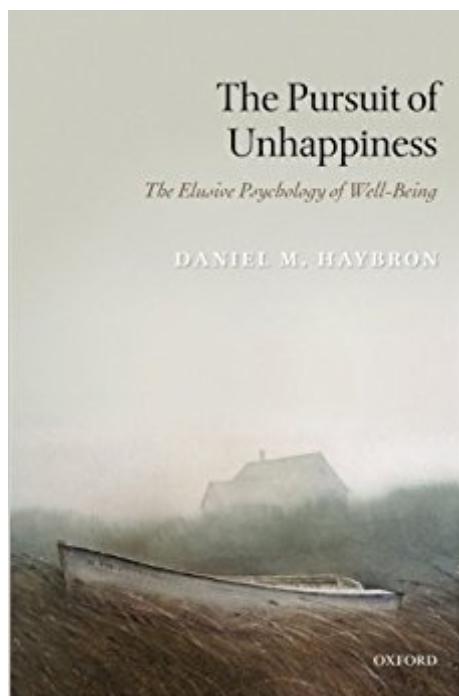


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# The Pursuit Of Unhappiness: The Elusive Psychology Of Well-Being



## Synopsis

The pursuit of happiness is a defining theme of the modern era. But what if people aren't very good at it? That is the question posed by this book, the first comprehensive philosophical treatment of happiness, understood here as a psychological phenomenon. Engaging heavily with the scientific literature, Dan Haybron argues that people probably know less about their own welfare, and may be less effective at securing it, than common belief has it. This is largely because human nature is surprisingly ill-suited to the pursuit of happiness. For the happiness that counts for well-being is not a matter of what we think about our lives, but of the quality of our emotional conditions. Yet our emotional lives are remarkably difficult to grasp. Moreover, we make a variety of systematic errors in the pursuit of happiness. These considerations suggest that we should rethink traditional assumptions about the good life and the good society. For instance, the pursuit of happiness may be primarily a matter of social context rather than personal choice. This book offers an extensive guide to philosophical thinking about happiness and well-being, correcting serious misconceptions that have beset the literature. It will be a definitive resource for philosophers, social scientists, policymakers, and other students of well-being.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Review from previous edition: "Insightful and imaginative. A serious pleasurable read for those happy enough to explore a difficult subject." --Paul O'Doherty, Irish Times"Subtitled 'the elusive pscychology of well-being', this is a brilliant and comprehensive philosophical treatment of

happiness in the psychological sense... The book calls us to rethink our assumptions about the good life and the good society, raising many of the questions explored by Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World* and *Island*. All this raises interesting and complex questions for politicians and educationalist as they grapple with introducing happiness studies into the curriculum."

--Psychology/Parapsychology"An original and thorough investigation, richly informed by empirical psychology, of almost every topic connected, or seen as connected, with happiness: the self, well-being and virtue, and the good society. It is written in an engaging, often humorous, sometimes poetic, style, and contains a wealth of illustrations from life, literature, film, science, the arts, the news media, and Haybron's own prodigious imagination... It is safe to say that, after this book, happiness will never be the same again."

--Neera Badhwar, *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*"A prodigious act of scholarship whose comprehensiveness dwarfs previous efforts. The best single source for empirical and philosophical approaches to investigating happiness. A highly nuanced treatment that rewards the reader with its frequent and original insights."

--Robert L. Woolfolk, Princeton University"Haybron's book is a perfect example of how philosophical ethics can matter beyond the academy as well as within it. This original book is an acute, engaging, and well-informed discussion of an issue of concern to every human being."

--Roger Crisp, University of Oxford"Daniel Haybron has written a rare book that combines philosophical sophistication with detailed knowledge of, and respect for, the psychological literature. He integrates the best that philosophy and

psychology have to offer in pursuit of an answer to the question that matters above all others: how

we ought to live. The result is a book that will edify psychologists and philosophers alike."

--Barry Schwartz, Swarthmore College"Both progress and provocation are vibrantly on display in Dan Haybron's outstanding new book, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness*. The book is a model of humanistic inquiry: acute philosophical argumentation disciplined by close and careful attention to the latest and best in the sciences of mind, everywhere textured by a keen eye for what it is to be a person - and why it matters."

--John M. Doris, Washington University in St Louis"Dan Haybron has written the definitive philosophical book on happiness, and it is a must-read for scholars of the good life. The

work is broad, balanced, and interesting, and yet forcefully presents the case that happiness is a

crucial element of good living. In making the argument, Haybron beautifully reviews both the

philosophy of happiness, including what this concept means, and the empirical work on the topics

arising in fields such as psychology and economics."

--Ed Diener, University of Illinois"Dan Haybron asks the key philosophical questions about happiness: what is happiness, and how can we know

about it, and what is it good for? His book offers insightful answers that are well-grounded in both

science and philosophy. The book is full of clear and rigorous arguments, but at the same time it is a

pleasure to read. It will be a milestone in the philosophical discussion of happiness." --David Chalmers, Australian National University

Daniel Haybron is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Saint Louis University. His research interests centre on several issues in ethics: well-being and the good life, moral evil, and the virtues.

This extremely interesting and in places downright fascinating book is worth every penny you spend to acquire it. Sure, it's a hardback, but get it anyway: you'll probably want to re-read it. Haybron's title mentions unhappiness, but this is not a catalogue of the myriad ways in which we are, or can be, unhappy -- though he thinks we're less happy than we could be. He writes exceptionally well, and he thinks clearly. Indeed it's hard to imagine that this book hasn't been the product of decades of reflection on the weighty matter of human well-being and contentedness, for he seems very wise. He's a philosopher but there are many examples in it, and a number of "practical" asides, and a goodly number of references to, and quotations from, works of literature. Above all, he is someone who has absorbed work done in other disciplines, principally psychology. He is a cautious rather than a dogmatic writer, though after he treats such themes as psychic affirmation, self-fulfillment (not in the sappy, New Age sense), the role of the emotions in our happiness, and so on, he concludes that we should live our lives in a more contextualist fashion. By this contextualism I take it that he means a kind of communitarian liberalism, something he thinks would be more conducive to our flourishing and happiness. For a work of philosophy this has some amusing parts (Haybron talks about Pollyannas vs Kvetches). He discusses -- generally in passing -- a number of thinkers and views. One will find references to Bentham, Plato, Nietzsche, Mill, Freud, Aristotle, etc. (in addition to writers like Hemingway, Thoreau, Forster and Pound). Using evidence from narratives, oral reports, novels and works of philosophy, and above all from studies in psychology and economics, Haybron shows that the major (popular) ethical theories philosophers discuss (Kantianism, utilitarianism, virtue theory) are not fine-grained enough when it comes to treating the question of happiness/flourishing. Integrating the insights of psychological investigations into philosophy will help in providing what is missing. Ultimately his target is what he calls the Personal Authority position, the view that we know ourselves best/well and therefore know what is best for our flourishing. This target is a form of "transparency" subjectivism, which he rightly argues is incompatible with the evidence. Haybron defends a version of mild objectivism, which he says is distinct from Aristotelian and other virtue/perfectionist positions, but which seems quasi-Aristotelian to me (I'll defer to Haybron). Overall, he wants us to rethink some of the more individualistic and

selfish attitudes engendered by liberal modernity, without throwing the liberal baby out with the subjectivist/individualist bathwater. It could make us happier.

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