

Well-being

Preface

The question about good life has preoccupied minds for thousands of years. Is happiness the only goal in life? Or shall everyone also consider the needs of others? Perhaps the most significant matter is how a person performs in the competition against others in the various fields of life. There are numerous important questions and lots of disagreement about the correct answers.

This essay offers a viewpoint on these questions. As to the matter of good life, I am just an amateur. Numerous authors, from Aristotle to Esa Saarinen have influenced this essay. The objective is to present my understanding about the nature of good life and good society. Please, feel free to use this fiction in any imaginable way; the only condition is that you shall believe that your way of usage has a positive effect on the overall well-being of the humankind as defined in this essay.

Introduction

Let us imagine a kind person, Ann, who wants to be eagerly and honestly a good citizen. Ann wants to behave and act as well as possible taking into account her intrinsic character and the society in which she is living. The main challenges for her are, first, to know what is good and what is bad, secondly, to predict what kinds of actions lead to good results, and, thirdly, to enforce herself to systematically act in a way that leads to a good rather than a bad outcome. Although she have spent lots of time and effort to ponder these issues and tried to behave well, she is still unsure whether she has been successful or not. The organizers thought that Ann would be a perfect choice for the experiment because she is eager to understand what a good citizen really means and because she is apt to creative thinking.

Then, another person, Bod, is more concerned about the society as a whole than his own direct impact on the society. Of course, he understands that, at the end, a society consists of individuals that determine how the society is working and how well the society is able to support the fulfillment of human needs. Still, he thinks what really matters are the rules, laws and institutions used in the society to control the behavior of citizens. As an engineer, Bob believes that it is both important and possible to create mechanisms that directs the actions of citizens in way that advances common good. He wants know what rules are good for the society and then foster the realization of those rules.

Chris is a sociologist who is somewhat dissatisfied with the prevalent tools to measure and compare different societies. In an interview, Chris already presented some interesting reasoning: Economic performance is relatively easy to measure by means of Gross Domestic Product per

inhabitant. It is also easy to ask a large number of citizens what is their life satisfaction on a numerical scale, say, from 0 to 10. As a result, there are two unequivocal numbers that can be used to put the societies in an unambiguous order, which ones are good and which ones are bad. Still, Chris feels that both methods are too limited to tell the whole truth about the well-being of the societies. He wants to develop a better measuring method that is both implementable and more credible.

There also are people that want to consider an even bigger picture: Diane appreciates human life and its various delights, but she is also deeply concerned with the safety and health of the most distant people, the well-being of various animals and the future of the global ecosystem. Still, she struggles when trying to balance all the highly respectable objectives. What should be done in the harsh reality of conflicting needs and wishes?

The organizers noticed that the religious aspect was almost missing in the group, Gabriela is deeply religious and believes that everything has been created by God. Thus well-being is essentially the same as living according to the rules defined by God.

It would be nice, if the society just consists of people like Ann, Bob, Chris, Gabriel, and Diane. Although they see the world from different viewpoints, they may still agree about many principles, because they want to be good—similarly as you.

There are, however, people that have somewhat different attitudes. Elma (name changed) lived as a child in an environment in which all people seem to seek only their own happiness on the cost of everyone else. As a result, Elma's honest belief is that everybody shall take care of his or her own happiness; all other people are there to satisfy her needs. Thus, it makes sense for her to serve another person only if she knows that the other person will, in turn, serve her needs.

Finally, in the current market economies, there are people like Fausto who measures everything by wealth and money. There are winners and losers; winners are those who own more and loser are those who own less. According to these people, the society shall have rules to protect the rights of owners. This means that everything can be sold and bought while the famous invisible hand takes care of the fair division of wealth.

In December 2015 Ann, Bob, Chris, Diane, Elma, Fausto, and Gabriela are invited to a bizarre experiment. It is a kind of combination of a TV format and a scientific experiment in which seven people spend seven days in a comfortable but relatively small cottage. Their only task is to develop methodology that can be used to measure the well-being of any society in an objective way. Those seven persons have been selected because they represent different kinds of personality and, in addition, they have demonstrated creativity and argumentation skills. In a way, they represent diverse stereotypic personalities.

