

The Long Slide to Happiness

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The recent wave of interest in ‘teaching happiness’ is beset by problems. It consists of many different emphases and approaches, many of which are inconsistent with each other. If happiness is understood as essentially a matter of ‘feeling good’, then it is difficult to account for the fact that we want and value all sorts of things that do not make us particularly happy. In education and in life more broadly we value a wider diversity of goods. Such criticisms are standard in philosophical treatments of happiness and can be found across a range of imaginative literature—perhaps the kinds of books that would no longer be read if the proponents of ‘teaching happiness’ were to have their way.

When I see a couple of kids
And guess he’s fucking her and she’s
Taking pills or wearing a diaphragm,
I know this is paradise

Everyone old has dreamed of all their lives—
Bonds and gestures pushed to one side
Like an outdated combined harvester,
And everyone young going down the long slide

To happiness, endlessly.

(Philip Larkin, *High Windows*)

People in the West have got no happier in the last 50 years. They have become much richer, they work much less, they have longer holidays, they travel more, they live longer, and they are healthier. But they are no happier. This shocking fact should be the starting point for much of our social science.

(Richard Layard, 2003, p. 14)

The concern that children in the UK are significantly less happy than their counterparts in other countries, and the responses to this concern that take the form of proposals to ‘teach happiness’ in schools, are discussed elsewhere in this Issue (by Ruth Cigman and Judith Suissa). They have come from, among others, Anthony Seldon, Master (i.e. Headmaster) of Wellington College and biographer of Tony Blair, Tal D. Ben-Shahar,

who teaches ‘Positive Psychology’ at Harvard, and Richard (Lord) Layard, author of *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science* (2005). If any further illustration of such concern is needed, the publisher’s blurb for Layard’s book supplies it:

Richard Layard shows that there is a paradox at the heart of our lives. Most people want more income. Yet as societies become richer, they do not become happier. This is not just anecdotally true, it is the story told by countless pieces of scientific research. We now have sophisticated ways of measuring how happy people are, and all the evidence shows that on average, people have grown no happier in the last fifty years, even as average incomes have more than doubled. In fact, the First World has more depression, more alcoholism and more crime than fifty years ago. This paradox is true of Britain, the United States, continental Europe and Japan. What is going on?

These ideas and the proposals to which they have led echo to a remarkable degree the ‘self-esteem movement’ which has been vigorous in the USA and has been influential in the UK. This movement emphasises the widespread incidence of psychological harm caused by damage to the child’s sense of self-worth, including damage done by formal education itself, and looks to education, suitably reconceived, as a site where such damage can be repaired.

Like the self-esteem movement, the focus on happiness promises a more sensitive culture, and one more aware of the casual injustices and indignities that education can inflict. In particular—to take a matter that I have written about before (Smith, 2006) and that exercises me because I see its effects almost daily in my work with university students—it might make us more capable of noticing the obsession with a kind of perfection on the part of young people whose schooling has persuaded them that anything other than a series of top marks and grades means complete academic and personal failure. The focus on happiness is kindly, and unquestionably well-intentioned, but also potentially cataclysmic in two of its tendencies especially. It contains the seeds of a worrying emphasis on the self as opposed to the world that the individual benefits from engaging with, and treats happiness as an achievement on the part of individuals. I have written about this before in the context of self-esteem (Smith, 2002) and will not repeat the argument here. In this article I shall focus on the point that the focus on happiness cannot account for the fact that we want and value all sorts of things that do not make us particularly happy. Above all, it overlooks the diversity of goods that we value in education and in life more broadly, as if anything that we found worth pursuing must be understood in terms of the common currency of happiness.

1 PARADISE CONFUSED

Claims that we now know what makes for happiness, and can proceed to ‘teach happiness’ in schools, tend on closer inspection not always to be versions of the same claim but to be various different claims. In the new literature on teaching happiness can be found the following:

1. Claims about the need to teach ‘the whole child’, which generally seem to turn on a concern that education has become (i) narrowly academic and (ii) dominated by regimes of assessment;
2. Claims that instead of learning all kinds of ‘facts out there’, which by implication are inert, fusty and irrelevant, children ought to ‘know themselves’;
3. Claims that there are different areas of experience or understanding, of which education has focused on far too few;
4. Claims that children need exercise—for instance, along the lines that twenty minutes of exercise a week does as much good as Prozac, if not more;
5. Claims that we know what causes happiness and unhappiness (divorce, bereavement, misuse of drugs) and that children would benefit from this knowledge;
6. Claims that children would benefit (i.e. be made happier) by yoga-style exercises designed to help them to relax, focus and concentrate;
7. Claims that children need to learn that other people’s happiness can be damaged by thoughtlessness, bullying, racism, etc.

