

Happiness is the Wrong Metric

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Abstract People are motivated not only by a quest for satisfaction but also by trying to live up to their sense of what is moral. This sense cannot be reduced to a form of satisfaction, among other reasons because it often engenders pain and sacrifice rather than pleasure. Analysis is enriched when we realize people are moral wrestlers who are pulled by both kinds of motivations. Such a recognition is also useful for public policy. The concept of well-being is a step forward but one must take into account that people can find meaning and purpose in bad behavior from gang-like activities to serving in ISIS.

Keywords Happiness · Well-being · Satisfaction · Contentment · Sacrifice

Introduction

Competing social science theories, the policies based on them, and public discourses about society and the ways in which it might be bettered draw on different meta-conceptions of human nature. To start with a simple example, if one assumes people are by nature brutish and boorish, we shall look for ways to control them, for a strong authority. If one assumes that they are benign beings, naturally at peace with each other, we shall look for ways to remove forces that distort their good nature. Other such meta-conceptions assume that people seek to maximize pleasure or – are inherently flawed but

redeemable. This essay examines these recently popular conceptions about human nature and suggests refocusing on a different one.

Among the popular meta-conceptions is famously the thesis that people seek and are entitled to seek happiness. The concern with what makes people happy arises within the liberal democratic context. Liberalism, with its focus on individual rights, liberty, and dignity, can be viewed as a belief system that arose and was embraced by people seeking to curb the power of rulers (feudal lords, monarchs, and later the states) and religious authorities. This is reflected in the question of what makes *people* happy, rather than, say, the lord of the manor or the Lord of the world.

One very widely shared and powerful interpretation of happiness views individuals as seeking to maximize *their* pleasure and minimize *their* pain. (And that pleasure is associated with the command of material goods, needed to gain what is pleasurable.) Related meta-conceptions of human nature have sought to enrich and expand the meaning of happiness by including the gratification a person gains from the happiness of others (e.g., their children) or even from carrying out moral acts.¹ Note, though, that in all these expansions of happiness, the happiness of others or service to the common good are achieved by making the person happy. If children are happy, say about a move overseas, but this does not make the parent happy, the move does not count as contributing to happiness. If making a major donation to a good cause makes the recipients happy, but the contributing person is not satisfied by, say, the amount of recognition he received or the ways the funds have been used, there is no net happiness gained. Of course, utilitarianism includes concern for the happiness of the greatest

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¹ Elizabeth W. Dunn, Daniel T. Gilbert, and Timothy D. Wilson, “If Money Doesn’t Make You Happy, Then You Probably Aren’t Spending It Right,” *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 21:2 (2011): 115–125.

number, but this is merely a sum of individual happiness! (Attempts to modify this assumption are discussed below.)

I shall refer to all these various meta-conceptions as those of “satisfiers.” They all hold that the individual is self-centered and seeks satisfaction. These approaches also tend to be amoral. Satisfiers do not judge whether some satisfactions or preferences are morally superior to others, nor do they, as utilitarians are wont to do, equate satisfaction with being moral.

The main thesis of this article is that sound analysis, good public policies, and proper public discourse assume a rather different meta-conception of human nature. I shall refer to this type of person as a *moral wrestler*. This views the person as being subject to an irreconcilable conflict between the quest for happiness (of one kind or another) and the quest to live up to their moral values, with the completion of the latter resulting in a sense of *affirmation*.² Much of the dynamic of human behavior reflects this conflict between the quest for pleasure and the quest for affirmation. For now, it suffices to illustrate this point with the simple statement “I would like to go and see a movie, but I ought to visit my friend in the hospital.” To “like” something denotes the pursuit of satisfaction, while “ought” denotes affirming motivation.

This article first briefly outlines the reasons that these age-old issues now deserve special attention, especially in societies with developed economies (Part I). The discussion then turns to “higher” sources of satisfaction and their historical relevance (Part II). It then explores the most important reason to reject happiness as a measure of the good life: the good life has a major moral component. Furthermore, the article examines affirmation and the connection between moral behavior and pain and sacrifice (Part III). It then highlights that preferences are social products that can be collectively modified, for better or for worse (Part IV).

Part I: Within History

Since the Great Recession, economic growth, especially in economically developed countries, has been anemic. Unemployment has been high, especially if measures of unemployment include the many people who have ceased to look for work or who work less than they prefer. Wages have stagnated. These conditions have contributed to rising political alienation; a greater variety of extreme and violent expressions such as xenophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism; support for radical right-wing parties and politicians; and some—albeit much less—support for the radical left.³ Some scholars have posited

² I first discussed this in my book *The Moral Dimension: Toward a New Economics*. 1988. (New York: The Free Press).

³ “Fact Sheet on the Impact of Economic Crisis on Discrimination and Xenophobia,” United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, October 2009, Accessed June 26 2015 at www.globalmigrationgroup.org/

the existence of a general link between low rates of economic growth and support for right-wing politicians and nationalism.⁴

It is possible that rates of economic growth will rise again and that the “legitimacy of affluence”⁵ might be restored. However, several leading economists hold that it may well be impossible to return to a high-growth economy.⁶ Particularly compelling are predictions that account for the fact that the new “industrial revolution” is driven by artificial intelligence—that is, by advanced computers that can replace not only manual labor, but also skilled labor in fields such as medicine and law and education.⁷ This trend is now extending to middle class jobs, especially in education and medicine.

Similar fears of and opposition to new technologies arose during previous industrial revolutions, the classic example being the Luddites. However, in earlier cases in which technological advances destroyed old jobs, these novel technologies also created a similar number of new, better-paying and less menial jobs. However, nothing in economic theory suggests that there is an iron law or an identifiable mechanism to ensure these new jobs will materialize following any and all major technological breakthroughs. This time, advanced computers are replacing human labor and eliminating well-paying, desirable jobs, while generating few new ones. To illustrate, Kodak once employed more than 145,000 people to manufacture its film and camera products and to develop photos at various retail establishments; in 2010, a team of merely 15 individuals created Instagram, which facilitates the exchange of digital photographs.⁸

If predictions are correct that new, developed nations will face persistent and growing unemployment, this will affect not

⁴ Markus Brückner and Hans Peter Grüner, “Economic growth and the rise of political extremism: theory and evidence,” CEPR Discussion Paper No. DP7723, 2010, Accessed June 26 2015 at <http://www.uni-kassel.de/>

⁵ Amitai Etzioni, *The New Normal: Finding a Balance between Individual Rights and the Common Good*, (New York: Transaction Publishers, 2014).

⁶ Robert Gordon, “Is U.S. Economic Growth Over? Faltering Innovation Confronts the Six Headwinds,” Center for Economic Policy Research, 2012, Accessed June 26 2015 at <http://www.cepr.org/>

Robert Gordon, “The Demise of U.S. Economic Growth: Restatement, Rebuttal, and Reflections,” NBER Working Paper No. 19895 (2014), Accessed June 26 2015 at <http://www.nber.org/>

John G. Fernald and Charles I. Jones, “The Future of US Economic Growth,” *American Economic Review* 104:5 (2014): 44–49.

