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Interview by Uliana Lushch-Purii

MEASURING HAPPINESS AND THE GOOD LIFE

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Dan HAYBRON

PhD, Associate Professor,

Department of Philosophy, Saint Louis University (Saint Louis, Missouri, USA)

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Abstract. In this interview Dan Haybron speaks about his recent interdisciplinary research on measuring happiness and the book on the good life he is currently working on. Dan Haybron explains how beauty and excellence are components of the good life and talks about the need to replace ethics of consumption with ethics of appreciation.

Keywords: happiness, well-being, good life, ethics of appreciation, beauty, excellence, gratitude.

Uliana Lushch-Purii, PhD, Associate Professor of Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, Co-founder of The Ukrainian Institute for Happiness Research: *I would like to ask about your current research you are working on, in particular, about your recent article in co-authorship with your colleague psychologist David Yaden on measuring happiness [1] and about your book. Are the two studies related or do they cover different directions?*

Dan Haybron: They are not directly related. They are different parts of my interest in happiness and the good life but there is a connection. As for the new happiness measure, we are framing it as a measure of emotional well-being. That came out of a project I led with the Templeton Foundation, especially after working with policymakers and thinking about using well-being measures in policy. The word happiness has so many meanings. Happiness in English sometimes means what you wish people on their wedding day or for a newborn – a life of happiness, a good fortune, of doing well, flourishing and thriving. In my sense of the word, happiness is just one part of well-being or flourishing but it's a really important part. In my sense, it is roughly the opposite of anxiety, depression and stress. And one of the horrible things about war is that it creates an immense amount of suffering, and a great deal of that is emotional. I saw an interview with a woman in Kyiv who was giving medicine to people and the only medicine they mentioned, although there were other ones, was anti-anxiety. I would probably need a lot of that if I had people dropping bombs on me. So happiness is important. I tend to be more interested on the unhappiness side and on reducing suffering. The part of the measure is to bring together mental health research... Unhappiness is a very healthy response to many circumstances. In wartime it isn't always appropriate to be happy, although it could be surprising where one can find a laugh or other positive emotions. People tend to treat mental health issues as unhappiness, they call depression, anxiety and other forms as unhappiness. That's been well-studied but in completely different measures, in completely different ways of approaching it. A greater awareness that people don't necessarily know how they feel very well. That's been separated from the positive psychology, research under the label of happiness. So we've tried to bring those

two paradigms together: positive psychology and negative psychology. We also wanted to have a scale for measuring that would allow different cultures to put more weight on different forms of happiness or unhappiness depending on what they value. So in East Asia people value peace of mind, or tranquility, or serenity. So we've broken it down into six different sub-dimensions of happiness and unhappiness. So, roughly, cheerfulness, energy (being energetic) and serenity (peace of mind) on the positive side, and on the negative side – sadness, lethargy (like with depression) and anxiety or stress. And most scales just lump all that together. I think it's important to break that out because as for Americans, we are really into the cheerfulness and the smiley face but not everybody values that as much. I personally think that peace of mind is the most important to get in order to be able to enjoy life and well function in life. So our paper has just been published in *The Journal of Positive Psychology* in the Special Issue honoring Martin Seligman who is one of the founders of positive psychology. We are very excited to get this complicated measure out there. This is going to need more validation. It's just got just eighteen items and we are hoping to come up with simpler versions but also to translate it. We're planning to study whether the measure works in different countries as we hope it will.

One of the things we found incidentally is that the unhappiness factors: sadness, anxiety, lethargy, stress – got almost identical results to standard depression and anxiety scales. So you could use this happiness measure essentially as a screening tool for anxiety and depression even though it wasn't designed exactly for that purpose. However, measuring is a little bit crude because you're always going to miss something, there's a lot you cannot boil down into numbers. But what we've been doing so far and part of how we got into this mess currently politically is because our governments have focused on counting money, on piling up money making more money, and we've only recently started to look whether it actually pays off in terms of human quality of life.

