairs of cases, it seems natural to say that we could have the same creative activity but differential meaning because of how it was brought about and what its results were. Similar remarks go for the meaningfulness of helping others (Metz 2002, pp. 807–09).

There are two ways to object to the idea that the meaningfulness of an action is partially a function of its relationships to other things such as the mind that has caused it and the effect on the world that it has caused. First, one might deny the intuition that what surrounds the action is relevant to its meaning, so that meaning is a function solely of the action's intrinsic properties. For instance, perhaps the meaningfulness of trying to help someone but failing is just as high as it is in the case where you have succeeded in benefiting someone.

There are two serious problems with this suggestion. First, even the meaning of the action of trying to help depends on some relational factors, for example, the act's *likelihood* of having a certain result. No (or virtually no) meaning accrues to waving a wand that you think will magically stop a flood, whereas some (or more) meaning would come from digging a ditch in a place that can reasonably be expected to prevent a flood but that ends up failing to do so. Second, the case of helping others obtains much of its force from its association with morality, which I am prepared to accept is largely immune from luck. And the value of helpful behaviour with regard to morality might differ from the value of it with regard to meaning (Metz 2002, p. 808). My intuition is that more meaning comes from an action that turns out to actually benefit others, even if it is no more moral for that. And this idea is buttressed by reflection on other, non-moral cases such as those concerning creativity. Actually producing a beautiful art-object or a revealing philosophical theory is more meaningful than doing something that is merely likely to do so but ends up not.

There is a second way to object to the idea that the bearer of meaning is not identical to its source, namely, to question whether the bearer of meaning in these cases is at bottom an action. Perhaps what bears the meaning is rather a complex of mental states leading to behaviour that leads to results in the world distinct from oneself. If that were true, then meaning would be a function of solely intrinsic properties, namely, those of a composite made up of deliberation plus intention plus action plus states of affairs, all linked by certain causal relationships.

In reply, I contend that it is unnatural to suppose that composites are always the basic bearers of meaningfulness in cases whether something other than an action appears relevant to meaning, for two reasons. First, when an action fails to realize the aim behind it, we usually say things like ‘that was pointless’, clearly referring to the action, not the entire complex of intention-that-has-caused-action-that-has-caused-result-other-than-what-was-intended. It is more natural to say that the action was meaningless because it failed to have a certain intended result than that the intention-action-result was meaningless. Second, the idea that action is a basic bearer of meaning best explains why an action often retains some of its meaning when the things around it change. Performing an action that is likely to help others has some meaning, but the action would have even more meaning if it actually ended up benefiting them. Since action of a certain kind is constant among the permutations, it is plausible to think that it is what bears the meaning. I therefore conclude that what bears meaning is typically an action but that the amount of meaning that accrues logically depends on factors beyond the action, a structure that differs from happiness, where the bearer and the source are one and the same thing, pleasant experiences.

4.3. Role of luck: total ν partial

Given that the bearer of happiness is largely experiential and that of meaning is largely volitional (Section 4.1), there are significant differences in the role that luck can play in realizing these goods. I take it that luck is a matter of factors over which one has no or little control, and I presume that one has the most control over the actions one performs, and somewhat less control over other things such as what one feels or how one’s actions have affected the world. If so, then luck can *conceivably* be what is *completely* responsible for a person’s happiness, or at least it could affect it to a much greater degree than it could affect meaningfulness. To clarify the point, I note that luck can of course play a role in whether one’s life is meaningful or not, since, as I have said

(Section 4.2), the consequences of one's actions can affect their significance. Furthermore, whether one's life is utterly meaningless could entirely be a function of luck, for example, if one were so unlucky as to have had an accident in which one's capacity for action is impaired. However, it appears that luck cannot on its own ever bring about the positive good of meaning to one's life; one has to engage in certain actions, which are under one's control. That differs from the positive good of happiness, which in principle could come about entirely by virtue of factors beyond one's control (even if, in the real world, it often requires a lot of effort).

