

# Happiness and the Metaphysics of Affect

Daniel M. Haybron

Philosophy, Saint Louis University

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

It is risky to focus very intently on words in doing philosophy, as the vagaries of one's dialect can easily obscure the realities one hopes to understand. But insights are not infrequently embedded even in the offhand expressions of everyday language. The popular English locution, "happy and healthy," may be an example. Whatever it refers to, people—English speakers, anyway—tend to think it quite important, so that they'll often say things like "I just want my kids to be happy and healthy." Indeed, this frequently reduces simply to "I just want my kids to be happy." If happiness alone is that important, then happiness and health must be really important. It is doubtful that in making such assertions many of us mean to be committing ourselves to the idea that these things literally exhaust the constituents of a good life, just that the other bits like not being a serial killer don't require mentioning. Moreover, the fact that 'and healthy' seems not to be redundant suggests that whatever happiness is thought to be, it isn't necessarily the same thing as well-being, even if 'happiness' can take such a meaning in other contexts. What is being wished for, beyond health, is very likely something to do with mental states: happiness in a psychological sense of the term.

Here I want to focus on what the suggested parallel with health tells us about how people conceive of happiness: namely, as something belonging to the category of what I'll call *functional conditions*, or "conditions" for short. Just as ascribing health to someone is saying something about their condition, so, I will argue, is ascribing happiness to someone. If this is right, then what has struck many as a puzzling feature of the emotional state theory of happiness I have defended in earlier work, namely that happiness is substantially a dispositional phenomenon, may not be so puzzling after all (Haybron, 2005, 2008b, 2010). For dispositionality is an essential feature of conditions, at least in the sense that health is a condition; for instance, to be healthy is at least partly to be disposed to function well, not to drop dead of a stroke, and so on. Likewise, to be happy is at least partly to be disposed to respond favorably to things on one's life. Put another way, the concept of happiness, like the concept of health, is what we might call a *condition assessment concept*.

In what follows I will, first, rehearse the essentials of the theory of happiness in question and the puzzle it raises: why think happiness is dispositional, and not merely an occurrent state? To explain this we shall need to introduce a distinction in the metaphysics of states, namely the idea of a condition, which I am not sure has been elaborated previously. To motivate the distinction and illustrate its importance in the present context we imagine an artificial system, a security robot that monitors and responds to threats in the environment. To characterize this system in relation to its purpose we need concepts having to do with various aspects of its state, including its condition—for example, whether it is on high alert.

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to participants at the conference on Well-Being and Affective States in Clermont-Ferrand for comments on an earlier version of this material.

The upshot is that the emotional state theory of happiness, dispositions and all, is well-motivated, capturing an important and natural aspect of a person's psychological state: her emotional condition. As with the security system, a person's emotional condition amounts to a summary evaluation of her circumstances relative to the goals that structure her makeup: are things going well for her? This underwrites the use of happiness as a convenient, nonevaluative proxy for well-being—a relatively simple way to tell how someone is doing. But happiness has far more than a merely informational role: our emotional conditions are centrally important for human well-being and functioning, among other things amounting to a person-level control mechanism that complements more widely-acknowledged implements of control such as values and conscious deliberation. Because our emotional states are constantly, and largely automatically, updated with a far larger stream of information than we can consciously process, and because their evolution is only partly subject to voluntary control though also sensitive to conscious reflection and effort, they help to enforce key priorities that arise from a combination of innate endowments and a lifetime's experience, such as a need for friendship and love, and while changeable through reflection, are also not so voluntaristic that they are easily gamed by clever rationalizations, self-deception and so forth.

The paper concludes with some reflections about the import of these points for the empirical study of personality and well-being, both of which have deficiencies owing to a failure to distinguish functional conditions from mere events in the emotional realm. Our emotional lives are not merely a series of transient responses to stimuli, as is widely supposed; like life satisfaction attitudes, they concern the broad character of our circumstances, and may indeed offer a better gauge of those than our explicit judgments. And a state's being dispositional does not suffice to make it a trait, as is widely supposed in social and personality psychology, with the result that personality measures are sometimes confounded with happiness measures. And "happiness" measures typically fail even to attempt to measure central aspects of happiness.

At the core of this paper are several distinctions in the metaphysics of states and events that, to the best of my knowledge, are novel. Presumably the arguments ramify for other questions in metaphysics, but my aim here is mainly to bring a bit of clarity to some issues in the psychology of affect, so the discussion will be fairly rough and tentative. I regard the framework sketched below as a first approximation, not a finished product—but hopefully good enough to sustain my claims about the nature and significance of happiness.

## 2. Background: the emotional state theory of happiness

The theory in question, the emotional state theory of happiness, was introduced as an alternative to the then-dominant views of happiness in the long-term psychological sense, hedonistic and life satisfaction accounts. The former identifies happiness with a person's balance of pleasant versus unpleasant experiences, while the latter identifies it with a judgment-like attitude of being satisfied with one's life as a whole, or with one's life as it is these days.<sup>2</sup>

In its basic or default form, the emotional state account reduces happiness to a person's emotions and moods. The basic idea is that happiness is roughly the opposite of anxiety and depression, these being prominent forms of unhappiness. The view differs from hedonism, first, in that emotions and moods are rich, deep affective states with various aspects—some of them non-conscious—and are not themselves reducible to experiences. Second, while emotional pleasures tend to be the most important for our hedonic states, they do not exhaust the hedonic realm.

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<sup>2</sup> For reviews of the literature on happiness, see (Besser, 2021; Haybron, 2020). Unless otherwise noted, the characterization of the emotional state view in this section is based on the discussion in (Haybron, 2008b).

Many sensory and “notional” or cognitive pleasures—e.g., approving of a pretty house one passes—seem not in any ordinary sense to be emotional states. Intuitively, they don’t impact our *emotional conditions*. Nor do they seem to affect how happy we are, as illustrated for instance by the intense pleasures of sex, which notoriously can be emotionless, leaving us cold even as they feel good. The distinction in question is quite familiar from both common sense and philosophical and spiritual traditions, where it is widely taken to be an important sign of character what manner of things we allow to get to us, upset us, get us down, raise or lower our spirits, and so forth. Not so for the things that merely give us pleasure or pain, like honey and hangnails. This distinction is central to Stoic and Buddhist practice, which focuses on the management of our emotional conditions, but expressly let us off the hook regarding mere pleasures and pains. To take a Buddhist example, when pierced by an arrow, the pain is inevitable; but the suffering is optional, and our task is to learn to avoid the emotional disturbance. Aristotle equally took our emotional conditions to be centrally important, though certain sorts of emotional disturbance, like fitting anger, are not to be avoided but actually cultivated. On the emotional state theory, these are all points about the things that make us happy or unhappy; they cannot plausibly be read as claims about pleasure. (Aristotle had a good deal to say about the role of “pleasure” in virtue and hence *eudaimonia* or well-being, but it is clear he should say emotional states; like most commentators he simply conflates these categories. He certainly is not suggesting that virtuous activity is completed by a pleasing bodily tingle. If the emotional state theory is correct, then what is ordinarily said about the role of pleasure in Aristotelian *eudaimonia* is really about the importance of *happiness* for well-being.)

The foregoing distinction is what I’ve called the central/peripheral distinction, where only central affective states—roughly, moods and emotions—constitute our emotional conditions, and in turn happiness. I argued that central affective states are all “mood-constituting,” so that one’s mood is thereby altered by an emotion, say, so that we could just as well speak of mood-related affect. I’ve left it open whether the central/peripheral distinction is merely one of degree, so it is possible that even peripheral affects play some role in happiness, and our emotional conditions, though centrality in any event is distinct from degree of pleasantness (e.g., orgasm).