Uliana Lushch-Purii: *What about your book? Is there a release date already?*

Dan Haybron: I owe it to the publisher in July, that was an aspirational deadline, so the answer is I don't know (☺). I hope next year. I have a couple of chapters drafted and posted on my website [2] and this spring I'm really hoping to add drafts of all the chapters to my website so anybody who wants to look at it and tell me what I got wring or help me to improve it. So I'm not sure when the book will come up but it's called "The Lives We Should Want", and it's a book about the good life; to me that's much wider notion than happiness or well-being. I'm in a strange position feeling like I'm doing something that shouldn't be done but as far as I can tell it hasn't been done before. In English, and at least where I live, we often use the words "good life" in the broadest meaning that includes the moral life, happiness and whatever it is that matters in life. The other day, my neighbor Liz, the 90-year-old lady, passed away. It was a sad occasion but it wasn't tragic because she was 90 and she had a good life. When you look back on someone's life and you think that they had a good life it's not just that it was a happy life. My neighbor's life wasn't entirely happy. She ended up going well but she started out as a little Jewish girl in Vienna. One of her early memories was being 6 years old and after a knock on the door seeing the black shiny boots of a nazi officer demanding to know where her father was, they wanted his factory he owned. Long story short, she and her sister were able to escape and eventually made it through Italy to the US after many close calls. As the rabbi at the service noted, she went through exactly what's happening

to many Ukrainians right now. So she had a very hard start and lost all of her family except for her sister in the Holocaust. But then she went on and had another more than 80 years of living here in Saint Louis, she had a college degree, three children and eight grandchildren and eighteen great-grandchildren. She's left 29 descendants. She was a cheerful person, she enjoyed life, and that was a good life. All of us can agree that that was a good life despite the hardships and that's not just saying she enjoyed it, it's not just saying she flourished. I think the most important part is that she seems to have led it well: everybody agrees that she was a good person, she was giving, she looked out for others. So my book is about trying to make sense of what goes into the good life. Maybe, it's not so important at the end of life to figure out whether you had a good life, but when thinking about how to live, about what kind of lives do we want.

When I started working on happiness, the idea was that our way of life is not good enough. When I was 10 years old, I was travelling in different places and I was that there are sane ways of living and insane ways of living. And the mainstream way of life in the West, at least in the United States, was ecologically destructive and humanly destructive: frenzy, overwork and loneliness that we've created here. I may be overstating a little bit, we've gained some things too, but I don't think we're getting our money's worth and the world is not getting its money's worth, so to speak. There's got to be better ways to achieve greater happiness with less impact; and part of it, I think, is getting sense not just of what it means to be happy but how happiness fits into the good life more broadly.

Happiness mattering depends on other things mattering: we get our happiness, as you mentioned earlier on in our conversation, from having purpose, from doing worthwhile things. So in my book happiness and fulfilling our values and natures are part of the picture. The moral life is absolutely essential, but I leave that to the moral theorist. What I'm most interested in is the things other than morality, happiness and well-being that I think matter: I think there are other values like **beauty** and **excellence** that animate many of our lives. It's part of why I do what I do for living. I want to be good at my trade. I don't think of myself as having a career, I don't care about promotions I want to do something worthwhile and do it well. Similarly, I'm lucky to have a Ukrainian tailor here and get my best suit. He is an artist, and I don't think that he is motivated by self-interest mainly. I go to people like him because when he's doing his work he's after excellence and beauty, he wants to do his job well, he wants to create excellent suits, he sees all sorts of distinctions in them, he has sense of beauty and aesthetic.

