

R. Allan Freeze

The Metrics of Happiness

The Art and Science of Measuring
Personal Happiness and Societal
Wellbeing

Social Indicators Research Series

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Contents

Part I The Multi-faceted World of Happiness and Wellbeing

1	An Introduction to the Concepts and Ideas	3
2	The Positive Psychology Movement	27
3	The Social Indicators Movement	39
4	The Sustainability Movement	61
5	Happiness Studies in the Biological and Medical Sciences	75

Part II Eudaimetrics

6	The Assessment of Personal Happiness and Life Satisfaction	97
7	The Dimensions of Communal Wellbeing	135
8	The Building Blocks of Communal Wellbeing	153
9	The Wellbeing of Nations	185
10	The Livability of Cities	239
11	Satisfaction in the Workplace	271

Part III Nexus

12	Policy, Politics and Happiness	307
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	Appendix: Data Sources (Table A.1)	331
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List of Tables

Table 1.1	Academic authors of popular self-help happiness books	20
Table 1.2	A selection of happiness gurus	21
Table 1.3	Some miscellaneous quotes on happiness	24
Table 2.1	A brief summary of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Adapted from the source materials listed in Reference [8])	29
Table 2.2	A summary of Peterson and Seligman’s character strengths and virtues (Adapted from the source materials listed in [13])	32
Table 2.3	A sampling of academic research centers and private institutes that focus on positive psychology	33
Table 2.4	Examples of specialization in the positive psychology movement	34
Table 3.1	A sampling of academic research centers and private institutes that focus on the economics of wellbeing	49
Table 4.1	A sampling of academic research centers and private institutes that focus on sustainable development and/or ecological economics	66
Table 4.2	The Bellagio Principles: Guidelines for practical assessment of progress toward sustainability. (Adapted from the source material listed in [8])	68
Table 4.3	United Nations Global Sustainable Development Goals. (Adapted from the source material listed in [9])	69
Table 5.1	A sampling of academic research centers and private institutes that focus on the neuroscience of happiness and wellbeing	76
Table 6.1	Sources of data on personal happiness from surveys and questionnaires	98
Table 6.2	Some examples of single “core questions” used in subjective questionnaires of happiness and life satisfaction	104
Table 6.3	Some of the best-known multiple-question scales used in subjective assessments of happiness and life satisfaction	106
Table 6.4	Three multiple-statement questionnaires. (Adapted from the source materials listed in [12–14])	108

Table 6.5	Template of questions used in the Oxford Happiness Inventory. (Adapted from the source materials from listed in [25])	110
Table 6.6	Positive and negative affect schedule (PANAS). (Adapted from the source materials listed in [48])	112
Table 6.7	Correlates of happiness and life satisfaction	121
Table 6.8	Self-help prescriptions for increasing personal happiness	128
Table 7.1	Dimensions of wellbeing	136
Table 7.2	The eight dimensions of personal happiness and communal wellbeing used in this book	139
Table 7.3	A ten-step scenario for the development of a composite index. (Adapted from source materials listed in Reference [18])	143
Table 7.4	Selection criteria for indicators of community wellbeing. (Adapted from source materials listed in Reference [19])	144
Table 7.5	Advantages and disadvantages of multi-dimensional indexes of wellbeing that aggregate results across the dimensions to produce a single-valued outcome	148
Table 8.1	A sampling of single-dimensional indexes that bear on issues of happiness and wellbeing	154
Table 8.2	Sixteen indicators for the Index of Economic Well-being. (Adapted from the source materials listed in [11])	159
Table 8.3	Sixteen indicators for the Index of Social Health. (Adapted from the source materials listed in [34])	169
Table 8.4	Summary of results for the USA and Canada for a set of selected single-dimensional indexes	181
Table 9.1	Multi-dimensional composite indexes of nationwide wellbeing	186
Table 9.2	Timeline of ideas and indexes developed to provide alternatives to the GDP as a measure of national wellbeing	188
Table 9.3	Calculation methodology for the Genuine Progress Indicator. (Adapted from the source material listed in [30])	205
Table 9.4	Indicators for the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (first four dimensions). (Adapted from the source materials listed in [34, 35])	207
Table 9.5	Indicators for the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (last four dimensions). (Adapted from the source materials listed in [34, 35])	208
Table 9.6	Dimensions, indicators, number of variables, number of sufficiency thresholds, and weights for the Bhutanese Gross National Happiness Index, GNH-B. (Adapted from the source materials listed in [42])	214
Table 9.7	Summary of country rankings from multi-dimensional composite indexes of nationwide communal wellbeing	226
Table 9.8	Critical issues in the design and application of multidimensional indexes of happiness and well-being. (Adapted from the source material listed in [61])	234
Table 10.1	Selection of sample city indicators	244

Table 10.2 A selection of multi-dimensional composite indexes of livability of cities 250

Table 10.3 Sectors used in Innovation Cities Index. (Adapted from source material on Innovation Cities website listed in [17]) 251

Table 10.4 Summary of city rankings from multi-dimensional composite indexes of urban wellbeing 255

Table 10.5 A selection of community indicator projects 259

Table 10.6 Cascadia Scorecard, 2007. (Adapted from source material on Sightline website in [44]) 261

Table 11.1 Dimensions and indicators for assessment of job satisfaction and engagement from the employee perspective 274

Table 11.2 A representative suite of questionnaires used in the measurement of employee satisfaction and engagement 278

Table 11.3 Industries with highest levels of workplace happiness (Kununu website, [33]) 284

Table 11.4 Ten Best and Worst Jobs, 2019 (CareerCast website, [33]) 284

Table 12.1 Federal, state, and municipal policy-making that can benefit from data and analyses on communal happiness, wellbeing, life satisfaction, and quality of life 319

Table 12.2 Suitability of multi-dimensional indexes of wellbeing as a measure of the effectiveness of policy 322

Table A.1 Summary of sources of data for calculation of indexes of happiness and wellbeing 331

Part I
The Multi-faceted World of Happiness
and Wellbeing

Chapter 1

An Introduction to the Concepts and Ideas



Measuring the Unmeasurable

Sometime, not too long ago, you have almost surely picked up your local newspaper and encountered a headline about happiness or wellbeing. Not *the* headline on page one, but a smaller item on a later page, perhaps in the op-ed section. The headline, and the article beneath it, may have told you that Denmark, or New Zealand, or some other country you don't live in, has just been determined to be the very best country in the world. Or, if you live in the United States or Canada, that they rank in the top ten, but not at the very top. You may have learned where your city ranks on a list of the "most livable cities" in the world. Or that the "gross national happiness" of the world has gone up or down. Or that your quality-of-life has been assessed and found wanting. Or that the United Nations has just issued its latest World Happiness Report, and that it did so on March 20, which has now been proclaimed as the International Day of Happiness.