One might object that a mad scientist could be entirely responsible for making you perform meaningful actions, just as a mad scientist could thrust you into an experience machine and thereby be the sole causal factor that has made you happy. However, the cases are disanalogous. Even if there were a sense in which the mad scientist could make you perform certain 'actions', these actions would not be of the sort necessary for meaning to accrue. So-called 'actions' that you perform simply by virtue of external manipulation are not enough to confer significance on your life. Instead, there must be some kind of autonomy or authenticity in order for them to ground meaningfulness.

4.4. Appropriate attitude: want to continue ν esteem

There are certain attitudes that are appropriate in response to meaningful conditions that are not apt for happy ones, and vice versa, it appears. For a wide array of factors in virtue of which a life is meaningful, it is, from the first-person perspective, sensible to take great pride in them or to feel substantial esteem about them. And from the third-person standpoint, it is reasonable to admire another person in virtue of conditions that make her life meaningful. Furthermore, when it comes to a lack of meaning or the factors that reduce the meaning of life, which I have called 'antimatter' (Metz 2002, p. 806), first-person reactions of shame and third-person reactions of abhorrence are often appropriate.

However, these reactions never fit happiness, as I construe it in this chapter. It does not make sense to admire people because they are happy or to take pride in the bare fact of one's experiencing pleasure. Nor is it appropriate to feel shame merely because one experiences pain or to abhor someone who does.

I have found it difficult to ascertain whether there is an attitude that is uniquely appropriate for one's own happiness. However, perhaps when it comes to your pleasant experiences, it is invariably appropriate for

you (*pro tanto*) to desire that they continue, and invariably appropriate for you to desire (to some degree) that unpleasant ones end. Meaningful conditions do not, it seems, invariably call for a desire that they continue. For instance, if you volunteer to be bored so that others avoid boredom, this might confer meaning on your life and be worthy of substantial esteem or admiration, but it might not call for a desire for this condition to continue. Perhaps when you adopt the goal of undergoing sacrifice for the sake of others, you need not want the sacrifice to continue and may instead wish the sacrifice to end as soon as possible, so long as the relevant end is realized.

4.5. When the value is possible: during life alone ν posthumously

From Sections 4.1 and 4.2, it follows that happiness can exist only during a life, while the meaningfulness of a life can be increased after it has ended. If happiness is a function of positive experiences such as pleasant ones, then no more happiness is possible upon death, which I conceive as the permanent cessation of existence and hence of experience. In contrast, since the meaningfulness of a life is partly a function of the consequences of one's actions, and since the consequences of one's actions can occur after one is dead, one's life can become more or less meaningful even though one is no longer capable of action. Vincent van Gogh's life is meaningful in large part by virtue of recognition and influence that obtained long after his death, but it is implausible to think that he has posthumously been made any happier thereby (or could have been, by virtue of anything else).

It is often said of meaningfulness that it is something worth living for, though, as the likes of Albert Camus and Joseph Heller have suggested, it can also be something worth dying for. Meaningful conditions are naturally understood to be able to provide reasons to die, since dying might have certain consequences that affect the significance of the life. Intuitively, sacrificing one's life could enhance its meaningfulness when done, say, in order to save one's children or to protect one's fellow soldiers and thereby advance a just cause such as protecting innocents from aggression.

In contrast, one's own happiness could never be worth dying for. Of course, there can be fates worse than death, such that dying might be welcome as a way to avoid one from undergoing substantial unhappiness. My point is rather that, unlike meaningfulness, realization of the positive good of one's own happiness, that is, pleasant experiences, cannot provide a reason for one to die.

4.6. When the value is preferable: bias towards the future ν lack of bias

Derek Parfit concocted a thought experiment that, when applied to happiness and meaning, reveals a striking difference in when most of us prefer these values to be realized (Parfit 1984, pp. 165–66). Imagine you have just woken up from a surgery and are suffering from a temporary bout of amnesia. Before you are able to remember who you are, you are told that you could be one of two people. You could be either (A) someone who experienced a great amount of pain yesterday or (B) someone who will experience a small amount of pain tomorrow. Most would prefer to be (A), even though (A)'s pain is larger. To Parfit, that indicates a 'bias toward the future' in the sense that we want our future to be as good as possible.

