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In Defense of Happiness,

Including Both Short-term and Long-term Subjective Well-being

Abstract

There are three broad approaches to, and measures of, the good life and the good society – what people select and choose, what they value, and how they experience life (subjective well-being). I argue that each of these gives an incomplete view of quality of life without the others, and that an adequate set of measures of subjective well-being to some degree includes the other two approaches. I review several objections to subjective indicators of well-being, and discuss the valid versus invalid issues that are raised. The evidence for the distinction between on-line and short-term measures of well-being versus global and long-term recall measures is reviewed. Although consummate subjective well-being includes high scores on both momentary and long-term indicators, findings are presented to demonstrate some of the advantages of long-term and global measures such as life satisfaction. If National Accounts of Subjective Well-being are carefully constructed to include various types of well-being, they can add substantially to current economic and social indicators in guiding public policy formation.

Ed Diener

Biographical Sketch

Ed Diener is Alumni Distinguished Professor of Psychology at the University of Illinois. He received his doctorate at the University of Washington in 1974, and has been a faculty member at the University of Illinois ever since. Diener is past president of both the International Society of Quality of Life Studies and of the Society of Personality and Social Psychology. He was the editor of the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology from 1998 to 2003, and is currently the editor of Journal of Happiness Studies, as well as the founding editor of Perspectives on Psychological Science, which will first appear in 2006. Diener is a fellow of five professional societies, and is listed as one of the highly cited psychologists by the Institute of Scientific Information, with over 9,000 citations to his credit. He won the 2000 Distinguished Researcher Award from the International Society of Quality of Life Studies. Diener has won several teaching awards, including the Oakley Kundee Award for Undergraduate Teaching at the University of Illinois.

Professor Diener's research is focused on the measurement of well being; temperament and personality influences on well-being; theories of well being; income and well being; and cultural influences on well being. He has edited three recent books: Well being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology (with Daniel Kahneman and Norbert Schwarz), Advances in Quality of Life Studies (with Don Rahtz), and Culture and Subjective Well Being (with Eunkook Suh. Diener's most recent large project is creating a set of national indicators of well-being, working under the auspices of the positive psychology movement. He also edited recently with Michael Eid the Handbook on Multimethod Measurement.

Ed Diener is married to Carol Diener, who is both a clinical psychologist and attorney who teaches forensic psychology at the University of Illinois. The Dieners' twin daughters, Marissa and Mary Beth, teach psychology at the University of Utah and the University of Kentucky, respectively. The Dieners' son Robert has collected well-being data from around the world in collaboration with Ed Diener. Two other daughters, Kia and Susan, are not psychologists. In addition to his academic interests, Diener is a farmer. He is president of a family farm in California that raises tomatoes, cotton, lettuce, and almonds.

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