Some form of emotional state theory has been endorsed by a number of commentators.<sup>3</sup> The variant I have defended, however, adds the idea that happiness is substantially a *dispositional* affair. This figures partly in how I conceive of central affective states, which I take to have dispositional elements that are important for their contribution to how happy one is. When feeling anxious, for example, one is thereby disposed to respond to events in ways characteristic of anxiety—more fearfully, with less enjoyment, greater vigilance, etc. It is partly by virtue of these dispositions that one is less happy when anxious. To this picture I added a further element, *mood propensities*—that is, one’s (appropriately grounded) disposition to experience certain moods and emotions. When depressed, for instance, one may at a given moment be in a good mood, yet

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<sup>3</sup> Some examples appear to include (Badhwar, 2014; Becker, 2012; Besser-Jones, 2013; Kauppinen, 2013; Klausen, 2015, 2019; Lazari-Radek & Singer, 2014; May, 2015; Raibley, 2012; Rodogno, Krause-Jensen, & Ashcroft, 2016; Rossi, 2018; Rossi & Tappolet, 2016; Sizer, 2010; Tiberius, 2018; Visak, 2015). Philosophers who have endorsed alternative conceptions of happiness, typically hedonism or life satisfaction views, since 2008 include (Blackson, 2009; Feldman, 2010; Goldman, 2016, 2019; Heathwood, 2020; S. Morris, 2011; Mulligan, 2016; Skidelsky, 2017), and perhaps (Suikkanen, 2011). Goldman’s view is not easily categorized but appears to be a form of life satisfaction theory. Suikkanen’s theory identifies happiness with a hypothetical, idealized life satisfaction judgment, and might most charitably be read as an account of well-being rather than happiness in the psychological sense. Vitrano’s life satisfaction theory seems pretty clearly to use ‘happiness’ in its well-being sense, and so is not a theory of happiness in the present sense (Vitrano, 2010, 2014).

still prone to slide back into a flat or depressed mood. One remains depressed—unhappy—by virtue of that propensity alone. In a later paper I allowed that we might substitute the categorical bases of mood propensities for the dispositions themselves—e.g., perhaps one is more or less happy by virtue of an unconscious mood state that manifests itself via one’s mood propensity (Haybron, 2010; Hill, 2007). Little hangs on this question, however, so I’ll stick with the original framing.

### 3. HAPPINESS as a condition assessment concept

#### 3.1. The problem of dispositionality

Perhaps the main source of resistance to the present theory of happiness, even among partisans of an emotional state approach, is the role it accords to dispositional states.<sup>4</sup> It might be thought, for instance, that happiness is purely a function of how you actually feel; whereas how you are disposed to feel is simply a different sort of question. Happiness is fundamentally an occurrent phenomenon, the thought goes, with dispositions being either irrelevant or counting only insofar as they are aspects of occurrent emotions and moods.

There is a simple response to such worries: namely, to observe that dispositionality is likewise a central characteristic of the most widely employed conception of happiness in research outside of philosophy, the life satisfaction view. Indeed, life satisfaction may be purely dispositional—essentially a cognitive counterpart to a pure “mood propensity” theory of happiness. It certainly cannot require that any occurrent states be taking place whilst one is happy or unhappy, since the occasions on which we are thinking about how our lives are going are few and likely far between. To conceive of life satisfaction as an occurrent mental state would yield a theory of happiness with grave “attitude scarcity” problems whereby most of us are rarely on the happiness-unhappiness scale at all—a result that is both deeply counterintuitive and vitiates the apparent significance of happiness. While life satisfaction theories have come in for strenuous criticism of late, leaving few defenders in the current philosophical literature, the problems have little to do with their dispositionality.<sup>5</sup> As far as that goes, the approach is plenty intuitive: *prima facie*, the idea that happiness consists in being satisfied with your life—for instance in being disposed to judge your life favorably—is quite plausible, to the extent that empirical researchers routinely assume such an account without argument, evidently oblivious to the philosophical objections.

While theorizing about the nature of emotional conditions such as depression is less prominent in philosophy, it is very plausible—and indeed is part of the argument for an emotional state view—that depression is substantially dispositional. To be depressed is not merely to feel bad, but for one’s entire psychological stance to be altered for the worse. And no one supposes that your depression has resolved if, given the time of day or a particularly agreeable situation, you happen to feel good at the moment. You’re still depressed, even when you don’t feel it at all. On the emotional state theory, depression just is a pronounced form of unhappiness, and this is not an unintuitive result. Contrary intuitions regarding happiness, then, may owe something to the particular connotations of ‘happiness’, including residual influence from the well-known history of philosophical work using the term in a hedonistic vein. Perhaps it would help to reflect for a bit on life satisfaction views before assessing the emotional state theory.

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<sup>4</sup> E.g., (Heathwood, 2020; Hill, 2007; Klausen, 2015; S. Morris, 2011; Raibley, 2012; Rossi, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> The classic articulation of a life satisfaction view in the recent philosophical literature is (Sumner, 1996); see also references in the previous note. Criticisms include (Feldman, 2008, 2010; Haybron, 2007, 2008b, 2011).

Even among commentators sympathetic to the basic emotional state framework, the inclusion of dispositional states has gotten a mixed reception. This is a bit surprising since the basic argument for such a view rests heavily on the failure of hedonism to take the nonconscious aspects of happiness, including dispositionality, seriously in thinking about happiness. If one favors an emotional state theory over hedonism, then hedonism is liable to seem the odd man out, as both emotional state and life satisfaction theories conceive of happiness as a matter of one's orientation or stance toward one's life, whereas hedonism conspicuously does not, reducing happiness instead to a series of purely experiential events. To some extent, the worries about dispositionality may owe to a residual allegiance to the venerable hedonistic paradigm.

While dispositionality *per se* seems to me a positive feature of emotional state theories, and not an objection to them, there seem to me real worries in the neighborhood. Specifically, the mixed character of the theory, whereby happiness has both occurrent and dispositional aspects, raises questions about how well the various constituents of happiness hang together. Is it just a grue-some assemblage of states rather than a genuine kind? Why not follow the lead of a life satisfaction theory and maintain that happiness is entirely dispositional? While I hope prior argument has made the naturalness of happiness as a kind seem plausible, greater clarity would be helpful.

### 3.2. Condition assessment concepts

The key lies in a better understanding of what it means to say that happiness is a matter of a person's emotional *condition*, as the emotional state theory was partly defended by adverting to commonsense intuitions about what impacts a person's emotional condition. (As has been noted, the view might accordingly have been more aptly called an "emotional condition" theory of happiness, but that term has unhelpful connotations. It is plausible, at any rate, that a person's emotional state is equivalent to her emotional condition.) It would be desirable to have an established theory in metaphysics on the idea of a condition, as opposed say to that of an event or state. But as far as I know there isn't one, so I will sketch such an account here. As I mean only to shed light on the nature of a particular sort of condition, happiness, the discussion will be somewhat crude, and doubtless will need refinement in order to amount to a proper contribution to the literature in metaphysics.

Let's return to the locution, 'happy and healthy', with which we began. In earlier work I noted that this conjunction signals a likeness of kind between happiness and health. In particular, both appear to involve what we might call *condition assessment concepts* (CACs). Such concepts serve to assess how things stand with functionally organized systems. Are they disposed to function properly? How are they presently configured to function? As noted above, the concept of health seems largely or wholly to concern the individual's disposition: a healthy person is able to function well, is not prone to develop serious problems like a heart attack, and so forth. While the exact contours of the notion of health are much-disputed, it is at least strained to regard, say, an episode of indigestion, or soreness or swelling from a stubbed toe, as a decline in health. In fact they may indicate *good* health, being healthy responses to the circumstances.<sup>6</sup> These points

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<sup>6</sup> In earlier work I suggested that the concept of well-being is a CAC (Haybron, 2008b, p. 142). That may be correct depending on the nature of the concept; we sometimes seem to understand well-being along the lines of a CAC, as assessing a person's overall condition ("How are you?"); but well-being might alternatively—or via a different concept of prudential value—be understood as merely a summary of events, as in hedonistic theories, and it may be that the idea of your life going well for you similarly centers on events rather than one's condition. But in that discussion I employed a broader understanding of a CAC, as simply assessing the practical significance of a person's situation,

noted, I am happy to allow that this notion of health might just be one among others given the diversity of practical concerns that arise in healthcare contexts. A healthy pain response might still merit treatment to ease the patient's suffering.