Haven't you ever wondered how they come up with these lists? How do they go about defining, and measuring, and comparing happiness, or wellbeing, or livability, or quality-of-life?

And who are "they" actually?

And what about those happiness questionnaires that pop up from time to time in your weekend supplement, or on that web page when you're checking out the latest news of the Kardashians? "Taking all things together," asks some anonymous questioner, "how would you say things are going these days?" You are given five choices and asked to choose one. Are you: Very Happy? Happy? Neither Happy nor Unhappy? Unhappy? Or Very Unhappy?

What did you answer?

Happy?

Most people do.

So if you chose "Happy," what exactly did you take into account? You probably thought about your financial situation. Maybe, your level of marital contentment?

How about your kids? Do they make you more happy or less happy? What about the current success (or lack thereof) of your favorite college football team? Or the state of live theater in your town? Or whether there is a good supply of butterscotch ripple ice cream in your fridge?

If you checked the “Happy” box on that questionnaire, and not the “Very Happy” box, what would it take to move you up a notch from “Happy” to “Very happy?”

There are tangles here. Surely there is more than one kind of happiness. Surely there are a host of things that contribute to our happiness, some that come from within our own hearts, and some that reflect the external influences of the world around us. And how does our rating of our own personal happiness feed into assessments of the communal wellbeing of our towns and cities? Who decides what is important and what isn’t? How in the world might we go about trying to measure all this?

This book is an attempt to address these types of questions; a joint quest if you will, between author and reader to uncover what is important in the tangled history and current resurgence of the happiness movement. It is, at root, a book about measurement. It is about the now-decades-long striving, sometimes quixotic, sometimes more-or-less successful, to pin numbers onto the illusive chimera of personal human happiness and communal wellbeing.

In the eyes of some, it is about trying to measure the unmeasurable.

What About the Dow-Jones and the GDP?

Of course, in the eyes of many, the wellbeing of every nation is already being measured. One can pick up any newspaper in the country and find the latest values of the Dow-Jones Industrial Average, and with lesser regularity, but easily discovered nevertheless, the current estimate of this year’s Gross Domestic Product. Some see these economic indicators as a suitable proxy for happiness and wellbeing. But as we shall see, many others do not.

One of the strongest demurrals came from Robert F. Kennedy in a speech at the University of Kansas in 1968 [1]. His take on the Gross Domestic Product: “It does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debates or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country. It measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.”

In recent years, there has been an ever-growing philosophy of social governance which holds that public policy ought to lead to an improvement in the levels of happiness, wellbeing, and life satisfaction of the citizenry, and that the accomplishment of such policy prescriptions requires consideration of a much wider suite of concerns than just the wealth and economic prosperity of the favored few. As the economist Andrew Clark puts it: “Surely the ultimate aim of human endeavour must

be to produce flourishing communities of people who are profoundly satisfied with their lives. It cannot be simply the creation of wealth.” [2].

More to the point, this philosophy requires some way to *quantify* the success or failure of public policy, not just in terms of Gross Domestic Product or the Dow Jones Average, but in terms of the happiness that is engendered in individual citizens, and the wellbeing that is engendered in the population as a whole.

The Four Fountainheads

This philosophy has given rise to a whole new enterprise in the halls of academe (and in the self-help aisles of your local Barnes and Noble), one that emphasizes the development and assessment of happiness and wellbeing. It has grown helter-skelter across a wide spectrum of disciplines, both hard science and soft, but it owes its genesis to four paradigm-shifting transformations that have taken place in the way that scholars probe the human condition, all of which have pushed society closer to a more universal and meaningful perception of human happiness and wellbeing.

First of all, in psychology, the leaders of the *positive psychology movement* have changed the way we look at mental health, away from an obsessive interest in the identification and treatment of abnormal behavior, and toward a more preventive approach that emphasizes the development and nurturing of positive life skills that lead to personal fulfillment.

Secondly, we can turn to the domain of economics, where the *social indicators movement* has fostered a move away from sole dependence on economic indicators like the Dow-Jones and the GDP to measure our state of wellbeing, and toward a more inclusive assessment of the quality of life, one that includes consideration of social, spiritual, and health-based considerations, as well as giving value to the safety and security that is enabled by good governance.

Thirdly, in the latest incarnation of the environmental awakening that swept over the world in the second half of the twentieth century, the *sustainability movement* has made us all realize the negative impacts that decrease our happiness and wellbeing due to environmental contamination, resource depletion, and climate change, and the positive impacts that arise from a healthy and sustainable ecosystem.

And lastly, in the so-called hard sciences, there has been a move toward *happiness studies in the biological and medical sciences*, particularly in the areas of endocrinology, the neurosciences, and genetics. Studies in these areas have clarified the role of hormones, the promise of brain imaging technology, and the explanatory power of genetic coding, all of which. Have important implications for the understanding and measurement of human happiness and wellbeing.

In the next four chapters that make up Part I of this book, each of these movements will be taken in turn, examining their historical development, identifying the leaders of the new paradigms in each of the separate disciplines, and assessing the role that each sub-discipline has to play in the evolving multidisciplinary world of happiness and wellbeing research.

Detailed descriptions of the actual measurement tools will be saved until Part II, and the implications for social action and governance until Part III.

In the remainder of this introductory chapter, the goal will be to set the table, defining and differentiating between happiness and wellbeing, introducing the basic building blocks of indicators and indexes, drawing the distinctions between subjective and objective measures, and identifying a hierarchy of possible scales of study. In all these cases, the treatment in this chapter will be introductory. There will be much more to say about all these issues in later chapters.

The Human Desire for Quantification

Human beings have been measuring things since time immemorial. Our earliest ancestors must have utilized some rough prototypical ideas of measurement in order to carry out the tasks in their daily lives: in the barter of goods, the construction of dwellings, or the scheduling and planning of migratory travels. As civilization progressed, the needs of trade and commerce required the development of common units of measurement, defined by science, enshrined in trade agreements, and eventually legitimized in the laws of individual countries and in the treaties between them.