⁷ Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee, *Race Against the Machine: How the Digital Revolution is Accelerating Innovation, Driving Productivity, and Irreversibly Transforming Employment and the Economy*, (Lexington, MA: Digital Frontier Press, 2012).

Carl Benedikt Frey and Michael Osborne, “The Future of Employment: How susceptible are jobs to computerisation?” (Paper presented for the Machines and Employment Workshop, Oxford University, September 27, 2013), Accessed June 26 2015 at <http://arche.depotoi.re/>.

⁸ Ian Leslie, “Kodak vs Instagram: This is why it’s only going to get harder to make a good living,” *The New Statesman*, January 28, 2014, Available at <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2014/01/kodak-vs-instagram-why-its-only-going-get-harder-make-good-living>.

merely people's income but also their sense of self, a major source of meaning and structure. *This would lead either to massive alienation and social and political upheaval or to new characterizations of what makes people happy.*

Moreover, even if economic developments in the foreseeable future do allow for ever higher income and consumption, data suggest that increasing income above a certain threshold tends not to increase happiness significantly. For this reason, even if the world could find its way back to high economic growth rates, one must still answer the question of whether alternate sources of satisfaction can be found that are not derived from ever-higher levels of income and material consumption. Does affluence provide a satisfactory response to basic questions of the meaning of life, human existence, and purpose? Are humans cast into this world to make and consume products? Or do they aspire to find meaning for their actions in the service of higher purposes, once their basic needs are sated? Religious fundamentalism has offered a highly troubling answer to these questions. What other visions of the good life are compelling and compatible with the human nature of a moral wrestler?

Communitarian philosophy provides such an alternate vision. The communitarian movement arose in the 1990s around two main principles. First, the West's increased focus on the individual had contributed to the neglect of the common good and to an imbalanced society. Second, there is a need to shore up social responsibilities and commitments to society, as well as to form new norms defining what society should expect of its people. Reexamining the role of happiness in crafting a good society reflects this need to restore balance between the self and society by enhancing the common good after centuries of it being (properly) scaled back.^{9,10} Most Western societies have yet to achieve this balance.

Part II. Maslow and “Higher” Satisfaction

The Hierarchy Revisited Among the social scientists that draw on a richer theory of human nature than the one embraced by hedonists, Abraham Maslow and his theory about a hierarchy of human needs stand out. Maslow holds that a set of needs motivates all human behavior; these needs exist in a hierarchy, such that the most “prepotent” need that remains unsatisfied is the most active, or most strongly drives behavior.¹¹ As more prepotent needs are gratified, higher needs exercise greater influence over the individual's behavior,¹²

although it is not necessary for a prepotent need to be fully gratified before higher-order needs affect behavior.¹³

Maslow identified five fundamental categories of needs. Ranked from most basic to highest-order, these are physiological needs, safety-security, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization.¹⁴ *Physiological needs* include the “chemicals, nutrients, or internal (e.g., exercise/health) or environmental (e.g., temperatures) conditions necessary for the body to survive.”¹⁵ *Safety-security* needs are the absence of threatening stimuli—including but not limited to “wild animals, criminal assault, disease, war, anarchy, natural catastrophes, [...] the lack of such things as job security, financial security, [and] medical insurance.”¹⁶ The need for *love and belonging* is predicated on the finding that the absence of affective bonds with other human beings causes stress responses that people experience as loneliness and depression.¹⁷ *Esteem* involves the need to be valued by others and to feel intrinsically that one has contributed to the world.

Self-actualization, considered the highest need, is defined as achieving the fullest use of one's talents and interests—the need “to become everything that one is capable of becoming.”¹⁸ As implied by its name, self-actualization is highly individualistic and reflects Maslow's premise that *the self is “sovereign and inviolable” and entitled to “his or her own tastes, opinions, values, etc.”*¹⁹ That is, self-actualization refers to an *individual* need for fulfillment.²⁰

For the purpose of the following discussion, it suffices to group Maslow's needs into three main “layers” or categories. Physiological needs and security comprise *basic creature comfort needs*, which are closest to inborn biological urges. The second layer is made up of love and belonging and esteem, and the third layer, the pinnacle, is self-actualization.

A very considerable amount of social science data show that people gain satisfaction when needs such as those listed by Maslow are gratified. Spending time with those with whom

¹³ Sunita Singh Sengupta, “Growth in Human Motivation: Beyond Maslow,” *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations* 47:1, (2011): 103.

¹⁴ David Lester, “Maslow's hierarchy of needs and personality,” *Personality and Individual Differences* 11:11, (1990): 1187.

¹⁵ Robert J. Taormina and Jennifer H. Gao, “Maslow and the Motivation Hierarchy: Measuring Satisfaction of the Needs,” *American Journal of Psychology* 126:2, (2013): 157.

¹⁶ Robert J. Taormina and Jennifer H. Gao, “Maslow and the Motivation Hierarchy: Measuring Satisfaction of the Needs,” *American Journal of Psychology* 126(2), 2013, 157.

¹⁷ Robert J. Taormina and Jennifer H. Gao, “Maslow and the Motivation Hierarchy: Measuring Satisfaction of the Needs,” *American Journal of Psychology* 126(2), 2013, 158.

¹⁸ Michael R. Hagerty, “Testing Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: National Quality-of-Life Across Time,” *Social Indicators Research* 46(xx), 1999, 250.

¹⁹ Adrienne Aron, “Maslow's Other Child,” *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 17(2), 1977, 13.

²⁰ Michael R. Hagerty, “Testing Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: National Quality-of-Life Across Time,” *Social Indicators Research* 46(xx), 1999, 250.

⁹ Amitai Etzioni. 1993. *Spirit of Community*. (Touchstone: New York).

¹⁰ Amitai Etzioni. 1996. *The New Golden Rule*. (Basic Books: New York).