Some of them were concerned about the TV part of the experiment while some of them were more interesting in the TV part than the experiment? Why on earth they need to be a part of strange TV format? Or what they had to spend time with as dull topic designing a "framework"? But there are different kinds of people that appreciate different kinds of matters. The rest of this document contains a research report written by the project manager leading the experiment. Unfortunately, the strict timetable did not allow a formally written report on this interesting experiment.

Report

This is as truthful and accurate report as possible on what happened during the course of the experiment. The report has not been edited for publishing purpose but is in the original, somewhat sketchy format.

Day 1

As a starting point, Ann, Bob, Chris, Diane, Elma, Fausto, and Gabriela accept as a fact that they, indeed, have different opinions about almost everything. The objective of agreeing on a generally applicable method to assess the well-being of any society appeared impossible to achieve. But they have signed a contract that gave them a strong incentive to end up with something acceptable.

The Group was allowed to organize their work as they wanted. After some discussion, Chris, as the oldest person in the Group, was given the responsibility to lead the discussion about their work plan. Chris proposed that they should spend the first day to construct a framework that would provide a basis both for the method and their effort. The basis means parts of the Method and the main interactions between the parts. They noticed that the most important question to be agreed was: What could be a proper measure for well-being? They made a list of possible measures: happiness, wealth, health, love, status in the society, meaningfulness, self-actualization, devotion, virtue, reputation, and the number of friends.

They first considered an approach of simply asking: "What is your current level of life-satisfaction?" They rejected the idea because they wanted to handle the diversity of basic attitudes including pure happiness, material wealth, and devotion (besides they had allocated one week, not one hour, for their task). The next simple question was: how many aspects of well-being would be enough? There were a lot of similar questions and everyone participated into the discussion.

At the end of the day, the group defines the following general framework for their effort:

- They must define a basic unit for well-being that can be used to describe both the well-being of individuals and the well-being of society.
- The secondary objectives are a) to promote the understanding of well-being among citizens, b) to enhance the overall well-being.

TV feedback was unenthusiastic. Viewers expected some drama, not endless discussions about numerous aspects of well-being. Boring. Still, a minority of viewers considered the basic idea of the show inspiring.

Day 2

The group was able to agree that there are animals that are occasionally conscious and pursue their own goals, although Gabriela did not want to use the term animal for human beings. After reading some articles about the recent research findings most of them agreed that all perceptions and ideas are constructed in the brains of conscious beings. Yet, Gabriela disagreed because she believes that God is able to communicate directly without any aid of the brain. Furthermore, she tends to believe that individual consciousness can be part of something bigger, a kind of universal consciousness. Other participants claim that they were unable to observe anything that supports Gabriela's claims. It seemed, however, that Ann was somewhat unsure here; she has practiced yoga and meditation for a couple of years and had some spiritual experiences. Fausto was unsure about the relevance of consciousness and wanted to exclude it from their analysis.

The group had some difficulties to define the limits for their analysis. Bob and Fausto wanted to include only adults whereas the majority wanted to include young children. Another problem that generated quite harsh discussion was the status of people living in a country without a residence permit. The preliminary agreement was to restrict the analysis only to the members of the society. Who exactly is a member remained an open issue.

At this stage, the group did not make any decision on how the framework should deal with other people, other societies and other conscious animals. They made a decision that they shall develop some methods and rules also for these groups, but only after the development of the basic framework covering the members of the society [Note by KK: finally, they did not do anything with this issue].

TV ratings were still quite discouraging. The typical reaction was that viewers expected more action instead of dull conversation. The sponsors of the show, mostly some foundations, stressed that the most important matter for them was to study whether a group of diverse people could agree about the fundamental nature of well-being, not the level of viewer ratings.