Used-car buyers and sellers routinely speak explicitly of a car's condition, here employing a CAC appropriate to automobiles: how do things stand with the car? Is it able to serve the purposes for which such vehicles are built? (At least, relative to the baseline set by non-defective new instances of the model—there's only so much you could expect from a 70's-era Peugeot.<sup>7</sup>) Can one depend on the engine, transmission and other parts to work properly? Cars also serve aesthetic purposes, so the body, paint and interior should also be relatively unmarred if it is to be able to serve those ends. Note that not all car problems speak to the car's condition: if the engine is knocking due to bad fuel, that in no way bears on whether the car is in excellent condition; if the engine is generally prone to knocking, that's a reason to downgrade its condition.

With these initial examples in hand, I propose the following definition as a starting point, doubtless needing refinement:

*functional condition =df that part of the state of a system consisting at least partly of the variable dispositional properties that influence its functioning, or the processes, parameter settings or other states that ground those properties*

Since 'condition' is can be used variously, it seems desirable to have a more precise term; hence, "functional" condition, though I am not sure the modifier will prove entirely apt, say if there turns out to be a more general metaphysical category at issue. As the definition indicates, functional conditions are a kind of state. They may necessarily be composed of multiple states, just as a person's health consists of a variety of states: cardiovascular, digestive, renal, neurological, etc. This is one reason it is often helpful to employ 'emotional condition' rather than 'emotional state': the latter is ambiguous, between particular emotions, moods etc. and a person's overall emotional condition.

Without getting too far into the deep waters of the event/state distinction, we might at least venture this much: conditions are not events; nor are they conjunctions of events. Intuitively, an event is a "happening," and essentially involves temporal structure. When a car engine knocks, that's an event: a knocking, and these can naturally be counted ("it's knocking right now, for the second time today"). When a car is in fair condition because its engine tends to knock, that's not an event, and it isn't readily dated or counted ("it's fair-conditioning right now, for the second time today").

To use a more pertinent example: pleasures, that is pleasant experiences, are events, and can naturally be referred to in the imperfective aspect: "She was experiencing a thrill of pleasure." (For how long, and when did it start?) To be in a certain condition—for instance, to be happy—is not merely for an event to be occurring: "She was happy" has no essential temporal structure and cannot similarly be rendered in the imperfective without loss of meaning. Note that "She was feeling happy" is not at all equivalent, since one can feel happy without being happy, and this is a core feature of the emotional state view. Again, I do not wish to venture too deeply

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e.g. as warranting concern or intervention. That now seems a mistake since even summaries of events like hedonic experience can serve that purpose, though they aren't about anyone's condition.

<sup>7</sup> I'm told they've improved considerably since the 1976 504, which I mention for no particular reason.



into weeds best navigated by metaphysicians, but it should be plain enough that conditions are not events.<sup>8</sup>

In earlier work I suggested that hedonism about happiness involves a category mistake (Haybron, 2001, 2008b). Even without all the details sorted out, we can now see why: hedonism mistakes a functional condition—the condition of being happy—for a mere conjunction of events—a series of pleasant experiences. Emotional state and life satisfaction theories at least are talking, at some level, about the right sort of thing—roughly, one’s emotional versus cognitive orientation toward one’s life, which essentially includes how one is disposed to respond, emotionally or cognitively, to things.<sup>9</sup> If this is right, then hedonism isn’t merely false; it’s off-topic.<sup>10</sup>

### 3.3. Kinds of functional conditions

The examples of health and cars illustrate one sort of condition: what we might call the *functional soundness* of a system, namely whether it is disposed to function properly. But many functional systems introduce a further type of condition owing to the fact that they can reconfigure themselves to function differently depending on the circumstances. I will call this, for reasons that will soon be clearer, a system’s *operational status*. Happiness—more generally, a person’s emotional condition—has to do with a person’s operational status, emotionally speaking. That’s not entirely intuitive, so let’s work our way to that idea, starting with simpler examples.

Again, a car. Many vehicles with four-wheel drive can operate in either of two modes (to simplify): 2- or 4-wheel drive. Depending on which drive mode you’ve selected, the engine will engage the wheels differently. The condition of the system varies depending on the drive mode: it is disposed to function differently in one mode versus another. Admittedly, the term ‘condition’ is not typically used in this context, though that may reflect the well-entrenched employment of that term to talk about the basic condition of a vehicle—whether it is in good or poor condition, etc. As well, it is easy enough to speak directly of the car’s “drive mode.”

The language of conditions becomes more apt when we turn to systems that, like human beings, are equipped with what amount to evaluative mechanisms, so that the system’s configuration varies with the quality of the conditions it faces: is it disposed to deal with good conditions, bad conditions, or...? To illustrate, let’s consider a simplified analogue of a person, a robotic security system whose “emotional” repertoire consists entirely of varying degrees of anxiety (not entirely unlike the robot, Robot, from the television series, *Lost in Space*; so let’s name it Robot). Its job is to protect a warehouse storing valuable goods for major threats like burglars and minor ones like pests. As it scans the environment over a typical night, it detects the occasional cockroach or other insect, or sometimes a misidentified piece of litter, and scoops it up or dispatches it with a laser. A single insect is a trivial matter: an utterly pedestrian negative that gives no reason for concern about the overall situation. It thus merits nothing more than a quick, focused, point response to deal with it; the robot does so and resumes its business as before, at its

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<sup>8</sup> I am grateful to Eric Marcus for guidance on these matters, though I am not sure he would agree with my remarks here; for a helpful discussion of the event/state distinction, see (Marcus, 2012). It seems to me that whatever might distinguish states from events, the distinction is still clearer between conditions and events.

<sup>9</sup> I am simplifying: life satisfaction may have affective and conative aspects as well.

<sup>10</sup> Feldman’s “attitudinal hedonism” about happiness is not obviously guilty of this charge, but only because it is not clearly an instance of hedonism, and in crucial respects more closely resembles the life satisfaction view (Feldman, 2010; Haybron, 2008b, p. 65). There is some plausibility, for instance, to the idea that one is happy to the extent that one is pleased with things in one’s life. But it is also intuitively plausible that to be pleased with things is at least partly to be disposed toward them in certain ways, so that the concept of attitudinal pleasure may in fact be a CAC.

modest baseline level of vigilance (intense monitoring consumes limited battery power and raises the risk of false alarms). Call this a Type-1 response: a transient response to a specific item or event.

Suppose Robot detects a break-in. This is a bad situation requiring a broad-based response: sound the alarm! Alert the police, lock down anything that isn't already secured, and try to frighten off or capture the intruder or intruders. The robot shifts from baseline (low-alert) to high-alert ("high anxiety") mode, configured to bring all its resources to bear to protect the warehouse. It scans the environment intently, and small anomalies that might normally be ignored are now treated as threats. Robot remains on high-alert for some time, even after police have come and gone. But gradually it shifts to lower levels of readiness until finally resuming its baseline low-alert mode, where it remains until another intrusion is detected. Call this a Type-2 response: a broad-based, sustained response to the quality of the present situation.

There is more to the story. (Let's assume that pests can be controlled individually and never warrant high alert.) This robot monitors not only the immediate situation, but also the general threat level it is facing these days. If there's been a rash of intrusions in recent weeks, that suggests that the environment is generally hostile these days. Remaining on elevated alert is costly and increases false alarms, so that isn't practical. Instead, the robot can adjust the gain on its mechanisms for detecting threats—and/or determining how to respond to apparent threats—so that they are more sensitive: it takes less to put the system into high-alert mode. Again, though, this is not an optimal configuration when risks are low, so if things have been quiet for some time, the robot dials down the gain, reducing its propensity to go into high-alert mode, sounding the alarm and so forth. We'll call this a Type-3 response: altering the system's preparedness to deal with concerns that may not be live at the moment, but are apt to become so given the general circumstances facing the system.

Security personnel for the warehouse may periodically inquire about the robot's status—in the above terminology, its operational status—to see whether anything is amiss. "What is its condition?" Is it on high alert—"condition red"—indicating a possible break-in? Is it on heightened readiness, suggesting that there may be a higher-than-usual risk of break-ins or a possible vulnerability needing attention?

This framework is quite general and might apply to a wide range of functionally organized systems. Military units, for instance, can instantiate all three types of response, including Type-3 responses, as in the "readiness condition" of a warship. When faced with peacetime conditions, a ship may operate in peacetime cruising condition; in wartime conditions, when hostilities are imminent, the condition may shift to general quarters, with all hands at battle stations, poised to engage in combat operations.