¹¹ Francis Heylighen, “A cognitive-systemic reconstruction of Maslow's theory of self-actualization,” *Behavioral Science* 37:1, (1992): 39–57

¹² Don Lollar, “An Operationalization and Validation of the Maslow Need Hierarchy,” *Educational and Psychological Measurement* 34:3, (1974): 640.

one shares bonds of affinity—children, spouses, friends, members of one’s community—has often been shown to make people satisfied.²¹ Indeed, “several researchers have concluded that human relationships and connections of all kinds contribute more to happiness than anything else.”²² Research shows that married people are more satisfied than those who are single, divorced, widowed, separated, or cohabiting.²³ In addition, the presence of close friendships can have nearly as strong an impact on happiness as a successful marriage.²⁴ Conversely, people who are socially isolated are less happy than those who have strong social relationships. As one study put it, “Adults who feel socially isolated are also characterized by higher levels of anxiety, negative mood, dejection, hostility, fear of negative evaluation, perceived stress, lower levels of optimism, happiness, and life satisfaction.”²⁵

Researchers who examined the effect of community involvement also found a strong correlation with satisfaction. One study that evaluated survey data from 49 countries found that membership in non-church organizations has a significant positive correlation with satisfaction.²⁶ Derek Bok reported that “some researchers have found that merely attending monthly club meetings or volunteering once a month is associated with a change in well-being equivalent to a doubling of income.”²⁷ Other studies have found that individuals who devote substantial amounts of time to volunteer work have high “life satisfaction.”²⁸

Extensive evidence indicates that people who consider themselves religious, express a belief in God, or regularly attend religious services—which Maslow considers a form of self-actualization—are more satisfied than those who do not. According to one study, agreement with the statement “God is important in my life” was associated with a gain of 3.5 points on a 100-point scale of happiness.²⁹ (For comparison, unemployment is associated with a 6-point drop on the same scale.) Other studies show that Americans with a deep religious faith are healthier, live longer, and have lower rates

of divorce, crime, and suicide.³⁰ In their 2010 book *American Grace*, Robert Putnam and David Campbell report that “a common finding [of happiness researchers] is that religiosity is among the closest correlates of life satisfaction, at least as strong as income.”³¹ They found that the difference in satisfaction between a person who attends church once per week and someone who does not attend church was “slightly larger than the difference between someone who earns \$10,000 a year and his demographic twin who earns \$100,000 a year.”³² All these examples are basically not capital intensive, and hence are not based on one’s income or job centered. People who have lasting, meaningful, and affective relationships find them to be a major source of mutual satisfaction, which can be achieved with very little material costs. Chess played with plastic pieces is as enjoyable as chess played with figures carved out of ivory; there is no evidence that the Lord better hears prayers from a leather-bound prayer book than from one made of recycled paper; and one does not need a BMW to drive to a picnic. One can spend time with one’s spouse and children, attend a church, or volunteer without spending much money.

Within History: Capping Versus Denial

Showing that seeking higher satisfaction leads to greater satisfaction overall does not mean favoring an austere or ascetic life of denial. Asceticism, the practice of denying one’s physical or psychological needs in pursuit of higher-order goals, often spiritual in nature, has appeared in virtually all religions at one point or another.³³ Examples of asceticism exist today, such as Christian and Jain monks and nuns. However, most sects that fully embraced asceticism as a basic tenet of their community either failed completely or became much less austere.

For example, the Israeli kibbutzim, collective communities founded by Jews who emigrated from Russia in the early 1900s, originally emphasized that a life of simplicity, materially speaking, “would encourage the realization of the full potentialities of human nature.”³⁴ Members were instructed “to seek gratification only within a restricted range of personal needs.”³⁵ However, over time, these “needs” gradually

²¹ Robert Sugden, “Correspondence of Sentiments: An Explanation of the Pleasure of Social Interaction,” *Economics and Happiness: Framing the Analysis*, Luigino Bruni and Pier Luigi Porta Eds., (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005): 97–98.

Also: Robert E. Lane, “Does Money Buy Happiness?” *Public Interest* (Fall 1993): 58.

Also: Robert D. Putnam, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital,” *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 1 (1995): 65–78.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁵ John T. Cacioppo and Louise C. Hawkey, 2003, “Social Isolation and Health, with an Emphasis on Underlying Mechanisms” *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 46.3 (summer).

²⁶ John F. Helliwell, “Well-Being, Social Capital and Public Policy: What’s New?” *Economic Modelling*, 20:2 (March 2003): 331–360.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁹ See note 61, 64.

³⁰ See note 85, 21–22.

³¹ Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 2010), 490.

³² *Ibid.*, 491.

³³ Encyclopædia Britannica Online, s. v. “asceticism”, accessed September 17 2015 at <http://www.britannica.com/>

³⁴ Melford E. Spiro, “Utopia and Its Discontents: The Kibbutz and Its Historical Vicissitudes,” *American Anthropologist*, 106:3 (2004) 559

³⁵ Uriel Leviatan, Hugh Oliver, and Jack Quarter (1998), *Crisis in the Israeli Kibbutz: Meeting the Challenge of Changing Times* (Praeger 1998) 3 accessed September 17 2015 at <http://havenscenter.wisc.edu/files/GLUCK10%20Consumption%20on%20kibbutz.pdf>

expanded.³⁶ At their consumption peak, kibbutzim fully financed members' trips abroad, and a growing basket of consumer products.³⁷ Similarly, the Amana community in Iowa traces its roots to German dissidents of Lutheranism known as Pietists, who sought to protest "the ceremony and pomp of the established churches."³⁸ The community eventually established itself in the United States as a group that avoided all luxuries and decorative arts and held 11 church services per week.³⁹ However, young members eventually resisted church restrictions on modern conveniences deemed "worldly" by elders, and many left the church.⁴⁰ Even the community that remained changed drastically, epitomized by the incorporation of the Amana Society in 1932,⁴¹ a joint stock corporation that eventually owned, among other things, the very successful Amana Refrigeration, Inc.

Other sects changed their cultures to pay greater attention to basic needs. In the 1960s, the importance of attending to basic needs was demonstrated by members of the "counter-culture," who, in the United States and northwest Europe, tried to live on cheap wine and handouts, sleep on mats, and otherwise follow a "simple" life. However, these individuals soon gave up on the ascetic dimensions of their culture. In short, there is no denying basic human needs or the quest for pleasure that comes from serving them adequately.

Serving these basic needs turns from a "healthy" satisfying pursuit to an obsession, though, when consumption turns into what might be called consumerism—when people continue to invest themselves in seeking ever-more material goods than they need to satisfy their basic needs, and when people employ material goods to gain love or esteem.

If developed societies could develop a *culture of capping* that would guarantee everyone sufficient income to provide for their basic creature needs—but otherwise would center life around higher pursuits—that culture would provide for less alienation and less anti-social behavior. This is particularly true if the predictions made above about the challenges posed by new technical developments turn out to be true. The more people can make ends meet because the income they need is capped, the fewer people there will be who seek second jobs or work overtime; all of this will leave work for those who have not yet reached their cap. And the people who spend

more of their life on higher pursuits will feel not deprived, but rather satisfied, which will help societies adapt to the new technical reality of less demand for labor.

In addition, quite obviously, a life that combines a cap on consumption and greater dedication to higher pursuits would be much less taxing on the environment than consumerism and the level of work needed to pay for it. This is the case because higher pursuits require relatively few resources and cause less pollution. Much less obvious are the ways capped culture combined with increased focus on the pursuit of higher satisfactions would serve social justice. Social justice entails transferring wealth from the disproportionately wealthy to those who are underprivileged. Such reallocation of wealth has been limited in large part because those who command the extra assets tend also to be politically powerful. Promoting social justice by organizing those with less and forcing those in power to yield has had limited success in democratic countries and has led to massive bloodshed in others. However, one must expect if those in power were willing to embrace the capped culture, they would be more ready to share than otherwise. This thesis is supported by the behavior of middle-class people who are committed to the values of giving and tending to the "least among us"—a value prescribed by many religions and by left liberalism.