The first consistent *system* of measure probably dates to the third century BC in Mesopotamia and Egypt [3]. It is known for sure that a unit of length was developed by that time. The *cubit* was defined as the length of one's forearm from one's elbow to the tip of one's middle finger, and despite the obvious vagaries of such a definition, this unit was widely used in the design and construction of the pyramids. Weights and volumes are also mentioned in the Bible, in the context of providing fair measure. The Magna Carta of 1215 specifies that the quart shall be the official measure used in the sale of wine throughout the British realm.

If temperature is taken as a representative proxy, we learn that Galileo Galilei invented the first device for measuring it in 1592, and that Anders Celsius was the first to suggest a scale of 0 to 100 degrees between the freezing point and the boiling point of water (although his scale was inverted, with 0 for boiling and 100 for freezing, and it was left to later scientists to reverse the scale to the one we use today). The point is that in the hard sciences, in medicine, and in engineering, there are myriad well-defined properties and parameters that are measured routinely with ever-more-accurate measurement instruments, using widely-accepted units of measurement. Physicists measure the mass, volume and density of solids. Chemists measure the concentrations and solubility of chemicals in water. Engineers measure the stresses and strains in engineering structures. Meteorologists measure the temperature and pressure of the atmosphere. And so on.

The question is: Can one conceive of a comparable system of measures, with well-defined units of measurement, and reliable instruments of measurement, that can be applied in the social sciences? Specifically, can one hope to quantify personal happiness and/or communal wellbeing in a meaningful way?

There is no doubt that this has been the hope of social scientists for a long time. As early as 1881, the economist Francis Edgeworth dreamed of the future development of a *hedonimeter* that would measure human happiness directly [4]. In 1940, the sociologist Hornell Hart promoted his *euphorimeter*, which was not actually a direct measure, but one based on interviews and questionnaires [5]. A similar approach has led to the *eurobarometer*, which is currently used to track wellbeing in the European Union.

Certainly, in economics, which can be viewed as the hardest of all the soft sciences, there is much quantification of measurable entities, from stock market prices, to worker wages, to government deficits (all of which are measured in units of currency such as the dollar). There are many other parameters like interest rates, unemployment rates, and rates of inflation, which are not measured in units of currency, but which have numerical values that are open to mathematical and statistical analysis. The subfield of economics that handles this quantitative analysis is well-enough established to have its own name, *econometrics*, its own journals and societies, and its own specialized college courses [6].

The comparable subfield in psychology is called *psychometrics*, and it, too, is now a highly-developed discipline [7]. It is defined as the objective measure of an individual's skills, knowledge, abilities, attitudes, personality traits, and educational achievements. It includes the quantitative assessment of happiness and wellbeing as part of its mandate.

The question of whether psychological traits such as happiness can be sufficiently quantified to qualify as measurements was answered in the affirmative in 1946 by the Harvard psychologist Stanley Smith Stevens. He argued that "any number that can be assigned to objects or events according to some rule constitutes a measurement." [8] Under this definition, numerical scores that are derived from psychological assessments such as IQ tests, or tests that measure ability in, say, mathematics, or self-reported scores from any type of happiness questionnaire that uses a numerical scale, all qualify as measurements that can be analyzed mathematically and interpreted quantitatively. Such tests and surveys constitute the *measurement instruments* for psychometric evaluation.

Perhaps the most-well-known quantitative approach to psychological assessment is the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), first developed at the University of Minnesota in 1943, updated most recently in 2008, and still in wide use [9]. It is a standardized psychometric test of adult personality. The questionnaire at the heart of the MMPI requires the test candidate to answer 338 true-or-false statements, which are then assessed with the aid of 10 clinical scales, 4 validity scales, and 32 additional supplementary scales. The final result is a set of numbers, one for each clinical scale, that lie in the range 30 to 120. A set of "codetypes" aids the psychologist in interpreting these numbers. The MMPI is used primarily in the diagnosis of mental illness and the development of treatment plans, but it has also found application in non-medical applications such as in job screening, personnel selection, and as a forensic tool in legal cases.

So, suppose you decide to sign on for one of the many available happiness surveys. Most of them will feature a questionnaire with many questions, maybe

even many pages of questions, but some of them use only one question. If there is only one question, it may look something like the one that was introduced earlier: “Taking all things together, how would you say things are going these days? Would you say you are: Very Happy, Happy, Neither Happy nor Unhappy, Unhappy, or Very Unhappy?” Suppose you check the second box. You are Happy. If the test designer has assigned the numerical values 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 to the five choices, you have just recorded a 4. You have given the tester a numerical estimate of your happiness. You have given him or her a measurement. And if there was a prologue to the questionnaire that required you to identify your age, gender, marital status, level of educational attainment, line of work, and other personal info (kept scrupulously anonymous, of course), he or she will be able to add your numerical score into the database that has been built from the results of others who have filled in the questionnaire, and it will now be possible to carry out statistical analyses on the data to correlate personal happiness with some of the possible contributing factors. Moreover, the database as a whole will provide the tester with much information that is pertinent to the assessment of happiness on a communal scale. And if there are trends to that assessment over time, it may be possible to relate them to possible external causes, including changes in public policy.

In short, we have taken the initial steps towards measuring the unmeasurable. The parameter under investigation is happiness. The units of measurement are derived from the numerical scales used to interpret qualitative expressions of personal emotion. The instruments of measurement are the questionnaires that produce the numbers and the statistical databanks that store the data. Admittedly, these soft-science “measurements” (and the “instruments” that measure them) are not quite the same as in the hard sciences, but they do satisfy Stanley Smith’s requirement that they are numerical, and that they can be interpreted “according to some rule.” All this is not to say that designing a meaningful questionnaire is easy or trivial; there are issues of bias, and scaling, and representativeness, and more. At this point, it is just the concept of this type of “measurement” that has our attention; a full and thorough discussion of the potential pitfalls is saved for Chap. 6.

It is probably appropriate to end this section with a pause for thought. While measurement is a powerful and essential ingredient in assessing wellbeing, it is certainly not the only way to do it. Despite our emphasis on measurement and our search for quantification, let us not lose sight of the value of more qualitative approaches to the assessment of happiness and wellbeing. There is a long history of *hermeneutic* ideas in the social sciences; the art of understanding and communication through story, contemplation, and allegory; and the recognition of the role of experience and world-view in interpreting human social behavior. We have begun to see how happiness can be expressed as a number, but clearly it is much more than a number.