Naturally rather different claims are made by different writers, but confusion often reigns even in the ideas of any one writer. Since this provides an *a fortiori* element to the discussion I shall focus briefly on the claims made by Anthony Seldon in a debate with Frank Furedi titled ‘Can we Teach People to be Happy?’ in *The Guardian* (19 February 2008). Seldon begins:

There is only one important question: what is the purpose of education? Is it to cram students with facts to maximise their test performances, so that whole institutions become exam factories, tensing and stretching every sinew to achieve five A*s-Cs at GCSE, and comparable results at A-level and beyond?

Or is there a wider vision? One that involves developing the whole student, so that we help them know who they are and what they want to do in life. On leaving full-time education, not only will they be able to wave certificates with pass marks written on them, they will also be fully prepared to embrace life in all its fullness.

Here, clearly, is a vigorous version of (1), but an element of (2) enters with the aspiration to ‘help them know who they are’. After noting that schooling is too much subject to the ‘top-down’ drivers from government, universities and employers (the demand, essentially, for academic results) Seldon claims that these ‘drivers’ should be ‘balanced with “bottom-up” factors: what makes up each child, and how they can make the most of their linguistic and logical, social and personal, spiritual and moral, creative and physical faculties. Every school should be developing these eight aptitudes’. Thus claim (3): and while it is the kind of claim with which one can easily nod along—who would not agree that education should attend to the spiritual and creative dimensions, for example, and

that they are too easily squeezed out of the curriculum?—it is important to note that a great deal is assumed here. Are the personal and the social distinct ‘faculties’, for instance, or the spiritual and moral? If someone produces some creative writing, are they using their linguistic or creative faculties, or both? And what if the writing is in some sense personal? These questions become pressing ones when there are proposals to re-shape the curriculum on the basis of the existence of such ‘faculties’.

Seldon continues:

... depression, self-harming and anxiety among students are reaching epidemic proportions. So are drinking and drug-taking. Teaching schoolchildren how to live autonomous lives increases the chances of avoiding depression, mental illness and dependency when they are older.

This is claim (5), here apparently consisting of the argument that there is factual evidence about, say, the harm done by cannabis use or alcohol dependency, and children ought to know it. Some further point is being made here about autonomy, but it is not easy to see quite what it is. Is the value of living an autonomous life here being assumed, so that it can be invoked as a motivator in persuading children of the evils of drugs? Or is the claim that people who live autonomous lives (a life which is apparently exclusive of inappropriate drinking and drug use) do as a matter of fact tend to avoid depression and mental illness? No evidence is offered for this, and it seems on the face of it unlikely.

After some unexceptionable remarks about the sensible use of technology, about keeping one’s room tidy and having good personal relationships, Seldon writes:

Most important of all is the relationships with oneself. Students learn how to manage their minds, their emotions and their bodies. Bit by bit, they learn what makes them distinctive. They learn to recognise and manage their negative and positive emotions. They learn the value of accepting themselves as they are and appreciating others. They are taught to calm themselves by deep breathing and other techniques, and discover that three 20-minute bouts of exercise a week have the same effect on raising the spirit and avoiding depression as a standard dose of Prozac.

Here (4), the simple point that exercise is good for you, and (6), the ‘deep breathing and other techniques’, sit uncomfortably with echoes of (2), the focus on the self, and a suggestion of (7), the appreciation of others that will include an understanding of the effects of our actions on *their* happiness.

The fact that there are very different kinds of claims being made here is not a trivial matter, since the variety of claims undermines the possibility that it is just one thing, happiness, which is being talked about in every case. The feeling of well-being that comes from brisk exercise, for example, is very different from the sense that you are to some degree in control of your own destiny and know what you want to do with your life. The former brings exhilaration, a feeling of cares dropping away: the latter

may bring a vertiginous and unsettling feeling—frightening, even—as a young person realises that all along they have wanted to be a creative artist, for instance, and begins to recognise the rocky and uncertain path along which they will have to go, or sets their sights on the long journey to qualifying as a doctor. These conditions in turn are different from the calm that comes through ‘deep breathing and other techniques’, or from whatever satisfaction is supposed to result from ‘knowing who you are’ or what makes you distinctive (not forgetting of course that you might find that you are a rather unpleasant person who has inherited various undesirable but highly distinctive traits from your parents).