To review the argument so far, the current conditions in which developed countries find themselves raise the question of whether pursuing ever-higher incomes and consumption of material goods will continue to be possible—and people will continue to be able define themselves and to drive meaning out of jobs. Data furthermore show that ever-higher incomes may not buy ever-higher levels of satisfaction, but people who have already met their basic needs can increase their overall satisfaction by pursuing higher needs (higher in Maslowian terms). This article shall next show that although this understanding of human nature and society is much more valid than one that centers exclusively on material consumption and pleasure seeking, it still ignores one substantial motivator of human behavior—moral commitments. Without this dimension, the conceptual apparatus for understanding much of interpersonal and social dynamics is extremely deficient. Above all, it leads to giving the pursuit of happiness much too much prominence and undermines the moral commitments that are essential for making a good life and a good society.

Part III: Affirmation, Living Up to Moral Commitments

This part of the essay presents evidence that people are motivated in part by their quest to live up to their moral commitments. Lacking a better term, I shall refer to this kind of motivation as affirmation. We shall see that this motivation cannot be reconstituted as another source of satisfaction, most

³⁶ Ibid. 9

³⁷ Maayan Hess Ashkenazi and Yossi Katz, "From Cooperate to Renewed Kibbutz: The Case of Kibbutz 'Galil', Israel," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 45:4 (2009) 577

³⁸ Peter Hoehnle, "Community in Transition: Amana's Great Change, 1931–1933," *The Annals of Iowa* 60 (2001) 3

³⁹ Ran Abramitzky, "On the (Lack of) Stability of Communes: An Economic Perspective," *Oxford Handbooks Online*, accessed 17 Sep. 2015 from < <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195390049.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195390049-e-9>>.

⁴⁰ Peter Hoehnle, "Community in Transition: Amana's Great Change, 1931–1933," *The Annals of Iowa* 60 (2001) 5

⁴¹ Ibid. 16

importantly because it typically entails pain. Moreover, if viewed as one source of satisfaction among many others, we shall lose major insights into the dynamics of human behavior that result from the conflict between satisfaction and affirmation. To illustrate this point very briefly, if one states that “I would LIKE to go to a movie but OUGHT to visit a friend in the hospital” and reads this as not different from “I would like to go to a movie or a dinner,” one has lost much of what social science needs to study.

1. *Introspection*: Compare two senses. One is the feeling one has after considerable pleasure—eating a great meal, experiencing a relaxing massage, listening to your favorite tune. Now compare this to the sense one has after doing something considered to be a moral duty—spending a long night with a very sick friend, spending a weekend with a colicky baby, fasting for 24 h. Nobody would doubt that the latter activities are not pleasurable per se, but many satisfiers would argue that these acts nevertheless result in pleasure: the pleasure of having done what one ought to do. However, if one compares the two kinds of satisfaction, i.e., those that arise from acts that are inherently pleasurable and those that arise from moral behavior, it becomes clear that these are very different kinds of satisfaction.

These differences are even more pronounced when the moral behavior is truly demanding. Giving bone marrow to save another’s life is a painful operation; carrying a cross up a steep mountain in the heat of desert, as people do at Mount Sinai, is both painful and exhausting; and attending to a spouse who has a terminal illness is emotionally and mentally exhausting.

2. *Affirmation Defined*: Social science suffers from a surfeit of technical terms; hence, I am reluctant to add one more. However, the current use of language is deceptive. By referring to both kinds of motivations and senses as “satisfaction,” the difference between the two disappears, and the wording, in effect, affirms the hedonistic reductionist assumption that all acts that seem moral are actually self-serving and motivated by the pursuit of pleasure. Even if one wishes to argue that there is no profound difference between the two kinds of acts, denoting the two kinds of motivations and acts under comparison is necessary before collapsing them. Referring to acts that are motivated by a sense that one should live up to one’s moral commitments as “affirmation” rather than as “satisfaction” enables this discussion.
3. *Affirming Behavior is Painful, Not Pleasurable*: In sharp contrast to the thesis that acts motivated by attempting to live up to moral commitments are but another source of satisfaction, one ought to note that practically all affirming behavior is in effect painful, or deprives one of pleasure. Fasting, donating an organ, attending to the sick, refraining from making inappropriate sexual advances, speaking truth

to power, and so on are all cases in point. Even if one gains some amount of pleasure as a limited side effect when one lives up to one’s moral commitments, the main effect is pain. It is as if moral systems are built on the assumption that there is no reason to spend the limited moral capital that society commands on motivating people to take steps they are already motivated to take because they are pleasurable and society should instead invest this limited capital in motivating people to do things they otherwise would not be inclined to do because they are not pleasurable.

Further, the pursuit of satisfaction tends to take care of itself (although society should take care to ensure that the pursuit of satisfaction is not perverted), while affirmation tends to decay if left to its own devices. Hence, there is a strong social interest in promoting the factors that reinforce and strengthen affirmation, which make people and societies more moral than they would be otherwise.

4. *Self-Centered Reductionists*: Satisfiers have gone to great lengths to argue that all that people seek is happiness, defined as pleasure, or some other source of satisfaction. This thesis is often expressed by the use of the term “utility.” The original concept of “utility,” as developed late in the eighteenth century largely by Jeremy Bentham, is narrow: All actions are directed toward gaining pleasure or avoiding pain.⁴² Happiness, satisfaction, and pleasure are used as synonyms.⁴³ Utilitarian philosophy asserts that pain and pleasure are not only sources of motivation but ethical guides: “It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do” and determine the “standard of right and wrong.”⁴⁴ Along similar lines, Mill’s proportionality doctrine held that if one accepts utility as the “foundations of morals,” then “actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness,” with happiness defined as “pleasure and the absence of pain.”⁴⁵ The hedonistic version of utilitarianism forms the foundation of modern economic theory.⁴⁶ Economists often associate utility with conceptions of material goods and, hence, with income.

⁴² Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1789), accessed June 9 2015 at <http://caae.phil.cmu.edu/> (“By utility is meant that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness, (all this in the present case comes to the same thing); or (what comes again to the same thing) to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness to the party whose interest is considered.”)