When the health or functional soundness of a system like Robot are not at issue, questions about its "condition" concern, not its Type-1 responses, which are merely passing episodes, but its Type-2 and -3 responses. Both types of response involve the system's disposition to function, but there is an important difference between them: Type-3 responses are *purely* dispositional, having to do with how the system is disposed to function, while Type-2 responses are also occurrent, involving its functioning at the time as well as its dispositions. So to speak, it "feels" anxious, and this anxiety primes it to respond appropriately to its environment, being more prone to assess things negatively, notice threats, etc. It is operating in anxiety mode. As the gerund 'operating' signals, this aspect of its condition is event-like even if it essentially has dispositional components and so is not merely an event. The system's operational status, then, has two aspects—regarding Type-3 responses, what we may call its *readiness condition*, and regarding



Type-2 responses, its *operating mode*.<sup>11</sup> When the robot is sounding the alarm, then, we can say its operating mode is “high alert”; and when it is set to high sensitivity to threats, its readiness condition is something along the lines of “primed for high alert.” In some cases it may be operating in low-alert, relaxed mode, while primed for high-alert. Let’s call this a “fragile” form of low-alert mode; whereas in “robust” low-alert mode it is also set for low sensitivity to threats.

I have tried to keep terminology as close to familiar usage as possible, but as we are dealing with a number of distinctions that have not often been made explicit the jargon is bound to be a chore to navigate. Where feasible, I will refer generically to a system’s “functional condition” to simplify the exposition. Before returning to more familiar shores—the case of human happiness—let’s briefly summarize the distinctions introduced so far:

*Functional condition* =df that part of the state of a system consisting at least partly of the variable dispositional properties that influence its functioning, or the processes, parameter settings or other states that ground those properties

1. *Functional soundness*: the disposition of the system to function properly or otherwise
2. *Operational status*: that aspect of a system’s condition that determines how it is presently configured to function
  - a. *Readiness condition*: the system’s disposition to function in certain modes rather than others
  - b. *Operating mode*: the mode in which the system is currently operating, which (*inter alia*) disposes it to respond to situations in certain ways

Again, for Robot: its functional soundness amounts to its “health”—what someone looking to buy it would want to know about it; is it in good or poor condition? But when deploying it as a security device, using it partly to inform us about how things are going in its environment, we are typically interested in its operational status, which tells us what alert mode it is in—its Type-2 states or operating mode—or disposed to assume—its Type-3 states or readiness condition. When it is both on low alert and disposed to remain on low alert—it is robustly on low alert—then the robot is, in its sad and uninspiring way, *happy*. Such is the life of Robot.

### 3.4. Applying the framework to happiness

The terminology is a bit complex, but Robot is not, particularly. No great feat of engineering is required to build such a device, and indeed many examples of similar designs must exist in fact, because this sort of functional organization is an obvious way to build systems that need to respond adaptively depending on the quality of the circumstances they face. It would be very odd were human psychology not able to operate with at least the sophistication of our humble robot.

And of course, even casual observation of human life makes clear that it does. Returning to our primary concern, happiness, the contours of the emotional state theory should already be apparent in the robot example. But it will help to spell it out. The distinction between Type-1 and Type-2/3 responses in the robot corresponds to the distinction between “mere pleasures” and happiness:

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<sup>11</sup> Note that a system’s readiness condition could also be sensibly referred to as an operating mode, so the terminology is not as clear as might be desired.

- Type-1 (point responses): peripheral affective states (mere sensory and notional pleasures and unpleasures)
- Type-2 (operating mode): central affective states (moods and emotions)
- Type-3 (readiness condition): mood propensities

To be angry, for instance, is to be operating in “angry mode,” whereas a different but related question is whether one is poised to switch into angry mode, even when not already angry. (E.g., because one is irritable or prone to irritability.) Whereas to be in a serene mood is to be operating in “serene mode”; and so forth. To be enjoying a cracker, by contrast, is just to be experiencing pleasure in the eating of a cracker, with no direct bearing on your functional condition. To be happy, on this way of putting things, is to be operating broadly enough in positive vs. negative modes, and to be disposed to operate that way; it is for one’s operational status, emotionally speaking—that is, one’s emotional condition—to be broadly enough favorable.<sup>12</sup> At least, that is what robust happiness amounts to; one can possess a lesser, fragile kind of happiness when configured in a way that favors negative operating modes—that is, moods and emotions—while lucky enough not to have them triggered. For instance, during a period of generalized anxiety disorder when one is not, at the moment, anxious, but feels relaxed.

While dispositionality is a hallmark of Type-2/3 states, and of happiness, recall that Type-2 states—central affective states—are substantially occurrent states, at least in the typical case. And here we can see the answer to our original puzzle, about how happiness could be essentially dispositional, but also partly occurrent: dispositions are often *implemented* by occurrent states. The extra vigilance characteristic of fear, for instance, is part and parcel of the occurrent state of being afraid. The feeling is (or can be) what *makes* you quicker to notice threats. If I annoy my cat, he may shift quite visibly into angry mode; i.e., he becomes angry. Another false move and I’m liable to get zapped. Dispositions are essential to this story, but the most salient dispositions can’t enter the picture if nothing is actually happening: the animal must be conscious, operating in some fashion such that he is ready at any moment to zap me if I provoke him further. If happiness were a purely dispositional affair its effects on our mental states and behavior would be far remoter and weaker.<sup>13</sup>

This fact is what gives rise to one of the objections to life satisfaction theories of happiness: as a purely dispositional state—or at least as a state that requires little or nothing occurrent to obtain—it is fairly “causally inert” (Haybron, 2008b). Whether you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of your life, for instance, may have no bearing on anything if it only comes to light when you are prompted to offer a judgment. Emotions and moods, by contrast, involve a *lot* of internal activity, enabling them to play a profound and pervasive role in regulating one’s other inner states and outward behavior. Likewise, when a robot sounds the alarm, there is far more going on than merely setting parameters. A robot needn’t be functioning at all for the latter to happen, just as you might switch a truck into four-wheel drive mode when the engine is off. This is why I have claimed that a person can be happy, in a reduced and fragile way, even with a

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<sup>12</sup> Here as before I leave open what exactly the threshold is for counting as happy, though the bar is plainly higher than a bare majority of positive versus negative.

<sup>13</sup> It bears emphasizing that dispositions can be distinguished at many levels, and it may indeed be possible to distinguish the dispositions constitutive of happiness as relatively “occurrent” dispositions in the sense that they are closely linked to occurrent states and processes. At the other end of the spectrum, highly idealized states such as Suikkanen’s idealized form of life satisfaction can also be regarded as dispositions, but of a sort far removed from the actual flow of events: one is disposed to be satisfied, say, if fully informed, reflective, etc.

negative mood propensity: *one's actual moods and emotions do the lion's share of determining how one is presently disposed to function.* Mood propensity is part of happiness, but a secondary part. Ironically, there is a way in which this view takes happiness to be less a state of passivity than it is usually taken to be: happiness is not just dispositional, but also consists in occurrent states or processes of emotional functioning. This emotional activity underwrites various dispositions, but is no less a form of activity for all that.

To illuminate further the distinctions in question, imagine a simplified state space representation of one dimension of a person's emotional condition: level of anxiety. The possible states range in a line from zero anxiety to extreme anxiety, and its current level of anxiety is represented by a point on that line—think of it as a rolling ball, resting atop the line—whereas its propensity to varying levels of anxiety is represented by valleys and hills along that line, the valleys being attractors: states toward which the system tends to gravitate; the deeper the valley the stronger the disposition, and the wider it is the larger the range of initial states that tend to lead to it. In a case of generalized anxiety disorder there may be a very wide, deep valley in the region of high anxiety. But at the moment, let's suppose, the person is feely pretty relaxed, having just gotten a massage. The ball is resting in the low-anxiety region of the line; this is close to the attractor basin (valley) for anxiety, without much of a hill separating it, and so is not a very stable state. But it has a bit of stability, and for the time one is in “relaxed mode,” with the according propensities, which we can represent by imagining that the ball has a bit of weight and thus makes a small depression in the line: a little valley. Were this single dimension of anxiety the only aspect of the person's emotional condition, we could say that her happiness is defined by the shape of this state space—the hills and valleys of the line—and the position of the ball. That is, her mood propensity and her current mood.