Notice that such a bias also arises with regard to pleasure. Suppose you are told that you could be either (A*) someone who experienced a great amount of pleasure yesterday or (B*) someone who will experience a smaller amount of pleasure tomorrow. Most would prefer to be (B*), even though (B*)'s pleasure is smaller than (A*)'s.

Now, some have pointed out that there are goods and bads for which we lack a bias towards the future, but no one has proposed a plausible comprehensive principle to account for all those that come with a bias and all those that do not. In the light of several thought experiments that I conduct below, I proffer and defend the theory that we have a bias towards the future with regard to happiness and unhappiness and that we lack such a bias with regard to meaningfulness and antimatter, that is, factors that reduce meaning in a life. Although this account of when we are inclined to have a bias towards the future will not *justify* the bias to someone who doubts that we should have it, it will indicate that certain arguments that have been explored as potential justifications of it are non-starters, clearing the way for a more promising attempt in the future.

First, then, Thomas Hurka has noted that we are disinclined to exhibit a bias towards the future with regard to certain non-experiential goods related to self-realization (Hurka 1993, pp. 60–61). Would you rather be (A#) someone who saved another person's life yesterday or (B#) someone who will help an old lady cross the street tomorrow? Most would prefer to be (A#) because the value is greater, even though the value of (B#) is in the future. Also, would you rather be (A-) someone who murdered someone in the past or (B-) someone who will tell a minor lie in the future? Most would rather be (B-), which against suggests a lack of bias towards the future. As an initial suggestion, then, perhaps we lack a bias

towards the future simply with regard to self-realization goods and bads, that is, the development or stunting of valuable aspects of our human nature, one of which is the capacity to help others for their sake.

However, consider the following counterexample of a good unrelated to self-realization for which we lack a bias towards the future. Suppose you are told that you could be either (A^\dagger) someone who has been widely recognized for having produced a masterpiece in the past or (B^\dagger) someone who will be only mildly recognized for having produced a mediocre poem in the future. Although there is self-realization in both cases, the good of recognition is beyond that of self-realization, and it is part of the explanation of why one would rather be (A^\dagger).

One might suggest that the recognition would be desirable only if it were in response to actions that one has in fact performed. And so one might be tempted to suggest that we lack a bias towards the future in cases of goods and bads logically dependent on actions we perform for their value or disvalue. That seems to capture the cases of help and recognition for creativity.

Here, though, is a counterexample to this tempting proposal (Brueckner and Fischer 1986, p. 216). Suppose you are informed that you might be either (A^\wedge) someone who was systematically humiliated behind your back, for example, by virtue of a long string of romantic affairs that your spouse had unbeknownst to you, or (B^\wedge) someone who will be humiliated to only a small degree in the future, for example, your spouse will flirt with someone else at a party. Most would prefer to be (B^\wedge), which suggests a lack of bias towards the future. However, since no action would be involved on your part, it cannot be disvalue logically dependent on actions of yours that explain the lack of bias.

Another proposal is that we have a bias towards the future with respect to isolated goods and bads such as our own pleasure and pain, but lack such a bias in the context of interaction with others. That would seem to account for the lack of bias in the cases of helping others, being recognized by them, and being humiliated by them. All three cases are ones involving some kind of interpersonal engagement.

However, it appears that we also lack a bias towards the future with regard to certain isolated goods. Would you rather be (A') someone who created a masterpiece in the past (that I suppose went unrecognized by others) or (B') someone who will create a mediocre poem in the future? Most would prefer to be (A') because the value is greater, albeit in the past and without anyone else being involved.

My suggestion is that we lack a bias towards the future with respect to goods for which it makes sense to feel great pride or esteem and bads for

which it is reasonable to feel shame. Helping, harming, being recognized for great works, being humiliated by others and creating are all conditions for which it is reasonable to feel either esteem or shame. Note that my claim is not that it is the bare fact of *feeling* esteem or shame that explains when we have a bias towards the future. It is rather the *appropriateness* of these emotions in reaction to certain conditions that does the work. To see this, imagine that along with being told you could be one of two people, you were offered a pill to remove any unpleasant feeling you might have about being one or the other. Knowing you would not actually feel shame, you might still prefer not to be someone who has done a very shameful deed in the past.