⁴³ See for example Fred Gottheil, *Principles of Economics* 7 ed, (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2013) 121

⁴⁴ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1789), accessed June 9 2015 at <http://caae.phil.cmu.edu>

⁴⁵ John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (1 ed.). (London: Parker, Son & Boum, West Strand, 1863) Accessed June 9 2015 at www.utilitarianism.com/

⁴⁶ George Stigler, *The Theory of Price* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987) 52

To dismiss the role of moral commitments in decision making, satisfiers go to great lengths to explain “surprising” behavior. One example is the prevalence of tipping at restaurants. Tipping does not make sense from a reductionist perspective, particularly given that it is not legally required and that people tip the same regardless of whether they intend to return to the restaurant in the future.⁴⁷ As a result, reductionists have tended to regard tipping as “mysterious or seemingly irrational behavior.”⁴⁸ Michael Lynn and Andrea Grassman, for example, explain the prevalence of tipping at restaurants as a way to “to buy social approval and equitable relationships.”⁴⁹ Reductionist theories in the field of psychology similarly try to debunk moral behavior. Elliott Sober points out that it is “easy to invent egoistic explanations for even the most harrowing acts of self-sacrifice,” for while such arguments may seem “forced,” they are difficult to falsify without being able to read minds. For example, one “fixture” in the debate about egoism is the soldier who throws himself on a grenade to save his comrades. Though seemingly a purely selfless act, psychological egoists argue that the soldier “realizes in an instant” that acting with cowardice would condemn him to a lifetime of guilt and shame that would be worse than death.⁵⁰ In other words, the soldier acts in his own self-interest to achieve “a better life, in terms of welfare” or utility.⁵¹

If one assumes that all acts are motivated by the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, one can only conclude that saints “must be” masochistic, deriving net pleasure rather than pain from their sacrifices. If one abandons the reductionist assumption and allows for other factors to explain behavior, acts of self-sacrifice and altruistic behavior—of affirming value commitments in general—become much easier to explain: people are sometimes compelled by moral considerations to “do the right thing” even if they do not expect to derive any pleasure from such actions.

Much more important, *most* people, *most* times are pursuing both pleasure and affirmation. People differ a great deal in the extent to which they dedicate themselves to one kind of pursuit or the other, and the same person—and

community and society—may change in that way over time. Understanding what makes some societies more self-oriented and pleasure seeking and others more dedicated to affirmation is a major subject for social science, personal deliberations, and public discourse and policy. Collapsing the two kind of pursuits into one means losing the conceptual tools this kind of analysis requires. One must abandon reductionist theories of human behavior to study why, for example, having received training in medicine, some people join Doctors without Borders, others become plastic surgeons, and still others work on biological weapons.

Adam Smith famously argued in the *Wealth of Nations* that the market as a system relies on each actor pursuing his *self-interest*:

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.⁵²

If there is no fundamental difference between “self-love” and love for others, Smith's whole thesis vanishes. If people can derive pleasure directly from serving others, their community, and their values, there is no need for the invisible hand to direct individualistic pursuits to serve the common good. Even the distinction between profit and loss becomes unnecessary, as one man's loss is often another's gain. On the grounds of sound conceptualization, it seems best to separate the quests for self-satisfaction from efforts to adhere to one's values, i.e., affirming behavior.

5. *Evidence of Affirming Behavior*: A considerable body of *experimental* data provides evidence of the power of affirmation. Experiments show that many people mail back “lost” wallets to strangers with cash intact.⁵³ Widely replicated studies found that more than 70 % of people returned lost letters addressed to “Medical Research Associates” or a household address.⁵⁴ While some might argue that such studies represent “trivial” forms of self-sacrifice, people have been shown to make much greater sacrifices for others. For example, Shalom Schwartz found that a “strikingly

⁴⁷ Daniel Kahneman, Jack L. Knetsch, and Richard H. Thaler, “Fairness as a Constraint on Profit Seeking: Entitlements in the Market,” *The American Economic Review*, 76:4 (1986) 728–741

⁴⁸ Michael Lynn, “Tipping in restaurants and around the globe: An interdisciplinary review,” Cornell University, SHA (2006), accessed June 26 2015 at <http://scholarship.sha.cornell.edu>

⁴⁹ Michael Lynn and Andrea Grassman, “Restaurant tipping: an examination of three ‘rational’ explanations,” *Journal of Economic Psychology* 11:2 (1990):169–181

⁵⁰ Elliott Sober, “Psychological Egoism,” in *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory*, Ed. Hugh LaFollette Oxford: Blackwell (2000): 129–148

⁵¹ Robert Shaver, “Egoism” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Dec 24, 2014, accessed June 23 2015 at <http://stanford.library.usyd.edu.au/entries/egoism/>

⁵² Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Modern Library Edition (1776, reprint, New York: Random House, 1937) 14

⁵³ Harvey A Homstein, Elisha Fisch, and Michael Holmes, “Influence of a Model's Feelings about his Behavior and his Relevance as a Comparison Other on Observers' Helping Behavior,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 10 (1968): 220–6; see also “Wallet drop: World's least honest cities,” Marnie Hunter, CNN, September 24, 2013

⁵⁴ Stanley Milgram, Leon Mann, and Susan Harter, “The lost-letter technique: A tool of social research,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 29 (1965): 437–438; Bruce Curtis and Cate Curtis, *Social Research: A Practical Introduction* (Sage publications, 2011) 147–148.

high proportion” of people (59 %) expressed a willingness to donate bone marrow to strangers, a more “costly” form of self-sacrificing behavior, whereas only 5 % refused to at least have their blood tested for compatibility.

In addition, Latane and Darley and Piliavin et al. found that high proportions of people assisted researchers pretending to be in distress.⁵⁵ Even in poor urban areas, where a lack of social capital or physical resources is thought to discourage altruism, a vast majority of residents reported witnessing affirming behavior, including “saving the life of someone who was in danger; taking permanent custody of, or providing temporary care for, the children of neighbors; providing housing for homeless individuals and families; intervening to protect others from crime or violence; and providing money, food, clothes, guidance, and encouragement to others.”⁵⁶

Throughout history, we find people who risk their lives for others and for causes, from Christians who saved Jews in Nazi Germany to Freedom Riders who challenged segregation in the American South. Such behaviors are not adequately explained by self-satisfying motivation.⁵⁷ Christopher J. Einolf and others have found that “people with extensive moral obligations are more likely than people with constricted obligations to engage in volunteer work and charitable giving.”⁵⁸ Note that in such studies, the value commitments and the moral acts that affirm them are measured independently from one another, and the higher the level of commitment, the more likely one is to act morally.

To provide one more example: satisfiers have puzzled over why people vote. Voting entails costs (waiting in line, missing work or pleasure, etc.) and a rational person cannot expect anything in return he or she would not get if they refrained from voting. Faced with the fact that people do in fact vote and refusing to accept that they might be motivated by factors other than self-interest, satisfiers argue that if people vote, it must be because the election is very close or because voters, believing the election to be close, feel their individual vote will make a difference. However, Brian Barry compared voter turnout across varying levels of “citizen duty” for close and not close elections. Based on

the results, the closeness of the election accounted for at most 9 % of the difference, usually less; in contrast, the level of “citizen duty,” or civility, accounted for 20–40 %.⁵⁹ In other words, the stronger explanatory and predicting factor seems to be a moral commitment, namely the intensity of one’s civility, rather than a self-satisfying imperative.