I have left it open whether peripheral affective states involve the same mechanisms as central affective states, and left it open as well whether the central/peripheral distinction is merely one of degree. But for illustrative purposes let's assume that this anxiety system implements peripheral affects as well—fleeing concerns, say, as when having a slightly unpleasant experience of noticing an ordinary insect. If the central/peripheral distinction is sharp, then such an experience would register as an effectively weightless dot on the line, with no impact on the line's shape—i.e., on one's emotional condition. The dot comes and goes, and that's it, as far as one's emotional state is concerned. But little hangs on whether the central/peripheral distinction is sharp, or merely a matter of degree, for in any case the theory requires degrees of centrality, with for instance profound anxiety being more central than shallow. In terms of our simplified model, the centrality of an affective state corresponds at least partly to the size of the valley it creates.

In arguing that happiness has this sort of structure, I am of course committing to various empirical claims. In earlier work I noted that my claims about the distinctive functions of different types of affect such as mood do appear to be consonant with relevant empirical findings.<sup>14</sup> But the basic framework is highly abstract and theoretical, a conceptual mapping of a sensible and plausible way for many systems, including creatures like us, to be constructed, and the

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<sup>14</sup> The literatures on mood and emotion are not easily navigated, as there is no canonical way of conceptualizing the issues. But for some helpful empirical discussions, see, e.g., (Eldar, Rutledge, Dolan, & Niv, 2015; W. N. Morris, 1999; Nettle & Bateson, 2012; Parkinson, Totterdell, Briner, & Reynolds, 1996; Robinson, 2000; Siemer, 2009), who argues specifically that moods serve as summary indicators of recent experience. I discuss this evidence in (Haybron, 2013b), as well as (Haybron, 2008b). Relevant philosophical discussions include, e.g., (Delancey, 2006; Kurth, 2018; Lormand, 1985; Rossi, 2019; Sizer, 2000; Wong, 2016).

conceptual scheme can be implemented in countless ways, in robots, battleships—and, I’m suggesting, sapient apes like ourselves. For the most part the relevant empirical claims, for instance that our propensities for different moods vary according to the quality of our circumstances, are readily verified from common experience. You don’t need a controlled experiment to figure that out, nor to know that it will hurt a great deal if you drop an anvil on your foot. There is indeed a great deal of empirical investigation to be done here, if only to determine how exactly these distinctions are implemented in human psychology; the present discussion only circumscribes our subject matter in loose terms. And certain aspects of the view doubtless involve nontrivial predictions that should be testable through scientific methods. But at this stage I think the more pressing questions have to do with the conceptual framework: whether it is coherent, makes the right distinctions and so forth.

## 4. Happiness as a functional condition: what have we gained?

### 4.1. An efficient proxy for well-being

I hope by this point that the metaphysical status of happiness understood as emotional well-being, in terms of a person’s emotional condition, as well as its difference from happiness as conceived on a hedonistic theory, is reasonably clear. Doubtless more clarity could be brought to the general idea of a functional condition and of its various aspects, as well as the precise relation between conditions and other states as well as events. But it makes sense for human affect to be structured along the lines of this emotional state theory, and the dual character of happiness as a hybrid of occurrent and dispositional states should no longer seem ad hoc or chimerical. Certain kinds of functional systems, including human beings, can more adaptively respond to their environments if structured in this way, reconfiguring themselves on the fly at multiple levels as conditions demand. It would certainly make no sense for a person to have a fixed trait-level propensity for anxiety, anger or cheerfulness, no matter what the circumstances. If you’re struggling to get by in war-torn Syria, anxiety should probably come more easily than if you’ve been frolicking for months on a South Seas beach.

But what do we gain by distinguishing the idea of a functional condition, or of thinking about happiness in terms of a person’s emotional condition? Our example of Robot illustrates one reason: such a system’s condition offers an efficient means of gauging how well or badly things are going in the domain it is meant to evaluate. Security personnel wanting to assess the facility’s threat level might do no better than to check Robot’s condition or status, and indeed that’s an explicit purpose of the system: to summarize and communicate how secure the warehouse is. For human beings, our emotional conditions do the same, but add to this many other kinds of information about how well or badly things are going for the individual. In earlier work I suggested that happiness serves as a proxy for well-being: a rough and defeasible indicator of how the person is doing. Rather than just being a security indicator, emotional well-being amounts to an “affective welfarometer” that offers a broad gauge of the individual’s well-being (Haybron, 2008b).

It is insufficiently appreciated just how efficient an indicator this sort of condition can be. Suppose our emotional lives were exhausted by the flow of affective experience, so that we only had Type-1 affective responses to our lives. How would you assess how your child or partner is doing these days? You can’t watch them all the time, and you have limited information about their objective situation and, more importantly, how it affects their experience as far as that’s revealed through smiles, frowns, etc. as the day goes on—likely to be an unrepresentative sample

as well, since they may tend to feel better (or worse) than usual in your presence. If they get very angry about what seems like a minor event, you can infer nothing other than that they really don't react well to that sort of thing, or else that their mind was on really on something else. It was a bad moment, that's all. To figure out how they're doing these days on the basis of this sort of information would require a lot of surveillance—tiring for you, and perhaps annoyingly intrusive for them.

But that's not at all how things work in real life. If your friend blows up over a small matter that appears to be the sort of thing they normally shrug off with ease, that's an extremely informative observation: something is amiss. She's in a bad mood and may thus be having a bad day. Or, if you've seen several episodes like this recently, there may be a broader problem: something is probably off in her life these days, and she's gone into "hostile environment" or "DEFCON 2" mode, as it were, primed to deal with bad events. She's not happy, and this signals that she's likely not doing well—and more to the point, you were able to make this inference based on very little, easily gleaned information. No need for intense scrutiny of her myriad, often unobservable feelings over days, nor to compute the integral of such observations. Indeed, only one observation might be needed, say if she had just burst into tears out of the blue. Similarly, if instead she'd uncharacteristically broken out into song or played a practical joke a few times in the last couple of days, you'd have reason to suppose she's happy, and that things are going pretty well for her. In essence, an evaluation of how her life is going is encoded in her emotional condition, which in turn disposes her to react to events in certain ways. From such reactions you are able, with little effort and without neuroimaging gear from the future, to make reasonably accurate judgments about her well-being.

"Reasonably accurate": the claim is not that happiness perfectly tracks well-being.<sup>15</sup> I won't rehash previous arguments for thinking happiness serves as a proxy for well-being, for instance rebutting dubious "set point" and "happy slave" claims regarding extreme adaptation (Haybron, 2008b). To be sure, there's no reason to expect our emotional conditions to reflect chronic background conditions in our lives that should have no bearing on our behavior or functioning. From a biological standpoint, this would just be a waste of resources. The death of a partner, the failure of a career, or unjust societal conditions might plausibly be thought to affect well-being in lasting ways even when it has no emotional impact. Such examples help to motivate my own view that happiness is just one aspect of well-being, which also includes value-fulfillment: in these cases, important values are being frustrated even if the harm is no longer salient on a daily basis (Haybron, manuscript, forthcoming). But even if the loss of a spouse or career leaves a permanent mark, diminishing one's well-being, it seems entirely compatible with doing well on the whole, indeed thriving, just as a disability might diminish well-being without at all precluding flourishing.

The fact that our emotional conditions should not be expected to track closely all aspects of well-being may not be any great concession. If the three-dimensional framework I've suggested for emotional well-being is correct, for instance, then emotional well-being responds to three broad sorts of welfare concerns: security (attunement), opportunity (engagement), and success (endorsement) (Haybron, 2008b). It is not clear that any major domain of well-being, at least of a sort that might be anything like a consensus point—as opposed to tendentious items like virtue, say—is left out of this framework. Even if emotional well-being doesn't perfectly track well-being, for instance ceasing to register long-ago successes and failures, it is not clear that a great deal is left out, at least in most cases.

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. (Raibley, 2012).