In Section 4.4 I noted that meaningful conditions are typically ones that warrant great esteem, whereas antimatter warrants shame. Hence, my proposal is that conditions of meaning and antimatter are those for which we are inclined to lack a bias towards the future, whereas conditions of happiness and unhappiness, namely, pleasant and unpleasant experiences, are those for which we do have such a bias. Bias towards the future is another, key respect in which these two values differ.

If these intuitions about when we exhibit or lack a bias towards the future are correct, then a number of arguments philosophers have examined in search of a justification for the bias are misguided. For instance, some have addressed whether it might not be the passage of time or the direction of causation that makes it reasonable to have a bias towards the future (Parfit 1984, pp. 168–86). However, such general metaphysical considerations are clearly out of place, for they will not discriminate between goods and bads for which we have a bias and those for which we do not. The reason to exhibit a bias must be contoured to the particular dis/values involved. I do not yet have an argument for believing it not only to be reasonable to have a bias with regard to the experientialist goods of happiness and bads of unhappiness, but also to be unreasonable to have it with regard to the estimable goods of meaningfulness and shameful bads of antimatter. However, the search for one would be the next logical step to take, if my argumentation is correct.

5. Conclusion

I conclude this chapter with a brief summary of the discussion. I began by providing *prima facie* evidence for the idea that happiness and meaning are distinct not only conceptually but also substantially. I then stipulated a rough definitional essence of each value that appeared to underwrite the intuitions of their distinctness, with happiness being

a function of pleasure and meaning being characterized by creativity and beneficence. Next, I spelled out six major differences between the two goods, arguing that: the bearer of happiness is largely experiential, whereas that of meaning is principally volitional; the logical conditions for happiness are intrinsic to the bearer (i.e., are simply experiential), whereas some sources of meaning are extrinsic (e.g., can be the causes or results of a person's action); the role of luck can be complete when it comes to attaining happiness, but in principle can never be complete with regard to obtaining a meaningful life (which requires performing actions under one's control); the appropriate attitude to have towards happiness seems to be to want it (a pleasant experience) to continue, whereas that for meaning is rather one of great esteem or admiration (for what has been done); the time when happiness is possible is only during one's life (when there is the capacity for experience), whereas meaning can obtain after one has died (as the consequences of actions can affect their significance); and the time when happiness is preferable is invariably in the future, even if it is small, whereas most would prefer a more meaningful past to a less meaningful future. I hope that those who initially deemed happiness and meaning to be more similar in content than I have suggested might now be inclined to change their minds; given these six value-theoretic differences between pleasant experiences, on the one hand, and actions such as creativity and beneficence, on the other, 'happiness' and 'meaningfulness' are two terms with which it would be useful to track them.

Acknowledgements

For written comments on a previous draft that have helped me to clarify my thoughts and make them more compelling, I am grateful to Lisa Bortolotti and, especially, to Stephen Kershner and Pedro Tabensky.

Notes

1. For an exception, see Martin (1993).
2. For recent examples, see Tabensky (2003) and Kraut (2007). It might be plausible to think that well-being, namely, what makes a life go well, is largely objective, but to deny that happiness is, a view that is expressed in Wolf (1997a).
3. For a longer list of such persons, see Belliotti (2005, p. 129).
4. For discussion, see Metz (2003b, pp. 61–67).
5. For just a few, representative examples, see Nozick (1981, pp. 594–612); Kekes (1986); Taylor (1987); Singer (1996, pp. 112–22); Wolf (1997a); Cottingham (2003, pp. 18–31); Metz (2003b); Baggini (2004, pp. 99–115).

6. This distinction is implicit in much of the discussion about 'non-intrinsic final value'. See, for example, Korsgaard (1983); Kagan (1998); Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2000).
7. It is somewhat common to note that the effects of an action can affect its degree of meaning. However, Brogaard and Smith (2005, pp. 450–53) are one of the few to discuss the way that an action's cause can affect it as well.

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