Happiness and Wellbeing Defined and Differentiated

Thus far, the terms *happiness* and *wellbeing* have been presented as if they were synonyms of one another. However, there must be some uneasiness in every reader's mind that this is not quite so, that the two terms are related, but that they do not mean exactly the same thing. In fact, there are two distinctions that are often drawn to differentiate happiness from wellbeing.

The first distinction relates to their meanings when applied to a single individual. Most psychologists see *happiness* as a short-lived feeling of contentment, a positive emotion to be sure, but one that comes and goes with one's mood. The synonyms for happiness that are listed in the various versions of Roget's Thesaurus appear to support this concept of happiness. They include such words as bliss, delight, elation, glee, and joy, all of which seem to refer to the enjoyment of momentary high spirits. You may be happy as a lark, happy as a clam, or happy as a king. Happiness may make you sing, purr, smile, laugh, walk on air, or be on cloud nine, but presumably not forever.

The *wellbeing* of an individual, on the other hand, is seen as a term of wider scope, based on a more contemplative evaluation of life satisfaction, a cognitive rather than an emotional assessment of one's physical, intellectual, and social state of mind. Roget's synonyms include such words as contentment and good fortune, and recognize wellbeing as somehow related to safety, security and success. The wellbeing of an individual is a state or condition of existence characterized by ongoing good health, happiness, and prosperity. In this view, happiness is "a necessary but not sufficient condition for high levels of wellbeing." [10].

The second distinction uses *happiness* as a term to be ascribed mainly to individuals, while *wellbeing* is reserved mainly for a communal or societal scale. The conceptual equivalents of wellbeing under this distinction include such terms as public welfare, quality of life, and livability, all of which tend to reflect a societal focus. Wellbeing at this scale implies the existence of a civil society. Much of this book reflects this second distinction, referring as it often does to "personal happiness" and "communal wellbeing." However it is not possible to be slavish. The concept of "gross national happiness," for example, highlights happiness, but is clearly meant to be applied at a societal scale. The terms are too closely related, and too widely-used in a variety of senses, in both academic research and popular self-help literature, to try to enforce any clear-cut rules.

Another issue that arises in this regard is that of culture and language. Are the concepts of happiness and wellbeing universal? Is the happiness and wellbeing experienced in rich developed countries similar in kind to that experienced in poorer less-developed countries? Do citizens of individualist societies honor the same characteristics of wellbeing as those in collectivist societies? What about religious traditions? Is the concept of happiness for Buddhists or Muslims more or less the same as it is for Christians? As it turns out, much of the wellbeing literature that is quoted in this book is produced by happiness researchers who are based in the so-called WEIRD countries (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and

Democratic), especially those nations of northern Europe and North America with a long history of economic success and democratic freedoms. Perhaps not surprisingly, the country rankings that their studies produce tend to favor these same countries. Skeptics see an opportunity for bias. Suffice it to say for now that there are many diverse concepts of happiness and wellbeing in the many cultures and languages of the world, and there will be more to say about their possible impacts on studies of happiness and wellbeing in later chapters.

Hedonic and Eudaimonic Happiness

There are many types of happiness, but most of them can fit into a twofold classification which happiness researchers call *hedonic* and *eudaimonic* [11].

Hedonic happiness focuses on sensual gratification, the attainment of pleasure, and the avoidance of pain. The ideas date to the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341-271 BCE). We are all familiar with the Epicurean mandate to “eat, drink, and be merry,” but in fact Epicurus’ tracts were more nuanced than that, emphasizing the value of “healthy souls.” He recommended a peaceful life, as well as a merry one [12]. Nevertheless, the concept is a selfish one at root, with so much stake laid on personal pleasure. In modern dress, the search for hedonic happiness can lead to an undue focus on material wealth, and the shallow pleasures that accompany the consumer society. It can also lead one onto the so-called “hedonic treadmill,” whereby satisfaction never arrives; the more you have, the more you want. Many of the articles in a volume of research papers sponsored by the American Psychological Association found that those who lived their lives governed by materialistic drives tended to exhibit lower self-esteem, greater narcissism, less empathy, and more conflicted relationships [13].

Sigmund Freud’s *pleasure principle* is basically a restatement of hedonic theory, but one where the central tenets are instinctual rather than the result of rational thought [14]. He defined the pleasure principle as an innate seeking of pleasure and avoidance of pain in order to satisfy one’s biological and psychological needs, wants, and urges. When the needs of the pleasure principle are not met, anxiety and tension arise. In general, Freud seemed more interested in *arresting unhappiness* than in *promoting happiness*, and under his leadership, the field of psychotherapy settled into to a reactive approach to mental health issues, rather than a preventive one that might have focussed more on the pursuit of happiness and wellbeing.

To some degree, Freud was building on the evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin, which also featured an involuntary selection of hedonic biological attributes. Clearly the arrival of pleasure and the delay of pain are attributes that will be favored in species that are most successful in their adaptation to their environment. With the later developments of genetic theory now in hand, there is a better understanding of how our “selfish genes” play a role in this game of survival of the happiest [15].

The hedonic tradition is also usually credited as the forerunner of utilitarianism, the philosophical movement founded by Jeremy Bentham in the late 1700's, which holds that individuals will generally make decisions that are in their own rational self-interest [16]. They do so by maximizing their *utility*, where utility is defined as the aggregate pleasure derived by the decision-maker from any action. Utilitarian economists tend to believe that almost every decision made by a rational human being can be translated into the form of a "purchase," whether of goods or services, and that economic measures therefore provide a suitable proxy for happiness and wellbeing. To an economist of this stripe, "*having* is everything. There is no room in this world view for *being or doing*." [17].

Bentham argued that utilitarian decision-making would lead to "the greatest good for the greatest number." As originally presented, utilitarianism paid little attention to the impact of one's decisions on others, or to the so-called *externalities* in the form of aesthetic or environmental outcomes for which it is difficult to assign a specific value of utility. John Stuart Mill tried to raise utilitarian ideas onto a higher plane by giving greater value to pleasures of the intellect than to those of mere sensation, but the emphasis on self remains. Adam Smith, who is generally acknowledged as the founder of modern economics, used rational self-interest as the basis for his formulations of a free market economy.

The tenets of utilitarianism are carried to ultimate economic fruition in the ideas of Bayesian decision-making, where every outcome of every decision has a utility, usually measured in units of currency such as dollars. The Bayes approach does take explicit consideration of the externalities, but it does so by employing *utility functions* that use subjective weighting schemes to convert non-monetary outcomes into dollars (even up to and including the value of life, which may arise in the making of life-and-death decisions, such as those that occur in military strategy, or in risk-laden technical decisions like the development of nuclear power). In this line of thinking, everything has its price, and a straightforward summing of the resulting utilities leads to the preferred decision from a suite of possible alternatives. It is implicit in all these economic systems with hedonic or utilitarian roots that the maximization of utility also maximizes personal happiness.