Here are some external conditions that do seem quite central to well-being, so that if one is doing badly in these areas, it isn't clear how one could fail to be doing badly period, however one feels: problems with or relating to relationships, such as a bad marriage or a child in crisis, or problems with one's main occupation in life, be it work or something else. Intuitively, things like a bad marriage or a bad job—or having no meaningful way of passing one's time at all—tend to be incompatible with thriving or well-being. But these are also things that are strongly associated with unhappiness (Haybron, 2013a). And if someone manages to be genuinely happy despite having a bad job, then perhaps the work issue isn't such a big deal—the boss is a jerk but it's just a job and at least it pays the bills, etc. Likewise for a marriage: if the partners are happy, then perhaps they aren't actually doing badly in their lives. (There might well be a moral problem, say if the woman is subservient to the man. While there is no reason to think that people living in oppressive circumstances tend to lead particularly fulfilling lives, there's also no reason to address such cases as mainly being welfare problems.<sup>16</sup>)

It may be helpful to recall that welfare hedonism is not in fact a nonstarter.<sup>17</sup> Like the other major theories, it seems at least to get roughly the right verdict in most cases, which is why people take it seriously. In general, people don't adapt so thoroughly to their life conditions that their enjoyment of life is only loosely connected to how well they're doing. This is both intuitively obvious and amply supported by the data, which reveal vast differences in subjective well-being across different life circumstances.<sup>18</sup> The contrary view was only taken seriously during a brief period a couple of decades ago when a number of researchers went on sort of an intellectual bender, suggesting against all experience with things like marriages and jobs that happiness is largely immutable. Stranger things have happened in the academy, like behaviorism, but that one was up there. Note, by way of illustration, that it took a wild thought experiment involving an experience machine to pose a really serious counterexample to hedonism (Nozick, 1974). If happiness were really only loosely connected to well-being, one shouldn't have to work so hard to come up with counterexamples.

If technology advances sufficiently somehow to allow us to thrive emotionally in lives that are completely decoupled from reality, and if enough people derive their happiness from such sources, then we might have a problem using happiness as a welfare gauge. Until that time it remains plausible that happiness generally tracks well-being well enough to be a rough proxy for it: if someone is happy, they're probably doing well; if unhappy, badly.

#### 4.2. Emotional well-being as person-level control: the architecture of the self

While our emotional conditions serve important informational functions, that of course is not their main purpose, which is broadly to regulate our functioning so that it is appropriate to our goals and circumstances. Specifically, this is a *person-level* form of regulation, which is another way of putting a point I've made in earlier writings, namely that our emotional natures—roughly, what ways of living tend to make us happy or unhappy—constitute part of who we are:

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<sup>16</sup> Even consequentialists will standardly grant that one's opposition to injustices like racism should not depend on utility calculations (Railton, 1984).

<sup>17</sup> Despite the crucial differences between emotional well-being and pleasure, the two goods are plainly strongly correlated, so that if one is a proxy for well-being, the other probably is as well. In fact probably all major theories of well-being tend in practice to center on goods that are strongly correlated, thus tending to agree about the majority of cases; for the most part practical disagreements tend to arise at the margins.

<sup>18</sup> See, among many others, the annual World Happiness Reports from 2012 onward.

the self.<sup>19</sup> To be (authentically) happy is to respond to your life as good for you, as suited to your personality or nature, and this response involves not just certain feelings but also certain dispositions—being configured and functioning psychically as to things going well. To this extent, happiness arguably constitutes a kind of eudaimonic good, as at least part of *self-fulfillment*, which in turn is a form of nature-fulfillment centered on one’s individual nature or self. If this is right, then our emotional conditions are essentially linked to our selves, and form a core element of our flourishing (or languishing) (Haybron, 2008b, 2008a, forthcoming). I will not elaborate on this view of well-being here, but it will be helpful to say more about how the emotional aspect of a person’s functional condition implements a kind of person-level regulation, as this will give us a fuller and more compelling picture of the significance of emotional conditions in human life.

It is natural to think of person-level regulation as *rational* regulation, as when one acts according to one’s best judgment. Relatedly, moral responsibility—that is, what *you* are responsible for—is often linked to reasons-responsiveness; if your behavior does not issue from some faculty that is responsive to reasons, then perhaps you aren’t responsible for it; it doesn’t reflect who you are.<sup>20</sup> Such views are rarely purely intellectual: typically, rational regulation is thought to involve certain sorts of desires, such as higher-order desires or values that embody what one cares about, or considers reason-giving. (I will take the relevant insight here to concern *values* specifically.) But there is still a tendency to think of the “true self” as being first of all a rational, reasoning—if perhaps also a desiring, feeling—self. How, then, should we see someone’s inexplicable bout of depression or simple unhappiness as a form of person-level control? Perhaps the depressed person thinks, “but I have it all; I should be happy.” In recent decades it has become customary to follow this thought with another: “It must be a chemical imbalance.” Which is to say: one’s unhappiness represents a *failure* of person-level control; it doesn’t reflect who one really is.

Sometimes that may well be the case: mechanisms break down from time to time, and what we call mood disorders sometimes are disordered, owing to some malfunction in the mood system. But that isn’t always the case, and often it transpires that one’s unhappiness stemmed from some unrecognized deficiency in one’s life, such as a career that one valued but in fact didn’t suit one’s nature. (Perhaps it required a degree of comfort with risk that one lacks, and hence was overly stressful.) Later, in a different occupation, one might realize that there wasn’t any chemical problem at all; systems were humming along just as they should, and the problem lay in how one was living, which clashed with who one is. In that event, I would suggest we have a case of person-level control, but not rational control.

This might seem like a radical break from the standard picture. But as is often noted, our emotional and rational natures are not wholly distinct, and it is not clear that our emotional natures would seem to constitute part of the self if they were completely severed from rational processes. And in fact—and to emphasize further the weakness of a hedonistic view of happiness—our emotional conditions are responsive to reasons, and in a stronger way than our hedonic states *per se*. A now-standard view in the literature on emotions is that they aren’t mere feelings, but also have a cognitive or rational aspect, and indeed some even go as far as to reduce them to judgments (e.g., Nussbaum, 2003). Even if certain states such as moods are purely non-

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<sup>19</sup> As the reader may have surmised, this is a further level of disposition, at the trait level. But unlike one’s emotional condition, it is not dynamic, changing with the circumstances, and among other things does not serve as an indicator of how things are going for the individual. Like any trait it can change, but normally only over extended periods of time, as one’s character and personality do in general.

<sup>20</sup> E.g., (Fischer & Ravizza, 1998; Sripada, 2014; Vargas, 2013; Wolf, 1987).



cognitive, they are clearly *responsive* to cognitive states, including higher-level states such as judgments. This affords us a degree of voluntary control over them, which is why methods of happiness-promotion so often focus on changing the way we think, and in good part why our characters are judged by how things impact our emotional conditions—and arguably as well, why our emotional natures are plausibly taken to constitute at least part of the self (Haybron, 2008b, 2008a). By contrast, we have little voluntary control over mere sensory pleasures and pains, which aren't clearly reasons-responsive at all, at least beyond the extent to which they implicate our emotional conditions. Even Epictetus wouldn't blame you for feeling pain when stung by a wasp or hit with a rock; it's how you handle it emotionally that counts.

At the same time, notice that the means by which we most successfully exert voluntary control over our emotional conditions tend to involve habituation and training over an extended period of time; this happens to some extent in the typical process of maturing. Meditation is often dubbed “mind training” for this reason, as the main benefits derive from long-term effort akin to learning a musical instrument (Ricard, 2006). In general, our emotional conditions are only loosely responsive to reasoning and to a great extent have a “mind” of their own, as it were, as is plain enough from the difficulty of treating depression and anxiety, as well as the massive self-help industry catering to vast herds of consumers baffled by their refractory unhappiness. While not quite, or at least fully, rational states, emotional states are what we might call *para-rational*: apt for engagement or enmeshment with rational states, so that anxiety can either be free-floating and objectless, arising for no apparent reason, or express some quite explicit concern like fear of failing an exam.