Day 3

The task of the third day was to agree about the number aspects to be included in the well-being analysis, and the general content of each aspect. The group had already agreed that there shall be at least two aspects but hardly more than five aspects.

The unanimous decision was that *happiness* shall be one of the aspects. Elma was still somewhat skeptical about the need of any other aspects, because for her, her own happiness was the end while everything else was just a means to pursue happiness. Why not just measure happiness by a simple method and then take an average over them? Others were not happy with so limited a method. Fausto and Bob insisted that a measure of success must be an integral part of the framework. Others accepted this proposal on the condition that people are free to define themselves what success means for them.

Elma noticed that this implies that a person is allowed to choose as her objective whatsoever she had already been successful. This observation raised a hot debate. Fausto said that success must be measured objectively, because otherwise it would be just one more on the list of subjective feelings without any real relevance. According to him, wealth is an obvious measure of success and perhaps social status and reputation could be somehow included, too. He continued that in the current market economy, everything can be measured by its market value- and that exactly is the strength of modern society. After a long chat they decided to name the second aspect as *success*. However, they were not able to decide yet whether success shall be measured by means of objective data or by subjective assessment (or perhaps by a combination objective and subjective methods).

Thus, the group had now two aspects of well-being, happiness and success. After this point they decided to spend two hour for individual thinking. During the day, organizers provided some supporting activities. The goal was that during the day everyone make a list of three favorite aspects of well-being to be measured in addition to happiness and success. The lists appeared as follows:

Ann: Meaningfulness, engagement, peacefulness

Bob: Respect, equality, abilities

Chris: Eudaimonia, relationships, variety

Diane: Empathy, love, hope

Gabriela: Devotion, empathy, humility

Elma: Love, health, excitement

Fausto: Status, power, skill

Ann expressed her opinion that happiness and success are both quite shallow measures. Someone can be happy and successful but be without any real content or meaning in his life. Fausto looked her with suspicion but did not say anything. Diane nodded with approval. Bob considered the issue for a while and said that meaning is important but it might be difficult to evaluate: "How meaningful is your life" might be asked, but what do the answers really reflect? Chris had read some ancient Greek writings and was excited with the concept of eudaimonia. However, that was too elitist and abstract term for other participants. Thus, Chris had to explain in more practical terms what he sought by eudaimonia. Without true meaning, even a successful and seemingly happy life might be hollow. In the end, they ended up adding an aspect of the meaningfulness of life (or simply meaning).

For a while it seemed that those three aspects (happiness, success and meaning) were enough for covering the main elements of well-being. They wanted, however, to check their lists to make sure that everything essential was included. This discussion raised a concern that the analysis was too selfish. Could it be enough to live a satisfactory life without any connection to other beings? Elma and Fausto thought that social relationship might be important, but their effect could be measured by other aspects. Besides, if you become happy because of good relationship, then you are happy, and that is enough. Or someone may think a pleasant relationship as a great success story. And relationships may create meaning. Nevertheless, Diane proposed to add compassion as the fourth aspect of well-being, because we are so deeply social animals. Because they were unable to agree, they had vote about the fate of compassion. The result was: 4 in favor of compassion, 2 against (Bob abstained). Thus, they end up with four main aspects: happiness, success, meaningfulness, and compassion.

TV ratings: Feedback was a little bit improved, maybe because the expectations were not particularly high, while this day had provided some action in the form of serious quarrels.

Day 4

This day's objective was to define the scales. According to Chris they needed one number, not several, because that is the only way to claim that society A is better than society B. In addition, the method may claim that society B was better than society A in certain sense (or in respect of certain aspect), but that was a secondary issue. Thus, in an intermediate phase, there can, and obviously shall, be several parameters to describe the four aspects of well-being, happiness, success, meaning and compassion. A numeric scale would be necessary, not just stars or letters, because they also needed a way to combine the results.