2 STANDARDISING HAPPINESS

Since it seems so very clear that an unhelpfully wide range of states and emotions are here being recruited under the banner of ‘happiness’ it is worth enquiring how this state of affairs has come about. The line of thought in its modern form—though it can be traced without difficulty to the utilitarian philosophers of the nineteenth century—is set out by Richard Layard in his 2002/3 Lionel Robbins Memorial Lectures (Layard, 2003). Happiness means ‘feeling good—enjoying life and feeling it is wonderful’. Unhappiness, by contrast, means ‘feeling bad and wishing things were different’ (p. 4). Layard agrees that there are innumerable sorts of things that make us happy or unhappy, but claims that at root there is always this element of feeling good or bad. And it is this, of course, that makes it possible to compare experiences in terms of how much happiness they produce, and then to measure and rank them.

I want to stress the point about a single dimension. Happiness is just like noise. There are many qualities of noise, from a trombone to a caterwaul. But they can all be compared in terms of decibels. In the same way different kinds of pain, like toothache and tummy ache, can be compared, and so can different kinds of enjoyment . . . happiness and unhappiness are not separate dimensions; they are simply different points along a continuum . . . they are all part of the same phenomenon (ibid.).

In support of this way of thinking of happiness Layard cites a study of women in Texas. They were asked to divide the previous day into a number of episodes, and they came up with roughly 15 such episodes. They were asked to describe each episode, and who was involved in it with them. ‘Finally they were also asked how they felt in each episode, along twelve dimensions *which were then combined into a single state of feeling*’ (p. 5, my italics). In other words, whatever subtleties were there in the original responses were systematically flattened out so that every episode could be fitted somewhere onto one standard scale: that of happiness.

As a way of getting to grips with what is going wrong here we might try an experiment, substituting ‘response to art’ for ‘happiness’. In same way, then, as we can compare noise in terms of decibels, so different kinds of

response to art, like our impatience at a self-indulgent poem and our sense that there is something (like a low-level toothache) naggingly not right about the structure of *Macbeth*, can be compared. So too with our positive responses. It may sound odd to compare listening to a Beethoven quartet with contemplating Anthony Gormley's *Field for the British Isles*, but at root there is always the dimension of feeling good or bad. Let us propose a measure of response to art, AR. Now we can survey various experiences of art. Please come up with about 15 AR episodes, and say how you felt in each episode. You were stunned by that painting, intrigued by the poem, left speechless by that memorial to the Holocaust. And so on. We can then divide these into twelve dimensions, *and then combine them into a single state of feeling, AR.*

One of the many things going wrong here is that it is impossible to understand a response to art independently of understanding the work of art itself. My response to Gormley's *Field for the British Isles* is different from my response to Barbara Hepworth's *Oval Sculpture (No. 2)* because those responses are bound up with what they respond to: you will not be able to grasp my response unless you have some familiarity with those art works themselves. It cannot be a matter of comparing the responses and situating them on a common standard or scale. This is, I hope, clear enough in the case of response to art. But is it so very different in the case of the study that Layard reports, and other studies like it? The Texas women appear to have enjoyed sex most: it comes top of the ratings, with a measure of 4.7 in the Happiness Index. And surely we know what they are responding to: we know what sex, of all things, is.

However, a well-publicised recent piece of research casts doubt even—or perhaps particularly—on this. Drawing on replies from nearly 1,900 people, Meston and Buss (2007) distinguished 237 categories of reasons why people have sex. They include, among the reasons we might expect, such as 'I wanted to express my love for the person' and 'I was sexually aroused and wanted the release', a great range of other reasons, for instance: 'I wanted to feel closer to God', 'to get rid of a headache', 'help me fall asleep', 'make my partner feel powerful', 'burn calories', 'keep warm', 'hurt an enemy', 'It would allow me to "get sex out of my system" so that I could focus on other things', 'It was the only way my partner would spend time with me', 'I wanted to even the score with a cheating partner'.¹ What this research reminds us is that we do not know what 'having sex' is all about, until we know what it *means*. When sex scored 4.7 in the Texas Happiness index it is not just that we do not know exactly what was causing the women to be 'happy': we do not know what their 'happiness' was. Was it the religious ecstasy of feeling closer to God, the comfort of keeping warm, the vindictive thrill of hurting an enemy, the relief of *not* enjoying sex ('It would allow me to "get sex out of my system" so that I could focus on other things'), an escape from loneliness? Even where sex is the expression of love for a person, we need to understand the kind of love for the particular person involved before we can imagine we know anything about what the sexual act means, just as we need to appreciate the art work before we can understand the response.