We all care about self-interest but part of happiness is recognizing the things like beauty and excellence matter in themselves and not just because they are good for us. They are good for us but that's because we benefit from engaging with them. A part of virtue, a part of living well is engaging with them. I want my children to appreciate good music, good food, natural beauty above all. So the other part in the background of my book consists in questions 'why to protect the environment?', 'why should we care about the loss of the biodiversity?' If we cause the mass extinction that could take 10 million years to work for recover; and that's going to be the one thing we're all be remembered for if there's anything left to remember us. I don't want that to be our legacy. Biologically impoverished planet is a less beautiful planet. My neighbor Liz mentioned above who's just passed away together with other women of our neighborhood many years ago went out and put their bodies in front of the bulldozers to protect the beautiful

trees that were supposed to be cut down to build development. And right now I'm looking at these beautiful trees. My neighbor understood that beauty matters and protected that.

The philosophical audience is the one I'm writing for. But there's also a practical agenda in my book. I think we have a kind of spiritual crisis in our society and civilization; and part of it is **ethics of consumption**. I don't think economists themselves like it but this is a kind of public ethos that economists operate with, where all of matters is getting what you whatever you happen to want and don't hurt other people and maybe help people sometimes. That's sort of our public ethos has a lot to do with creating society of people that are consumers. Maybe I'm too optimistic but I believe that most people do actually care about beauty and excellence (doing things well), they do care about things other than just getting what they want but our culture doesn't license that though. What I'm hoping for is that we start shifting more to a **culture of appreciation** and **ethics of appreciation** where we appreciate and independently valuable world outside of us – and that is what really gratifying and that's what brings us happiness, and it's also worth doing for its own sake. We should recognize and appreciate beauty and excellence, we cultivate virtues like **gratitude, awe** and **wander**.

No philosophy is going to stop war, there are just bad people out there, but it's going to help if we create fewer of these people who start wars and erect the environment if we get beyond this idea that we're just consumers and if we really try to cultivate a life as appreciators of what's good in the world.

***Uliana Lushch-Purii:** Right now we are facing a threat to the whole democratic global community because indeed putin's aim is not just to conquer Ukraine, it is to threat the democratic order of the world. And the world, probably, to some extend wasn't quite ready for such a threat because there was a quite stable situation for many decades after the Second World War and there was a feeling of safety and people started to aim at well-being, at quality of life, and now we see that in just one minute everything can change, so something must be done to avoid such situation in the future. Do you have any idea as for now what this new world should look like? What the new philosophical foundation of the security system should look like?*

Dan Haybron: I don't have the answer yet to this wonderful question. But many of our problems are interconnected in many ways. One of the things I'm working on at the moment with colleagues from the domain of biology is building a map of how things look in different parts of Saint Louis. Saint Louis has a problem historically with racism. We are finding some very interesting results about the way well-being is distributed around Saint Louis. My colleagues in biology are studying how biodiversity differs around the city and the environmental injustice, for example, in the summer it can be 20 degrees (Fahrenheit) hotter in the "black" parts of Saint Louis than in the "white" parts of Saint Louis. There's economic inequality. I think all these problems are connected with each other. I believe that international conversations like we have now are the start for building community. One thing we can do at home is building communities in a way that people know each other and can rely on each other. In the United States it's very important because we've really lost our sense of community. This is the way to become more resilient in the face of climate threats and other challenges. For instance, in my neighborhood if you need something you can borrow stuff from your neighbor: we don't all need a log ladder or chainsaw or any other stuff we duplicate, we can borrow it from

each other, or if we lose power we can share generators with each other. In this case, if we had economic shocks we could more rely on each other. Building community also spills out that we have a sense like our leisure time isn't spent shopping on our own but actually spending time with friends and cultivating relationships. I think it helps to develop a sense of fellowship with other people and helps to make us less predatory, less selfish. I think it's wonderful to bring in positive psychology techniques like meditation and others, to teach kids to appreciate beauty. Kids should have a chance to see a Milky Way. About a half of humanity has never seen a starry night. I find that appalling. So how do we protect nature if we do not appreciate its beauty?

There is a wonderful book that I recommend anybody to read, it's "Braiding Sweetgrass" by a native American biologist named Robin Wall Kimmerer [3]. It's a stunning book, it's about plants and what they do for us but what it's really about is our relationship with nature. The author is calling to cultivate a culture of gratitude.

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