Fausto began by stating that money is an obvious choice as an additive scale (and highly addictive, added Ann—whatsoever she meant by that). We are paid Euros per hour, so, that is the way to assess the success and value of life and time. The more one is willing to pay for something, the more valuable the experience is. What else do we need? So you mean that the well-being of a person that is able to spend more is higher than the well-being of less wealthy persons? - Ann asked by Ann while Chris and Diane nodded approvingly. Obviously they needed a more neutral scale that makes it possible to better encompass different aspects. Bob proposed: "What if we use simply an abbreviation W and say that W can vary between 0 and 100 and

describes the entire well-being of a person? After some discussion they made a preliminary resolution that the scale from 0 to 100 would be adequate for formal analysis. It was less clear, however, whether ordinary people were willing and able to use that kind of scale for assessing their well-being. But that is another matter, noted Chris, and shall be addressed separately.

Gabriela then noticed that Chris has used this eloquent term of Eudaimonia – could that be used a term for general well-being? After a brief literature review made by Chris and Gabriela they selected Eudemony instead of Eudaimonia (Fausto liked a slightly modified version of Eude-money). Thus they now had a scale from 0 to 100 that was called Eudemony. Zero meant the lowest possible well-being and 100 meant the highest imaginable well-being. In addition, they had the aspects of happiness, meaning, success and compassion. So far, so good.

Day 5

Group discussions have so far been mostly friendly, but now some quarrels emerged, maybe because they had already spent several days together and knew the habits, both good and bad of other participants. The organizers were afraid that when the group approached more sensitive issues the group might not anymore be able to reach any reasonable agreement. Or, actually, those who were responsible for the popularity of the experiment as a TV show were not scared at all. Fausto and Gabriela seemed to disagree about everything, which somewhat slowed down the productivity of the discussions; Elma and Diane avoided speaking with each other and Bob became irritated whenever he heard words empathy or pity. The well-being of the group was not particularly high at this point of experiment.

The rules of the show were quite restricted about the use of alcohol. The organizers, decided to offer some special services on the condition that they were able explain how they would like to measure different aspects. It seemed that Bob became especially motivated because of this deal. So he organized smaller groups to develop methods to assess each of the aspects. First, Gabriela, Chris and Diane considered Happiness while Ann, Bob, Elma and Fausto considered Success. Then, Bob, Gabriela and Elma took Compassion while Ann, Chris, Diane and Fausto took Meaningfulness for more detailed analysis. The results of the group works were:

Happiness. Though the title of the aspect was happiness, they wanted to cover both positive and negative emotions; their preliminary list consisted of six pairs of feelings: happy vs. sad, satisfied vs. frustrated, peaceful vs. angry, confident vs. shamed, excited vs. bored, hopeful vs. worried. Their idea was to ask about the emotions during the previous day on a scale from -3 (strong negative feeling) to +3 (strong positive feeling).

Success. As agreed beforehand, success was a term that may have different meaning for different persons. The basic idea was that the respondent shall first select the three most important element of success in his or her life. Each element shall have a succinct definition and an objectively measurable scale; but the main point in their scheme was that every scale all to members of the society were arranged in the order of success. For instance, 87 meant that 87 percent of the members of the society were less successful than the participant under study in the specific success element; and this value shall be based on the real statistics not just on personal opinions. Possible success elements are income, status in certain field, education, wealth, physical condition in certain respect, and fame. [A note by KK: it seemed that Ann believed that this approach automatically meant that success was a zero-sum game within a society and, thus, could not be used to compare societies].

Meaningfulness. Based on narratives, each respondent shall write or tell a life story from personal viewpoint. The measuring part was a grand challenge for the group. They had to

somehow measure the meaning of the presented stories, in a way, they also needed to assess the expressed meaning was important. Something was meaningful if that something made life important [Note by KK: at least Chris was aware of the fact that they had a circular definition for meaning.] The scale for the meaningfulness was from -3 to +3 similarly as with happiness. In order to make the approach more respectable they wanted to include three dimension of meaning: past, present and future (in brief, how meaningful your life has been so far, how meaningful it is just now, and meaningfulness it will be in future).