What could be the point of putting para-rational states like these in charge of things, even in part? It might seem like a good way to build a 2-headed monster that can't make up its mind what to do. In fact this is an elegant solution to a pair of difficult problems: we can pursue the wrong goals, and we need to navigate a massively complex environment bearing on our interests. On the one hand, human beings need to be highly plastic, able to adapt to an extremely wide range of cultural and physical environments, and to adopt arbitrarily idiosyncratic goals as befits the particularities of their circumstances; on the other hand, that same plasticity can lead to disaster, like becoming a Shaker, say, or a lawyer. Some ideas, at least from a biological perspective, are downright bad ideas, and these primates need feedback mechanisms to discourage those, while encouraging the good ones. Feedback mechanisms that are primed to punish bad ideas, like being asocial or indifferent to mediocrity, and reward good ideas, like having friends and being good at things that matter, would do the trick nicely. It also helps considerably if these mechanisms can process vast amounts of information about one's situation quickly and automatically, largely unencumbered by plodding, effortful rational processes that can only deal with a few things at a time. This capacity for speed and volume is required even when pursuing perfectly sensible goals, since there's no limit to the range of factors in one's immediate circumstances that might foster or hinder their attainment.

As it happens, that appears to be precisely how human beings are in fact built, and the key feedback mechanism is our emotional conditions. Friendship and competence in pursuits that seem worthwhile make us happy; the reverse, not so much. These seem to be universals, or close enough to it, and research finds a great deal of commonality in the key sources of happiness, even as there is also massive diversity in the ways of life that can make us happy (Haybron, 2013a). We also happen to be finely attuned to noticing, if only implicitly, features of our environment that bear on these things: something, you're not quite sure what, just seems...*off* with your partner; anxiety ensues, motivating you to set things right. And when we pursue goals that

clash with these universals—and with other, less-universal aspects of our makeup—we tend to experience a sharp correction, in the form of unhappiness. In fact it isn't so much a sharp correction as a thoroughgoing punishment that tends to seize control of operations and ruin everything until we repent and change our goals.

Importantly, however, these feedback mechanisms aren't wholly decoupled from our more rational, goal-setting mechanisms; they themselves can evolve with our explicit goals and reasoning, so that choosing to be a stockbroker will result in a somewhat different emotional nature than if one had become a violinist. Different things will tend to make one happy. Similarly, our emotional natures have some immediate effect on our desires and cares, so that the things that make you happy tend to be things you are drawn to. So while there is considerable room for slippage between our explicit goals and our emotional natures, they tend to evolve substantially in sync. But not of course perfectly: it is a problem when they get too far out of step with each other, as I argued in *The Pursuit of Unhappiness*, which discussed social pathologies that can arise when a culture encourages the pursuit of goals and ways of living that clash with our emotional natures, leaving many of us unhappy even as we succeed in getting what we want. And worse, too busy and distracted, and too much surrounded by similarly dispirited confederates to be able to form a clear notion of the problem, or even that there is a problem. “Must be a chemical imbalance.” “Never mind the bite guard I use in the car; stress is just a normal part of life.”<sup>21</sup>

I've spoken of our emotional natures in contrast to our goals, but in fact we can see both as different ways to encode goals (Haybron, 2008b). Our values, for instance, explicitly encode goals in what we might call a “directive” mode: that is, they more or less directly guide our behavior. And unlike other conative states such as whims and urges, our values involve person-level goals that reflect who we are—the self. Whereas our emotional natures encode goals indirectly and implicitly, in an “evaluative” mode, namely by making us happy or unhappy, according to the circumstances. Here too, the goals appear to be person-level. Bringing these thoughts together yields a dual-aspect model of person-level control, and with it a dual-aspect model of the self, consisting—crudely speaking—of a valuing self and an emotional self.<sup>22</sup> While it can be convenient to draw the contrast in terms of rational and emotional selves, both aspects partake of the rational and the emotional, not to mention the conative, with differences merely in emphasis and functional role.

Summing up: our emotional conditions not only provide a useful summary indicator of how we're doing; they form a major part of the central control mechanisms by which person-level regulation of our functioning is achieved. For our emotional natures—our tendencies to be made happy or unhappy by various ways of living—encode goals that both reflect and constrain our values, providing feedback on how well-suited our lives are to our personalities. Crucial to their ability to do this is that emotional states are *not* limited merely to Type-1 transient responses to particular stimuli, but rather embody a multilevel response both to particular events and the broader conditions of our lives, including not just occurrent feelings and processes but also alterations in disposition that reconfigure us on the fly to fit the situation. It is because emotional well-being, or happiness, involves individuals' functional conditions—specifically, their

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<sup>21</sup> It has lately become reasonably common for American dental patients to be fitted with bite guards for their daily commutes, so frequently is the drive attended by the gnashing of teeth.

<sup>22</sup> (Haybron, forthcoming). Valerie Tiberius and Colin DeYoung and colleagues have recently been integrating Tiberius' value-fulfillment theory of well-being with DeYoung's Cybernetic Big Five Theory of personality, which conceives of human beings as goal-directed, adaptive systems (Bedford-Petersen, DeYoung, Tiberius, & Syed, 2019). An interesting question is whether the view defended here, which likewise appears to take a cybernetic approach, might also be incorporated in that framework.

emotional conditions—that how happy or unhappy we are is so strongly indicative of, and dispositive of, our overall well-being and functioning. The popular idea that emotional well-being reduces to nothing more than a series of transient responses to particular events betrays a profound misunderstanding of human nature and life.

At the very least, these reflections indicate that our emotional conditions have a massive causal footprint in matters of well-being. It may be fair to regard happiness as the engine of well-being.<sup>23</sup> But these points might also be taken to show that happiness is constitutive of well-being, as such. As was noted above, I believe that it is, but won't elaborate here. That it is at least quite important for well-being should be plain enough.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1. Summary

We began with a puzzle for emotional state theories of happiness, at least of the sort I defend: what is the justification for including dispositional states, including purely dispositional states like mood propensities, in an account of happiness? Particularly if happiness is also taken to include occurrent states? These questions are all the more pressing when the view is contrasted with an older account, hedonism, that seems traditionally to have been confused with it. The significance of pleasure is precisely that it is *not* dispositional. But, to begin with, this is the wrong contrast: in contemporary thought, both commonsense and academic, the dominant understanding of happiness has been the life satisfaction theory, which has an entirely different structure from hedonism. Indeed, life satisfaction may well be entirely dispositional. To be happy, on that view, is to take a certain stance toward one's life—to be disposed toward it in certain ways.

Once the emotional state theory is distinguished from hedonism, so that we can see how happiness might be both a matter of affect and have dispositional aspects, it becomes evident that hedonism is the outlier: it is weird to call someone happy simply on the grounds that a pleasant series of experiences has passed through his mind lately. That makes happiness too nearly something that happens to a person—a mere agglomeration of experiential events—rather than a genuine state of the person. On reflection, it seems that hedonism isn't even a candidate theory of happiness. As I suggested in earlier work, it is guilty of a category mistake. But the exact nature of that mistake was left unclear: just what categories are being confused?

The bulk of this paper ventured an answer: the categories of events and conditions, specifically functional conditions. Whereas hedonism reduces happiness to a series of events, the emotional state theory—and to a lesser degree the life satisfaction view—identifies happiness with an aspect of a person's functional condition, namely his emotional condition. As such, the concept of happiness belongs to a family of condition assessment concepts that we used to assess how a functional system is configured to function, with a robotic security system used to illustrate. While the notion of a functional condition is in great part dispositional, it very often—almost invariably in the case of happiness—consists substantially in occurrent states, if only because the relevant dispositions are so often implemented by occurrent states. When angry, for instance, you are functioning in “angry mode,” so that the way you feel grounds various dispositions to respond, usually not favorably, to things in your environment. Understood this way, happiness consists both in dispositions and occurrent functioning.

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<sup>23</sup> See (Haybron, 2013b), which argued that happiness may be the central node in the causal networks that Bishop argues constitute well-being (Bishop, 2015). I owe the “engine” expression to (Jayawickreme, Forgeard, & Seligman, 2012), though they posit a more comprehensive sort of engine.