The concept of *eudaimonic happiness* introduces a moral dimension into the discussion. The term *eudaimonia* is a Greek word that can be parsed into its two parts: *eu*, meaning "good," and *daemon*, meaning "spirit." Aristotle (384–322 BCE), who may have coined the word, viewed *eudaimonia* as a "virtuous life, well-lived." He wrote of "flourishing," and emphasized the pursuit of excellence, and kindness to others. He was the first of the Greek philosophers to see happiness, not just as the result of fate or good luck, but as an attainable pursuit over which we have some control. In his view, failure to attain happiness is at least partially our own fault [18].

In its modern usage, psychologists see the eudaimonic approach to life as one that breeds happiness from a wider and less-selfish suite of activities than just those that deliver the narrow pleasures of hedonism. Eudaimonic happiness arises from having a purpose in life, from maximizing personal growth, and from using ones strengths in helping and developing positive relations with others. It values the feelings of belongingness, and the pleasures brought by making contributions to society. It is a

philosophy of self-realization and self-acceptance, but one where these traits grow at least in part from contributing to the greater good. Joar Vitterso, the editor of the *Handbook of Eudaimonic Well-Being* argues that eudaimonic happiness is “the most important idea in the world” and defines it as “the good composed of all goods.” [19].

The appropriateness of the two-fold classification of happiness into hedonic and eudaimonic spheres has been widely discussed and debated in the happiness literature. Aristotle apparently favored a threefold breakdown featuring “goods of the mind” (like moral virtue and wisdom), “goods of the body” (like health, beauty, and strength), and “external goods” (like wealth, friends, and good government) [20]. Another paper identified 12 distinct conceptions of happiness held by the ancients [21]. Vitterso presents a table of 41 different descriptions of happiness from the literature. Most of the alternative classifications fall in the two-fold to four-fold range. They are often based on a differentiation of various “states of mind.”

At the other end of the spectrum, perhaps even the two-fold subdivision is one too many. In most of these alternative conceptualizations, pleasure is seen at best as a “handmaiden” of eudaimonia but never the central component. Hedonic happiness implies good feelings, and the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, while eudaimonic happiness implies something more. In this context, eudaimonic happiness is the more encompassing term and hedonic happiness is just a subset of it.

In this book, despite these somewhat esoteric controversies, the basic two-fold classification is retained, and the techniques that are presented for the measurement of happiness and well being will reflect both hedonic and eudaimonic contributing factors. However, it will be accepted that the eudaimonic term is the more encompassing, and for this reason it has been highlighted in the title of Part II. The term *eudaimetrics* is coined there, in parallel to such terms as *econometrics* and *psychometrics*, as the art and science of measuring happiness and wellbeing.

A Little History

The Greek philosophers were not the first to think about happiness. It is likely that ancient peoples had some recognition of their own moods; certainly they would have been familiar with both pleasure and pain. However, they probably ascribed the comings and goings of the good times to fate and luck and the fickle will of their Gods. It is unlikely that they saw their own personal happiness as something over which they had any control.

The first real attempts at self-analysis may have come from the Buddha in the fifth Century BC [22]. Buddhist doctrine charts an eightfold path to inner peace that recommends meditation as a route to mental equanimity and a deeper form of happiness. Some twenty-one centuries later, these ideas still have resonance. Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, spends his life traveling the world spreading his Buddhist-based message of “educating the heart” and practising the “art of happiness.” [23].

Buddhism is not the only religion to address the question of wellbeing. Almost all religions recognize the need to engender happiness in the minds of their followers, if only to keep their flocks faithful to the teachings of their prophets. However, most of them try to do so by promising peace and harmony if, and only if, their adherents observe the tenets of their church's particular dogma. Early Christian thought held that true happiness could only be found in a knowledge of God. The Roman Catholic scholar, Thomas Aquinas, in the thirteenth Century, concluded that perfect happiness, in the form of pure and everlasting bliss, was possible only in the afterlife. In his view, in this life we are limited to an imperfect happiness which he called *felicitas* [24].

Most historians trace the beginnings of happiness as we know it, as an attainable goal in the earthly realm, to the arrival of the Renaissance in 15th and sixteenth Century Europe [25]. The blossoming of art and literature during this period brought with it a more humanist and secular view of man's place in the firmament, with less emphasis on the afterlife. The Protestant Reformation, at least in its dour Calvinist trappings, may have been a bit of a setback, but during the Enlightenment of the eighteenth Century, with its emphasis on reason, tolerance, and liberty, it once again became legitimate to seek personal happiness. And of course it was around this same time that the pursuit of happiness became enshrined as a basic right in the newly-minted Constitution of the United States.

The Kingdom of Bhutan

No history of happiness can ignore the landlocked Asian country of Bhutan. It was in this Himalayan mountain kingdom, in 1972, that the then-king, Jigme Singye Wangchuk, declared that his government's policies would no longer be based on Gross National Product, but rather on a more inclusive measure of Gross National Happiness. According to the king, the four pillars of GNH are the promotion of equitable and sustainable socio-economic development, the preservation and promotion of cultural values, conservation of the natural environment, and the establishment of good governance. In 1999, a Centre for Bhutan Studies and GNH Research was established. It now publishes its own English-language academic journal, and has sponsored four international conferences, the most recent of which took place in 2013. The appearance of a best-selling book on Bhutan in 2004 generated media coverage for the GNH revolution in *Time* and the *New York Times* [26].

Sadly, despite all these good intentions, it was not until 2008 that Bhutan began the difficult transition from absolute monarchy to full-fledged democracy, holding its first free elections in that year. More discouraging yet, Bhutan remains one of the poorest countries in the world, and appears on the radar of Amnesty International for serious human rights violations with respect to its Nepalese minority.

Even with the questionable success in its home country, the idea of Gross National Happiness remains strongly on the radar screen of the happiness

movement. In 2005, an American economic think tank, the International Institute of Management, with headquarters in Las Vegas, was the first to develop a GNH Index, based on the original concepts from Bhutan. In doing so, they beat the Bhutanese at their own game, who did not come out with their homegrown version until 2010. Both these indices were designed to replace the GDP as a more-inclusive measure of national wellbeing. In their reports both groups make a plea for the consideration of “softer values,” including environmental and social “intangibles,” in the assessment of national success.