Compassion. The group had a hard time to measure compassion in any reasonable way. They had a feeling that they know what compassion meant but it was still unclear whether compassion was a characteristic of a person or a way of action. Can a person be compassionate without behaving in a compassionate way? Or can a person behave compassionately without being compassionate? They arrived at the conclusion that in the long term, compassionate behavior is more important but that true compassionate actions are possible only if the person has a compassionate quality either naturally or through systematic development. Thus they decided to measure compassionate by means of true actions and by a personality test. Consider what you have done during the last month on the behalf of other people. The question shall be divided into four parts: the most important people for you (about 5), other people you know personally (maybe 200), people that belong to the same society as you (but you do not know personally) and people not belonging to the same society (and that you do not know personally). But the scale? Ask how the selected actions in each category reflects inherent compassion of a scale from not at all to very strong (on a scale from 0 to 5).

Towards the end of the week it seemed that a kind of connection emerged between Ann and Chris. Bob and Fausto remained ignorant with that development while the ladies were well aware of what happened.

TV ratings was actually somewhat improved, maybe due to more energetic interactions. Female viewers showed increased interest in the show.

Day 6

Now they had the pieces but they needed a link between the pieces and the Eudemony as the final objective. This was a task that appeared insurmountable: too many incompatible pieces. Still they were able to design the following mathematical approach (unfortunately, the notes made by the group were somewhat vague and did not include all necessary details):

$$\text{Happiness: } H = \sum_{i=1}^6 (e_i + 3)(9 - e_i)/2.16$$

$$\text{Success: } S = \sum_{i=1}^3 s_i (200 - s_i)/300$$

$$\text{Meaning: } M = \sum_{i=1}^3 (m_i + 3)(9 - m_i)/1.08$$

$$\text{Compassion: } C = \sum_{i=1}^4 (c_i)(12 - c_i)/1.44$$

$$\text{Eudemony of the person } E = w_h H + w_s S + w_m M + w_c C$$

Now [Note by KK: this is the most crucial point of the framework] they were able to agree that the weight of every member of a society shall be the same, totally independent of the person's position in the society:

Eudemony of the society = the average Eudemony of all the members of the society.

All members that were able to answer the questions were included based on their own answers. Those members that were unable to answer the required question were still included but

with a modified set of model. For instance, in the case of small children, happiness had a relatively big weight while meaningfulness was related to the prospects of future life.

Day 7

At this point of the experiment the group was simultaneously exhausted and amused. Whatsoever they had achieved, there have learned a lot from themselves. They were aware of the incompleteness of their well-being framework, but they were reluctant to continue the polish the framework. Instead they decided to test how it works with themselves. Unfortunately, the details of the tests were declared confidential. The reasoning behind this, somewhat strange decision (at least from the viewpoint of a TV show) was that in reality the individual answers must be confidential in order to produce as objective results as possible.

The results (weight in brackets):

	Happiness	Success	Meaningfulness	Compassionate	Eudemony
A	86 (0.40)	69 (0.10)	76 (0.25)	80 (0.25)	80
B	77 (0.25)	78 (0.40)	78 (0.30)	73 (0.05)	78
C	82 (0.25)	74 (0.20)	83 (0.50)	71 (0.05)	80
D	69 (0.25)	68 (0.05)	84 (0.25)	86 (0.45)	80
E	76 (0.75)	81 (0.10)	69 (0.10)	64 (0.05)	75
F	67 (0.25)	86 (0.70)	59 (0.05)	52 (0.00)	80
G	83 (0.25)	73 (0.10)	82 (0.35)	79 (0.30)	80
Group (average)	76 (0.33)	77 (0.26)	76 (0.26)	71 (0.15)	79

Organizers decided that they will discard this strange format but continue their effort to develop a method to assess well-being in a more scientific context.

The participants and the organizers wished Merry Christmas and Happy, Meaningful, Successful and Compassionate New Year.