6. *Even in Economic Behavior:* In addition to cases of altruism and self-sacrifice, affirming behavior is surprisingly evident in behaviors normally considered self-satisfying. For example, economists explain the level of savings as an increasing function of one’s income and the value one places on consumption after retirement, as well as the interest rate. However, these factors explain only part of the variance in the amount saved, with a large part determined by “non-economic factors such as religion, geography, ideology, culture.”⁶⁰ For example, Guiso et al. demonstrate that religious belief correlates significantly with thriftiness.⁶¹ Of such non-economic factors, relevant moral considerations include a moral aversion towards indebtedness, the sense that one ought to help one’s children “start off in life,” and the sense that saving is moral in and of itself.

Since the 1970s, a high negative value has been attributed to public debt, or the deficit. While the actual effects of the deficit on economic performance is a complicated one, the public accepted that it is a violation of moral commitments to children and a sign of living above one’s means. These moral values have a great effect on voting and were used to justify the curtailing of numerous social programs and, in some years, defense spending.

In short, there is very considerable evidence from different realms of social life, including in the private and public sector, data based on experiments, attitude surveys, and statistics about actual behavior that moral commitments are one significant factor that motivates people, which leads to affirming action and entails pain.

Codetermination

The thesis that affirming plays a key role in people’s choices and actions does not rule out the quest for satisfaction as a motivation, but rather holds that affirmation is another important source of motivation. This thesis holds (1) that both pleasure and moral commitments significantly influence human behavior and (2) that the relative influence of the two kinds of

⁵⁵ Bibb Latane and John Darley, *The Unresponsive Bystander: Why Doesn’t He Help*, (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1970); Irving Piliavin, Judith Rodin, and Jane Allyn Piliavin, “Good Samaritanism: An Underground Phenomenon?” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 13 (1969) 288–299

⁵⁶ Jacqueline S. Mattis et al., “The Social Production of Altruism: Motivations for Caring Action in a Low-Income Urban Community,” *Am J Community Psychol.* 43:1–2 (2009): 71–84.

⁵⁷ Whitney Randolph Steele et al., “The role of altruistic behavior, empathetic concern, and social responsibility motivation in blood donation behavior,” *Transfusion* 48:1 (2008) 43–54

⁵⁸ Christopher J. Einolf, “Does extensivity form part of the altruistic personality? An empirical test of Oliner and Oliner’s theory,” *Social Science Research* 39:1 (2010) 142–151

⁵⁹ Brian Berry, *Sociologists, Economists and Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978)

⁶⁰ Denis Kessler et al., *Savings Behavior in 17 OECD Countries*, *Review of Income and Wealth* 39:1 (1993) accessed June 26 2015 at <http://piketty.pse.ens.fr/>

⁶¹ Luigi Guiso, Paola Sapienza and Luigi Zingales “People’s Opium? Religion and Economic Attitudes”, *Journal of Monetary Economics*, 50:1 (2003): 225–82.

motivation varies between historical and societal conditions and between different individuals under the same conditions. It follows that theories of behavior and society, as well as measurements of collective well-being, must take into account the forces that shape both factors, and the relative strength of these factors.

One particularly illuminating study by Harold Grasmick and Donald Green shows the relative importance of deterrence and moral commitments in curbing crime.⁶² The authors asked respondents whether they had committed various criminal and immoral acts in the past and if they thought they would do so in the future. They then asked respondents to “estimate the chances you would be arrested by the police if you did each of these things,” in line “with the utilitarian perspective” that “measures of perceived certainty of punishment must be from the viewpoint of the respondent.” In order to account for the fact that the same punishment may have a different impact on different people, they also asked “how big a problem that punishment would create for your life.” Finally, in an effort to measure moral commitment, the authors asked respondents to rank a series of criminal acts according to how strongly they feel these acts are morally wrong. All three independent variables correlated significantly. Moreover, moral commitment was correlated more strongly with reported past and estimated future criminal acts (−.42 and −.55, respectively) than were the perceived certainty of arrest (−.34 and −.24, respectively) and the perceived severity of punishment (−.27 and −.30, respectively). That is, *both deterrence and moral commitments discouraged illegal acts*. This finding highlights the importance of morality, in addition to material incentives and coercion, for a functioning society and economy.⁶³

Along the same lines, the literature on tax compliance has found that people’s decision to pay (or evade) their taxes has as much to do with their moral obligation as a citizen as with the fear of punishment. The traditional economic model of tax compliance, the economic deterrence model, “assumed taxpayers to be utility maximizers [for whom] tax evasion was viewed as worthwhile if the financial gains purely outweighed the financial costs.”⁶⁴ However, this economic model in fact “greatly overpredicts noncompliance.” Just as a purely egoistic individual would lie, cheat, and steal, he would also evade his taxes. Instead, studies of tax compliance found that

“incorporating noneconomic motivations, such as a moral preference for honest reporting, does reduce predicted noncompliance” to more realistic levels.⁶⁵ In particular, people’s “personal norms,” including “altruistic orientation,” community values, cooperation, honesty, and religious beliefs, as well as their “social norms,” the attitude of one’s “professional groups, friends and acquaintances” towards tax evasion, all have a significant influence on tax compliance. Likewise, the “perceived fairness of taxation,” including both the “perceived balance of taxes paid and public goods received” and the “perceived justice” of the enforcement regime, is strongly related to tax compliance.⁶⁶

Research has also found that “social interventions” based on “leveraging social concerns” can be more effective than material incentives in encouraging cooperative behavior. In trying to encourage water conservation in drought-affected California, the traditional economics-based approach of raising water prices did little to discourage water use. In contrast, the simple act of emailing homeowners a comparison of their water use to that of their neighbors was as effective as a 10 % price increase.⁶⁷ This case, however, shows the continuing prevalence of reductionist assumptions. A *New York Times* article by two economists and two psychologists on the drought, for example, concluded that “social interventions work” not because people care about “making others better off,” rather, “we cooperate because it makes us look good,” and “good actions benefit your reputation.”

Part IV: Preferences Socially Made, Can Be Socially Reconstructed

A considerable number of social scientists, some say most, increasingly recognized the limits of psychological hedonism as a foundation for theories of choice—but not because they discovered the moral dimension. They particularly concerned themselves with the fact that a statement about happiness “was based entirely on the internal subjective feelings of the individuals in question,” which “were not objectively observable.”⁶⁸ This led to a focus on relative or “ordinal”

⁶² Harold G. Grasmick and Donald E. Green, “Deterrence and the Morally Committed,” 22:1 *Sociological Quarterly* 1–14 (1981)

⁶³ See for example “The Role of Perceptions of the Police in Informal Social Control

Kevin M. Drakulich and Robert D. Crutchfield *Social Problems* Vol. 60, No. 3 (August 2013), pp. 383–407; *Religion & Liberty* Volume 16, Number 3 *The Economy of Trust* by Kenneth Arrow (2006); Edmund S. Phelps, “Introduction,” *Altruism, Morality, and Economic Theory*, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1975) 5

⁶⁴ Ken Devos “Tax Compliance Theory and the Literature” in *Factors Influencing Individual Taxpayer Compliance Behaviour* (Springer Netherlands, 2014) 13–65

⁶⁵ Tax Compliance STOR

James Andreoni; Brian Erard; Jonathan Feinstein
Journal of Economic Literature, Vol. 36, No. 2. (Jun., 1998), pp. 818–860.