There are literally hundreds of programs and projects around the world that take their lead from the original ideas of GNH. If you type “Gross National Happiness” into your Google browser, it will produce over five million hits. A more complete coverage of the GNH indexes, along with their many competitors, is presented in Chap. 9.

The Hierarchy of Scales of Study

In earlier sections of this chapter, a clear differentiation has been presented between personal happiness and communal wellbeing. However, it is certainly more complicated than that. At the communal level, there are many possible scales of study, and it is possible to arrange them in a hierarchal order, with each level in the hierarchy representing an ever-larger pool of subjects available for measurement and statistical study. From the *individual*, one can move to the *family* as the unit of study, and from the family to *groups*, like service clubs or sports teams. The next level of study would be in the *workplace*, or in educational institutions, or in the military. At the further end of the societal spectrum are *communities*, *cities*, *states*, and *nations*, and ultimately, the *world* as a whole.

Studies of happiness and wellbeing have been carried out at all these scales. Some of the measurement techniques and methods of statistical or mathematical analysis are common to all the scales, but many are not. By the same token, some of the factors that contribute to happiness and wellbeing are also common to all the scales, while others are not. In the simplest light, when studies are carried out at the level of individual happiness, the contributing factors are often more hedonic and self-centered. When studies are directed to wellbeing on a communal scale, they are likely to be more eudaimonic, more centered on the common good.

In Part II of this book, the various available measurement tools are organized in terms of this hierarchy of scale. There are separate chapters on personal happiness, satisfaction in the workplace, the livability of cities, and the wellbeing of nations.

Perhaps the thing that most separates these scales one from another is the fact that each of them has roots in a different academic discipline, and the histories of the development of ideas and methodologies for each of them reflect the traditions of the root disciplines. At the individual level, the assessment of happiness lies in the domain of psychology, and most Departments of Psychology at academic institutions now host programs in happiness studies. Questions of workplace satisfaction

and how best to achieve it have historically been addressed in Faculties of Commerce, and in programs in Business Administration or Industrial Relations. The enhancement of the quality of life in schools and colleges, for both students and instructors, has been the concern of Faculties of Education. The livability of cities has been the domain of programs in Urban and Community Planning, some of which are housed in Schools of Architecture. The move toward more all-inclusive assessments of the quality of life at the scale of states and nations has taken place primarily in Departments of Economics and/or Political Science, almost all of which now host programs in the new economics of wellbeing.

Clearly, there are huge differences in the histories and traditions of psychology, commerce, education, architecture, and economics. The paradigm shift that has seen more psychologists embrace the positive psychology movement has taken place in a milieu that was created by the history of development of the field, by the influences of Freud and Jung, and the relatively late emergence of quantitative rather than qualitative methodologies. Programs in commerce and business administration, at least the ones in Europe and North America, have almost all developed within a capitalist, free-market framework and its utilitarian traditions. Most early studies were generally carried out from the employer's perspective rather than the employee's. The history of education reflects its roots in religious doctrine and an early emphasis on discipline and rote learning. Concern with student happiness has arisen only as a by-product of the various theories of teaching and learning, such as those of Jean Piaget and Maria Montessori, which lean on a background in childhood developmental psychology. Urban planning dates back to the efforts of Baron Georges-Eugene Haussmann and the architect Le Corbusier in nineteenth-century Europe, whose city plans were designed to create showpieces of national pride. Current academic programs in urban studies lie at the intersection of architecture and engineering, and deal primarily with the functional questions of infrastructure, and the efficiency of civic governance. The economics and politics of wellbeing have arisen as a kind of antidote to the prevailing utilitarian doctrines in these various fields, influenced in part by the liberal sentiments of John Maynard Keynes and Thorsten Veblen.

Human Wellbeing and Ecosystem Wellbeing

In general, the emphasis in this book is on the happiness and wellbeing of humans, but the need for a harmonious relationship between human wellbeing and ecosystem wellbeing is recognized and supported. In fact, the importance of environmental sustainability is sufficiently highly regarded that it is acknowledged as one of the fountainheads of the human happiness movement (Chap. 4). More significantly, environmental health is seen as a direct contributor to human wellbeing, and environmental degradation as a serious negative influence. Concern over such issues as climate change, water contamination, air quality degradation, resource depletion,

and loss of species diversity, weigh heavily on both personal happiness (as described more fully in Chap. 6) and on communal wellbeing (as elaborated in Chaps. 8–10).

Subjective and Objective Measures

There is another distinction that needs to be made sooner rather than later. Happiness researchers distinguish between subjective and objective measures. *Subjective measures* are based on privately observable phenomena as seen from the perspective of a particular person. *Objective measures* are based on publicly observable phenomena as seen from the perspective of any independent, unbiased, and well-informed person [27]. Subjective measures depend on the judgement of the observer, while objective measures depend on external evidence that is independent of the observer. In communal happiness studies, subjective data come from personal assessments of the hopes, fears, desires, and levels of life satisfaction of a cohort of citizens. They are usually gleaned from answers to questions posed on happiness questionnaires. Objective data are based on measures of external factors that directly impact quality of life such as housing availability, secondary school graduation rates, or income distributions. They are generally taken from publically-available databases like census results, health outcomes, crime statistics, or government economic information.

In general, subjective measures are more widely used in assessments of individual happiness, while objective measures tend to find greater application in assessments of communal wellbeing. Once again, however, the separation is not clear-cut. The results of individual subjective happiness surveys, when viewed as a communal database, certainly have a place in studies of societal wellbeing. Conversely, an objective measure, say the distance of a respondent's home to the nearest park, may have a role to play in assessing a particular respondent's personal happiness.

There is also the question of whether one wants to take a single snapshot in time, or track trends over time. Both subjective and objective measures, either separately or together, may be used, on the one hand, to compare levels of happiness and wellbeing in different groups or jurisdictions at a particular moment in time, or alternatively, to track the levels of happiness and wellbeing in a single group or jurisdiction through time. The first approach is used in the annual country-by-country rankings one regularly sees reported in newspapers and TV clips. The second approach produces the time trends that are the stuff of every federal election, with one side telling us how much better off we are than we were a decade ago, and the other telling us that we are all going to hell in a hand-basket.