A great deal is lost if we do not employ—at least tacitly—condition assessment concepts in thinking about well-being, and certainly when thinking about our emotional lives. To assess a person’s well-being, we would be left in the hedonist’s predicament, attempting to infer from a hopefully representative-enough sample of observed emotions and moods, taken as piecemeal responses to the flow of events in the person’s life, how it all adds up. Even if we master this computational task, we still are given little sense of the macro-level picture regarding how the person’s life is going—the sort of information one might hope to glean from a life satisfaction judgment, for instance. The emotional information is essentially robbed of context—which might be important in its own right, but is all the more crucial to know insofar as much of the emotional story is not readily observed, say because the depressed friend usually hides her distress behind an obligatory smile.

We are also left with a misleadingly shallow and fragmented picture of persons’ emotional lives—just one damned thing after another—so that we are bound to underestimate the importance of emotional well-being for human functioning and flourishing. And, if I am right, to fail to understand in a very basic sense who we are, as it is only through an understanding of our emotional natures that we can grasp how human beings navigate life as persons, and what manner of persons, with what manner of selves, they are.

## 5.2. Implications for psychological science

I want to close by emphasizing the significance of the gap in psychologists’ understanding of the emotional realm, which was noted in earlier work but remains and should now be even more clearly problematic. Contemporary psychology is saddled with a crude and implausibly sharp distinction between traits and states, where states are wholly occurrent, along the lines of Type-1 responses. Insofar as happiness has dispositional aspects, then, it must be a trait construct. But of course that is false even to the standard means of operationalizing mental health constructs like depression and anxiety, which are typically measured with surveys including dispositional items about one’s “ability to” laugh, concentrate, sleep, etc. Without a category of functional conditions, psychologists lack the vocabulary even to state what depression, happiness and other emotional conditions are.

One result of this omission is that emotional well-being measures in well-being research—indulging for the moment the surpassingly weird convention of treating mental health research as about something other than well-being—invariably do nothing more than inventory the frequency and perhaps intensity of various feelings individuals have experienced during some time frame, as if Type-1 states exhausted the emotional realm. Outside the mental health paradigm, one seems to find dispositional items only in trait measures, for instance of personality. Yet some such items do not appear to concern traits or personality at all, but rather emotional well-being. The popular International Personality Item Pool (IPIP), for instance, has a suggested 50-item variant, starting with the unpromising prompt: “Describe yourself as you generally are now, not as you wish to be in the future.”<sup>24</sup> Yet even before seeing item one, we can surmise that “as you generally are now” is liable to embody your response to present conditions, which may well be unrepresentative (perhaps your home was recently incinerated by a wildfire, and this has gotten your goat for some weeks now). Taking just the first four items, the problem should be apparent enough:

1. Am the life of the party

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<sup>24</sup> E.g., [https://ipip.ori.org/new\\_ipip-50-item-scale.htm](https://ipip.ori.org/new_ipip-50-item-scale.htm). Accessed June 2, 2021.

2. Feel little concern for others.
3. Am always prepared.
4. Get stressed out easily.

It takes little imagination to see how someone who has become uncharacteristically downhearted in the wake of her house burning down might score poorly on these items, though normally she would give the opposite sorts of responses. These items convey good information about one's present emotional disposition, and might well constitute part of a good happiness measure. But they tell us little about one's personality.

This is what happens when your psychology is hamstrung by a primitive state/trait distinction that assimilates dispositionality to the realm of traits. You can't even handle a simple and obvious cognitive architecture like Robot's, let alone a human being. The ability to reconfigure ourselves according to the conditions is crucial to how we adapt and navigate the world, and a psychology that can't cope with this very basic aspect of human nature is missing quite a lot. Psychology can't do its work without something like the notion of a functional condition. That it has gotten so far without one may owe to the likelihood that you can ignore the dispositional elements of emotional well-being and still get reasonable-looking correlations among self-reports, since one's emotional dispositions will tend to be associated with occurrent emotions, and self-reports of dispositions are not trivial to render and would presumably rely on observations of occurrent emotions. Likewise, people's recent emotional histories probably correlate pretty well with their personalities; on a typical day, you're liable to feel as you typically do. Moreover, "reasonable-looking correlations" is a pretty elastic notion: in science, lots of findings can seem reasonable, which perhaps makes instruments easier to validate than they should be. So long as one is content with a psychology that merely summarizes correlations among self-reports without attempting to model the underlying processes—as if one were to do cognitive science entirely by word cloud analysis—the problem may not look so bad. But it would be better to understand what's going on under the hood, among other things because this might help us better interpret what people's fallible self-reports, which may uniformly share similar weaknesses, are really telling us.

A more pressing issue is that well-being research may be badly misconceived so long as it fails to distinguish people's traits and occurrent states from their conditions. Emotional well-being metrics, for instance, are often dismissed even by subjective well-being researchers as momentary feelings that reflect the flux of daily events but not the global picture regarding the things that matter in life, a prominent example being the annual World Happiness Reports, which sideline emotional measures in favor of global life satisfaction—strictly, life evaluation—measures as the chief indicator of well-being. If the view defended here is even roughly correct, this practice reflects a serious misunderstanding of human affect, well illustrating the hazards of not distinguishing emotional conditions. But, for the same reason, the measures employed may themselves embody this misapprehension. It is possible, as we just saw, that emotional well-being measures would yield similar results in practice, with or without that distinction; asking people about their disposition to feel sad, say, may not get you very different answers in large-scale surveys than if you simply asked them how often they actually felt sad.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> My own attempts with David Yaden (in progress) to develop an emotional well-being measure suggests this may in fact be the case. Dispositional items largely dropped out in factor analysis, and the resulting measure, along with other standard affect measures used in subjective well-being research like PANAS and SPANE, correlated very strongly with standard depression and anxiety scales.

Interestingly, what makes emotional conditions informationally useful in everyday life—namely, that we can efficiently assess each others’ emotional responses to our lives from very limited observations—may also pose steep obstacles for the scientific study of happiness. You and I can deduce a great deal about a loved one’s inner emotional life from a single episode, even extending beyond what either of you is explicitly aware of. But such delicate exercises of social-emotional intelligence are no small matter to reproduce in any kind of scientific instrument, let alone a large-scale survey. Be that as it may, it would be reassuring to see some acknowledgement that there is a distinction, and some evidence about how best to manage it operationally. For the time being, only mental health measures, for instance of depression, anxiety and stress, seem to avoid the category mistake that plagues the conceptualization of other emotional well-being instruments.

Pace the points raised two paragraphs back, one might ask if life satisfaction might not be a better proxy for well-being than emotional well-being, at least in empirical contexts like the World Happiness Reports. Nothing argued here is incompatible with that: there could be more than one useful proxy for well-being, and perhaps the cognitive and affective metrics are complementary. As well, simple measures from vast samples across diverse cultures are needed for the sort of work done in these sorts of studies, and perhaps life satisfaction measures would serve better for those purposes. Moreover, problems that might vitiate life satisfaction as a proxy in daily life, for instance the fact that they are so easily gamed and prone to rationalization and hence of dubious value in the individual case, may tend to wash out over large samples. The epistemic demands of empirical research and everyday human life are quite different. So it is certainly an open question whether emotional well-being should be treated as a proxy for well-being in data-driven policy contexts, say.

But I do not think we should be too concessive just yet. There is some evidence, for instance, that the affect items used in the Gallup World Poll, which informs the World Happiness Reports, may in fact track well-being better than the life satisfaction measures. For instance Diener and Ng found that the emotion questions were better predicted by “psychosocial prosperity” items, whereas life satisfaction more closely tracked material prosperity—things like income and possessions (Diener, 2010). Psychosocial prosperity means things like good relationships and jobs, noted earlier as among the universally acknowledged non-negotiables of well-being. The importance of money and stuff for well-being, by contrast, is eminently negotiable, and you might prefer well-being measures that track the obviously important stuff more closely than the dubiously important stuff. This of course is just one slice of a very large and complex picture, and again for current purposes nothing hangs on whether emotional well-being measures offer the best snapshot of overall well-being. Measurement introduces all sorts of problems that don’t concern us here. The more important point is that our picture of human well-being needs a richer understanding of the how a person’s emotional life hangs together. It’s something deeper than a string of feeling episodes.

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