⁶⁶ Preconditions of Voluntary Tax Compliance: Knowledge and Evaluation of Taxation, Norms, Fairness, and Motivation to Cooperate
Eva Hofmann, Erik Hoelzl, and Erich Kirchler *Zeitschrift Fur Psychologie*, 216(4), 209–217.

⁶⁷ Erez Yoeli, Syon Bhanhot, Gordon Kraft-Todd, and David Rand, “How to Get People to Pitch In,” *New York Times*, May 17 2015

⁶⁸ D. Wade Hands *Economics, psychology and the history of consumer choice theory* Cambridge *Journal of Economics* 2009, 3

measures of utility, which did not depend on hedonistic assumptions.⁶⁹ Paul Samuelson, for example, put forward the theory of “revealed preferences,” according to which “consumers’ preferences can be revealed by what they purchase under [...] different income and price circumstances.”⁷⁰ According to Daniel Kahneman and Richard Thaler, the concept of “utility as an aspect of experience,” in which “people choose the options that they will most enjoy,” “essentially disappeared from economic discourse” during the 20th century, with economists moving to a model of “decision utility” focusing on whether preferences are “consistent with each other and with the axioms of rational choice.”⁷¹

According to this approach, the person’s feelings are immaterial; only the fact that his or her preference guided their choice matters. An often cited example is the preference of a person who sought to climb a mountain and did so; it matters not, say those who follow this line of analysis, if having reached the top of the mountain he felt happy, satisfied, disappointed, or empty; he got what he chose. It is worth noting, however, that economics textbooks continue to use “pleasure” and “happiness” interchangeably with utility, suggesting that this conceptual shift is very far from complete.⁷²

In response, one notes that it surely matters; the climbers who are unhappy, one would predict, are less likely to climb again. Moreover, the theory still does not encompass moral preferences, or if it does, it treats them as one kind of preferences among many others, and thus collapses a distinction that is crucial to many sound analyses of human behavior.

I move next to show, for those who do not take it for granted, that much of what people prefer is implanted. True, most if not all people, can eke out a measure of freedom and choice, but it is much less than satisfiers and followers of the preference theory assume. Hence, there is nothing immoral about limiting the pursuit of pleasure (e.g. speeding, driving while drunk) in order to make room for affirming action, especially in periods and societies where it is neglected.

The assumption concerning autonomous preferences conflicts with the empirical findings of the study of persuasion through advertising and other forms of manipulation by marketing. This has led defenders of the theory to argue that advertising serves merely an informative function. In reality,

advertising often focuses more on influencing its audience subconsciously⁷³ than on providing information.⁷⁴ Advertisements often appeal to emotions, irrational fears, and cognitive biases as a way of “manufacturing need,”⁷⁵ inducing preferences for the goods they seek to market rather than merely producing goods to satisfy existing preferences. Women did not feel that they had to pay for a painful procedure to remove hair from the private parts until the industry convinced them that a ‘bush’ was embarrassing.⁷⁶ Consumers felt no need to purchase mouthwash until they were convinced that without it their dental hygiene routine was incomplete.

Faced with the preceding observations, economists argue that economic theory “needs” the assumption that preferences reflect the true inner self in order to assess the contribution of the economy to general welfare. The economy is assumed to function well when it provides the goods preferred by people at prices such that supply equals demand. Individuals are thought to vote with their purchasing dollars so as to guide the economy toward that blessed state of equilibrium, which is considered the “holy grail” of neoclassical economics.⁷⁷ If preferences can be manipulated by social pressures or advertising, then an economy that satisfies those preferences would appear not to serve the people but, rather, the manipulators who affect the preferences. Such a revelation would require economists to study the relative power of persuasion and political power exercised by various elites.

True, acknowledging the reality of manipulation and the initial formation of preferences by a variety of social forces, as well as their continuous reshaping, does not prevent one from noting that there are limits to the extent to which people can be manipulated. One telling example is the USSR. It tightly controlled its educational system and shaped cultural productions such as movies, television, and books in line with its ideology, while limiting access to other cultures. It further provided strong incentives for conformity and strongly disincentivized dissent. Nonetheless, after 70 years, the

⁶⁹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online, s. v. “utility and value”, accessed June 09, 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/>

⁷⁰ Encyclopædia Britannica Online, s. v. “revealed preference theory”, accessed June 09, 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1952214/revealed-preference-theory>.

⁷¹ Anomalies: Utility Maximization and Experienced Utility

Daniel Kahneman and Richard H. Thaler

The Journal of Economic Perspectives, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Winter, 2006), pp. 221–234

⁷² See for example, MICROECONOMICS AND BEHAVIOR Seventh Edition ROBERT H. FRANK Cornell University 10; Robert Pindyck and Daniel Rubinfeld, *Microeconomics* 7 ed, (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2009) 79, 97

⁷³ “Advertising in contemporary society is generally regarded as having two central and correlative functions, that of informing and that of persuading consumers. The informative function is likely to be stressed by defenders of the advertising practice, for by providing information to consumers about products, services, and prices advertising allows the consumer to make reasoned choices about the things on which he/she will spend his/her money” (Santilli, 1983: 27). “The overwhelming bulk of advertising in American mass media is designed to promote the sale of products and services” (Pearlin and Rosenberg, 1952: 5).

⁷⁴ Li Way Lee, “Persuasive Advertising and Socialization.” *International Journal of the Business of Economics* 4 (1997): 203–14.

⁷⁵ Katie Phillips, “The Manufactured Wants and Unmet Needs of Young America.” *Forbes*, August 29 2011, accessed June 23 2015 at www.forbes.com/

⁷⁶ Rebecca M. Herzig, *Plucked A History of Hair Removal* (New York: NYU Press, 2015)

⁷⁷ *The Foundations of Non-Equilibrium Economics: The Principle of Circular and Cumulative Causation*, ed. Sebastian Berger (London: Routledge, 2009): xii

regime was unable to suppress religion, family loyalties, and aspirations for liberty, leading to its collapse. There have been many thousands of attempts in the West alone, from the Israeli Kibbutzim to American “hippie” communes to various religious orders, to form cultures and communities dedicated to an ascetic life. All of these, too, failed to maintain their culture of denial for most members. These failures demonstrate that the extent to which preferences can be shaped against basic underlying human needs is limited.⁷⁸ Indeed, if it were possible to manipulate people without limits, as suggested in *1984*, it would be possible to make slaves sing in appreciation of their servitude. The historical record clearly demonstrates otherwise, but only over the longer run, and for basic human needs rather than for specific preferences. (And those must be studied to determine who and what shaped them rather than take them as given.) Once it has been established what these basic needs are, it becomes possible to assess the contributions of the economy to the general welfare without disregarding that preferences to a significant extent are inauthentic in the sense that they do not express the true, underlying needs of the person but rather mirror the manipulators. However, in the longer run, regarding basic human needs such as the quest for a measure of autonomy, for dignity, and for affective bonds, people do prevail.⁷⁹