In their book *Soft Systems Methodology in Action* Checkland and Scholes note that “while subjectivity is never a problem for those whose inclinations are towards arts and humanities, it can be difficult for numerate scientists and engineers whose training has not always prepared them well for the drama, tragedy and farce of the social process.” [28] In a book such as this one that searches for “numerate” findings, care must be taken not to ignore the “drama, tragedy and farce of the social process.”

Indicators and Indexes

There are going to be many references in this book to indicators and indexes of happiness and wellbeing. The reader will encounter economic indicators, social indicators, and environmental indicators. You will be introduced to the Social Progress Index, the Crime Severity Index, the Environmental Performance Index, the Global Peace Index, and many others. It is appropriate that one understand what is implied by each of these two terms at the outset.

An *indicator* is a numerical or statistical measure of a single variable that changes its value over time, and that is thought to reveal some underlying aspect of social reality, in our case, the happiness and wellbeing of individuals and/or communities. An indicator must be easily identified and clearly defined. There must be an unimpeachable, non-partisan, non-ideological source of data for the indicator, usually in the form of publicly-available databases hosted by national governments or international agencies. Among the thousands of indicators of wellbeing that might be gleaned from such sources could be such diverse items as life expectancy at birth, seasonally-adjusted unemployment rates, urban air quality, levels of internet connectivity, or high school math literacy.

An *index* is a higher-level concept that usually involves the integration of several indicators into a single measure of greater breadth than that represented by the individual indicators. As a simple example, consider the two-indicator index known as the *Misery Index*, which is a kind of index of unhappiness. It is defined as the seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate plus the annual inflation rate (both in percent). It claims to reflect how an average citizen is doing economically. From the perspective of communal wellbeing, low is good, high is bad. Despite its ironic name, it is actually a respected measure of financial health (or lack thereof) developed by Arthur Okun, a Yale economist who was a member of the Council of Economic Advisors to both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations [29]. The values of the two component indicators, the unemployment rate and the inflation rate, are both easily found in widely-available databases at any point in time for any or all of the countries in the world. In 2013, a comparison of the Misery Index for 89 countries in the world showed values running from 5.4 to 79.4, with Japan at the top and Venezuela at the bottom. In the USA the MI value in January 2017 was 6.8.

Almost all the indexes that come into play in the world of wellbeing integrate a much larger suite of indicators than the two included in the Misery Index. The State of Caring Index, for example, put out by the United Way of America, uses 36 indicators. The Worldwide Press Freedom Index uses seven criteria, with several indicators defined for each of them. The Global Opportunity Index tracks five major areas, using 54 distinct indicators. In all these cases, the ability to come up with a single numerical score for the index itself involves some kind of subjective weighting of the various basic indicators. The indicators used in the State of Caring Index, for example, include measures that reflect charitable donations, volunteer activities, and engagement in civic activities. The designers of the index have to decide how to integrate and weight these various contributions to civic health,

differing as they do in function and impact, and, more importantly, in the units of measurement that might be used to chart them, say dollars for the first indicator, hours donated to the cause for the second, and some kind of subjective scoring for the third [30].

All of the indexes noted thus far are *single-dimensional*, that is, they reflect conditions in just one aspect of happiness and wellbeing. The Misery Index is an economic index. It says nothing about the social or environmental components of human happiness. The State of Caring Index charts volunteerism, and only volunteerism. The Press Freedom Index is similarly unidimensional. Economics, volunteerism, and press freedom are often identified as each having a role to play in communal wellbeing, but taken alone they are certainly not the whole story.

There has always been a yearning for a single score that might be developed for any given jurisdiction, be it a workplace, a city, or a country, that tells the whole story, a numerical value that can be used to rank these jurisdictions one against another, or to track conditions in a single jurisdiction over time. For this, the eudaimetric world has turned to *multi-dimensional* indexes. These are composite indexes, or “indexes of the indexes” if you will, that integrate not just many indicators but many unidimensional indexes as well. In principle, one could imagine a composite index that includes the Misery Index, the State of Caring Index, and the Press Freedom Index, all as subcomponents of an overall Happiness and Wellbeing Index. In fact, many such attempts are already on the books. In Chap. 7, the various dimensions that have been proposed to describe the multi-dimensional world of happiness are laid out, and Chap. 9 catalogs many of the most successful ventures, including the Human Development Index, the Quality of Life Index, the Happy Planet Index, and many more.

Self-Help, Inc.

There are two distinct wings to the happiness movement, one based in the hallowed halls of academia, and the other scrambling for the big bucks in the down-and-dirty competitive world of self-help. The paradigm-shifting breakthroughs in human psychology, economic theory, sustainability, and medical science are all first reported by academically-based happiness researchers in the specialized journals of their diverse disciplines. However, the man-on-the-street does not monitor the *Journal of Positive Psychology* or the *International Journal of Wellbeing*, and if he did, he would probably drown in the sea of jargon and lack of background knowledge. The message needs to be taken to the masses.

And so it has. Modern times have seen the birth and growth of the happiness doctrine as a money-making industry that has featured an explosion of self-help in the form of books, videos and seminars. Cyberspace is awash in motivational speakers, personal coaches, and new-age philosophers. Take a stroll down the self-help aisle at your nearest Barnes and Noble. Peruse the latest New York Times bestseller list. Or just punch in “happiness” on your smartphone and take a spin

through the lead offerings at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). What you see there will leave you in little doubt as to the universal longing for happiness, and the omnipresence of authors who promise to deliver it. Titles that offer joy, bliss, contentment, and success fill the bookshelves and Kindles of the nation.

It is not a completely new thing. One of the earliest happiness-centered self-help books was penned in 1930 by the celebrated philosopher, Bertrand Russell, who provided a rationalist prescription for living a happy life [31]. He was followed by such noteworthy purveyors of optimism as Dale Carnegie, who taught us how to make friends and influence people, and Norman Vincent Peale, who emphasized the power of positive thinking.

However, the sheer volume of output is a new thing. Many of the authors of these do-it-yourself, feel-good books that now crowd the non-fiction best-seller lists are the very same academic researchers whose research findings have fueled the happiness movement. It takes experimental studies and learned articles in the best academic journals to get tenure, but it is the popular press that leads to fame and fortune. Table 1.1 introduces us to a suite of academic authors who have parlayed their special knowledge about happiness into best-selling self-help books designed for the man on the street.

Right away, we are introduced to the names of Martin Seligman, Ed Diener, and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, all of whom will figure prominently in Chap. 2. So too will the academic contributions of Sonja Lyubomirsky, David Myers, and Emma Seppala. With respect to David Myers, it is worth noting that his book “The Pursuit of Happiness” is by far the oldest on Table 1.1, dating back to 1993. It bears the honor of being the first trade paperback to bring the new science of positive psychology to the masses.

Four of the other listed authors have connections with Harvard University. Shawn Achor was a lecturer there before leaving academia to form the business motivational firm, GoodThink, Inc. Tal Ben-Shahar is noted for teaching the most popular course ever offered at Harvard, a positive psychology class that annually attracts over 1000 students. Daniel Gilbert is the most renowned of the foursome. His book “Stumbling on Happiness” has been translated into 30 languages, and was honored as the best popular science book of 2007. It promises “all that science has to tell us about the uniquely human ability to envision the future, and how likely we are to enjoy it when we get there,” Gilbert’s ideas have also been highlighted in the PBS series, “This Emotional Life.”

Several of the academic authors on Table 1.1 come from fields other than psychology. Richard Layard, who sits as Baron Layard in the British House of Lords, is a labor economist and the Program Director of the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics. Richard Thaler is a behavioral economist at the University of Chicago’s Booth School of Business. Cass Sunstein is a professor at Harvard Law, and also served as the Head of the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs in the Obama administration. He is an amazingly-prolific author, having written over 20 books that run the gamut from “The Politics of Libertarian Paternalism” to “The World According to Star Wars.” In addition to

Table 1.1 Academic authors of popular self-help happiness books

Author	Academic affiliation	Published self-help happiness books
Martin Seligman	University of Pennsylvania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment</i>, Free Press, 2002. • <i>Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being</i>, Free Press, 2011.
Ed Diener and Robert Biswas-Diener	University of Illinois, Portland State Univ.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Happiness: Unlocking the Mysteries of Psychological Wealth</i>, Wiley-Interscience, 2008
Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi	Claremont Graduate University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, <i>Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life</i>, Basic Books, 1998.
Daniel Gilbert	Harvard University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Stumbling on Happiness</i>, Vintage, 2007.
Sonja Lyubomirsky	University of California, Riverside	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The How of Happiness: A New Approach to Getting the Life You Want</i>, Penguin, 2008. • <i>The Myths of Happiness: What Should Make You Happy But Doesn't, What Shouldn't Make You Happy But Does</i>, Penguin, 2014.
Richard Layard	London School of Economics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Happiness Lessons from a New Science</i>, Penguin, 2005.
Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein	University of Chicago, Harvard University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth and Happiness</i>, Yale University Press, 2008.
David Myers	Hope College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Pursuit of Happiness: Discovering the Pathway to Fulfillment, Well-Being, and Enduring Personal Joy</i>, William Morrow, 1993.
Tal Ben-Shahar	Harvard University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Happier: Learn the Secrets to Daily Joy and Lasting Fulfillment</i>, McGraw Hill, 2007. • <i>Being Happy: You Don't Have to Be Perfect to Lead a Richer, Happier Life</i>, McGraw Hill, 2010.
Shawn Achor	Harvard University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Before Happiness: The Five Hidden Keys to Achieving Success, Spreading Happiness, and Sustaining Positive Change</i>, Crown Books, 2013. • <i>The Happiness Advantage: The Seven Principles of Positive Psychology that Fuel Success and Performance at Work</i>, Crown Business, 2010.
Emma Seppala	Stanford University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Happiness Track: How to Apply the Science of Happiness to Accelerate Your Success</i>, HarperOne, 2017.

the book highlighted on Table 1.1 that Sunstein coauthored with Richard Thaler, he is also the author of a 2010 treatise on “Law and Happiness.”

While academic authors have been prevalent in the self-help happiness explosion, they are certainly not alone. There are literally thousands of writers, journalists, practicing psychologists, motivational speakers, New Age philosophers, and just plain hockey moms, who have found a niche in the movement. Sometimes it has been in the form of published books, sometimes under the klieg lights out on the

Table 1.2 A selection of happiness gurus

Deepak Chopra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Author of <i>The Ultimate Happiness Prescription: Seven Keys to Joy and Enlightenment</i>, Harmony Books, 2009. • Founder of the Chopra Center for Well-Being, Carlsbad, CA. 	[www.deepakchopra.com]
Gretchen Rubin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Author of <i>The Happiness Project</i>, Harper Collins, 2012. • Host of weekly podcast “Happier with Gretchen Rubin.” 	[www.gretchenrubin.com]
Neil Pasricha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Author of <i>The Book of Awesome</i>, Penguin, 2010. • Author of <i>The Happiness Equation: Want Nothing, Do Anything, Have Everything</i>, Putnams, 2016. • Founder of the Institute for Global Happiness. 	[www.1000awesomethings.com] [www.globalhappiness.org]
Debbie Gissonni	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Author of <i>The Goddess of Happiness: A Down-to-Earth Guide for Heavenly Balance and Bliss</i>, New World Library, 2010. • CEO, Stillheart Institute 	[www.goddessofhappiness.com]
Dan Baker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Author of <i>What Happy People Know</i>, St. Martins Griffin, 2004. • Director of the Life Enhancement Program, Canyon Ranch, Tucson, AZ. 	[www.canyonranch.com]
Chade Meng Tan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Author of <i>Joy on Demand: The Art of Discovering the Happiness Within</i>, HarperOne, 2016. • Developer of the Search Inside Yourself motivational program. • Google’s “Jolly Good Fellow.” 	[www.ChadeMeng.com]
Billy Stream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Author of <i>The Hoho Dojo: Lighten Up and Love Life Laughing</i>, Random House, 2008. • Director of the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor. 	[www.billystream.com]
Steve Wilson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Founder of the World Laughter Tour. • Founder of the Laughter Arts and Sciences Foundation. 	[www.worldlaughter.com]
Ken Walker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Happiness Guy 	[www.thehappineguy.com]

speaking circuit, sometimes on internet websites. Interesting backgrounds and a talent for self-promotion abound. Table 1.2 highlights a few of the best-known of these happiness gurus.

The top name on the list is probably known to us all. Deepak Chopra is a widely-followed speaker, a TV celebrity, and the author of many books on health and happiness. He is an advocate of transcendental meditation, a populariser of many New Age practices, and a zealous supporter of alternative medicine. On the latter front, he has espoused a placebo-based approach called “quantum healing,” which has been pilloried by the medical establishment as pseudoscientific quackery. On the happiness front he has published several books, and hosts several websites, each of which promises to reveal the keys to joy, happiness, and worldly success. The