Although there are many variations,⁸⁰ the basic sociological and psychological understanding of the process of and factors influencing preference formation goes as follows: Children are born with biological urges but their mode of satisfactions is very open ended. They experience hunger but are not born with a need for Cokes and French Fries, or snails and red wine, or hummus and nargila. These preferences reflect the particular cultures and communities in which they are born and raised. In particular, children’s initial preferences are formed through complex processes of socialization involving identification, habituation, and explicit and implicit persuasion. Children acquire their preferences by imitating their parents and other adults; they are persuaded by them, and are influenced by their narratives. However, preference formation is not limited to the home; children learn from schools, peer groups, media, and other sources besides their parents. Further, these processes of socialization never end; thus, colleges and professional schools play a role in the preference formation of their students, and after graduation, people continue to be influenced by peer groups and leaders and are adverse to changing their preferences. Children gradually develop an ability to modify their preferences on their own,

⁷⁸ Amitai Etzioni, *The Active Society: A Theory of Societal and Political Processes*. (New York: Free Press, 1971)

⁷⁹ Amitai Etzioni, “Basic Human Needs, Alienation and Inauthenticity.” *American Sociological Review* 33 (1968): 870–85

⁸⁰ Eleanor Maccoby, “The Role of Parents in the Socialization of Children: An Historical Overview.” *Development Psychology* 28 (1992): 1006–17.

but when all is said and done, individuals’ preferences are, broadly speaking, largely the product of socialization, and only to some extent of individual reflection and desires.

In short, despite these many and important differences about how preferences are formed, the evidence is overwhelming that they are not inborn the way biological urges are, but rather reflect the particular cultures and sub cultures in which the child is raised; that is, preferences are socially shaped. Research also shows that they are constantly reshaped through peer pressures, exposure to leadership, and advertising. Individuals have a degree of freedom, but it is much smaller than hedonists assume.

It follows that these preferences should not be granted the kind of strong normative standing to which they would be entitled if they truly reflected free will. It also stands to reason that, given that corporations and various interest groups and ideological camps constantly labor to reshape preferences, there is no reason for those who represent the common good or the public interest to not do the same, e.g., by discouraging people from smoking.

Above all, those who seek to better the human condition by encouraging them to reduce their obsession with material consumption once their basic needs are well and securely met, exercise more, and share more would be more effective if they focused not on changing individuals but on changing cultures and social and political structures, which shape preferences. This in turn requires collective action, of those who seek changes to ally themselves with others, and above all form a social movement. History shows that movements such as the civil rights movement, the environmental movement, those of national liberation and many others—are the forces most able to withdraw the legitimacy of an old regime and invest the freed legitimation in the formation of a new one.⁸¹

Major Addendum: Well Being: Much Better but not Good Enough

In response to an earlier draft of this article, Carol Graham made the following important critique:

There is a big difference in the idea of happiness/well-being as an object of policy (as, for example, Jeff Sachs and the Bhutanese espouse) and its usage as a metrics, as a tool of analysis to help us understand the intersect between income and non-income determinants of well-being (as well as their causal properties). Indeed, many of the most serious scholars in the field, like Danny Kahneman,

⁸¹ This is a broad subject. For a discussion by the author, see Amitai Etzioni, *The Bankruptcy of Liberalism and Conservatism*, *Political Science Quarterly* 128:1 (2013) 39–65

Arthur Stone, and others who I served with on a National Academy of Sciences panel on well-being metrics and policy, shy away from the term happiness as it confounds momentary contentment with life satisfaction and other deeper dimensions of well-being.

She continued:

“There is also increasing consensus among scholars of well-being that there are two distinct dimensions: a. Hedonic or experienced well-being, which includes contentment, pain, pleasure, sadness, and so on. b. Evaluative well-being, which is more complex and captures individuals’ views of their lives as a whole. This latter dimension implicitly includes Aristotle’s eudemonia, which is individuals’ capacity to lead purposeful or meaningful lives (which includes a moral dimension.)”⁸²

In response I draw on the difference in the literature between subjective well-being (as reported by those studied) and objective well-being. Subjective well-being is surely a much more meaningful and richer concept than that of happiness. Studies of happiness in the hedonic/experienced sense assess how satisfied a person is at a given moment by asking questions such as “how happy are you” and “did you smile frequently yesterday”. In contrast to those seeking to understand well-being use questions such as “how satisfied are you with your life in general” and “do you feel that you have purpose or meaning in life” (with possible responses on a ten point scale).

However, this concept raises two questions. First, a relatively minor one, whether all or even most people have a clear and stable conception of the purpose of their lives and its meaning—and to what extent they formulate such notions mainly in response to the questions asked, and whether when asked again, under different circumstances, they would not provide rather different answers.

(By the way, this measurement would make young people come off as less well than older ones because many young ones are less clear about their purpose/meaning than older ones).

Second, there can be little doubt that people who state that they have a purpose and a meaningful life may be Jihadists, gang leaders, produce ads to promote the purchase of cigarettes, or sell subprime mortgages. *I see no correlation between being a good human being and leading a purposeful and meaningful life.* To get at the moral dimension one would need to ask people what they did during the last weekend; what they would do if everyone in their group did free ride; how improper they consider keeping cash in a found wallet; how they rank inequality versus economic growth; and other such questions.

Objective well-being can include moral assessments—and anything else those who study the concept wish to include. Examining such studies shows that definitions of objective well-being reflect the values of the researchers, not their subjects. Thus, some students of objective well-being assume that people who live in a society that has a lower environmental footprint than others, are more just, and are at peace with others are better off. Others—if they have higher income, pay fewer taxes, and are freer from government regulations. That is, this concept moves us in the right direction but still faces two challenges: a) it mixes moral and non-moral determinants of well-being, preventing us from measuring the moral factor, and b) it ignores the moral positions of the subjects and instead draws on implicit, not accounted for, values of the researcher.

In short, studies of well-being move well beyond those of happiness but leave room for a distinct and explicit study of how moral people are by their lights and those of explicitly spelled out and accounted for values of others. And what determines how moral people are.

⁸² Quoted with permission. See also: Carol Graham and Milena Nikolova. 2015. “Bentham or Aristotle in the Development Process? An Empirical Investigation of Capabilities and Subjective Well-Being.” *World Development* 68, pp. 163–179; Arthur A. Stone and Christopher Mackie. 2013. *Subjective Well-Being: Measuring Happiness, Suffering, and Other Dimensions of Experience*.

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