The same argument applies to other items on the Texas list. 'Dinner' scored high. Again it might seem that this is a simple physical pleasure, a matter of relishing the flavour and texture of the food, and of course it might be just this. But for one woman the pleasure might be to a large extent that of having her family together and seeing them enjoy the food she has devotedly prepared for them; for another the meal might be an integral part of an evening with her lover. One woman may take particular pleasure in eating fast food, effortlessly microwaved, in front of the television, while for another the rhythms of unhurried preparation and cooking are part of what distinguishes this part of the day from the rest of it. The important general point here is made by Alasdair MacIntyre with the example of a man digging his garden (MacIntyre, 1981, Chapter 15). Is he doing it to please his wife, or for the sake of exercise (or both), is it part of a competition with his neighbour to see who can grow the biggest marrow? We do not know what he is doing until we know what the digging means, and this is often a matter of knowing the narrative or story of which it is part: the story here of the man's relationship with his wife or neighbour, or in the example of eating a meal the story of the woman's relationship with family, lover and food in general.

These considerations weigh heavily against the possibility of measuring and comparing happiness in the way that Layard argues for and that is presupposed by most programmes for the teaching of happiness. Layard knows this and attempts to dismiss the counterargument briskly by referring to the work of John Stuart Mill. Mill, he notes, made a distinction between quantity and quality in his account of happiness. Layard writes:

However psychologists have not been able to identify a separate qualitative dimension. Mill was surely onto something, but what he should have said is that there are different causes of happiness—those that produce enduring effects on happiness and those whose effects are transient (Layard, 2003, pp. 4–5).

This, though, is not enough to refute the kind of point that Mill was making. Mill was concerned with the difficulty of distinguishing between what he called the higher and lower pleasures, and with justifying the higher ones. Mill memorably uses as his example a satisfied pig and Socrates dissatisfied: the pig enjoying the lower pleasures of eating and generally snuffling around, and Socrates exercising his higher faculties and engaging in the 'higher pleasure' of philosophy which may involve being puzzled, not content with the answers you have reached, obsessed with a particular problem, and so on. Mill insists that we do as a matter of empirical fact value the higher pleasures:

Now it is an unquestionable fact that those who are equally acquainted with, and equally capable of appreciating and enjoying, both, do give a most marked preference to the manner of existence which employs their higher faculties (*Utilitarianism*, Chapter 2, para. 6).

The problem however is more difficult for any version of utilitarianism to cope with than Mill acknowledges. First, we do not in fact always markedly prefer using these higher faculties. We know that reading a demanding novel is more satisfying than doing the crossword, but often we settle for the crossword. Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos* are infinitely complex and rewarding, and we would certainly put them at the top of our desert island list, yet it is surprising how seldom we actually listen to them at all, let alone listen to them carefully and with concentration. Second—and this is the major difficulty for any kind of utilitarian theory such as Mill's or Layard's—it simply is not obvious that many of those 'manners of existence which employ the higher faculties', which we clearly value and aspire towards, actually bring us anything that can simply and helpfully be described as happiness. In Mill's own example, an individual may feel she has some talent for philosophy, may feel drawn to it and pursue it, but at the same time be made thoroughly miserable by it (this seems to have been the experience of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein for much of the time). In short, we value activities and ways of life that do not bring us happiness.

This point is of the highest importance and is explored further in the next section. Before moving on, however, there is one oddity that should be noted. The proponents of the teaching of happiness invariably complain of the damage done to education by the culture of high-stakes testing and league-tables. Seldon, for instance, writes that the government's vision of education extends no further than trying to 'show, year on year, a quantifiable improvement in results . . . It has little incentive to concern itself with holistic and non-measurable aspects of learning'. Yet the research Seldon and others draw upon, and Layard's in particular, is precisely an attempt to measure and quantify. Is the teaching of happiness, to paraphrase Mill, to concern itself only with the measurable aspects of the enterprise?

3 THE DIVERSITY OF VALUE

Layard concludes his first Lecture with the assertion that we know that 'happiness is basic to human motivation' (Layard, 2003, p. 21). Since I am about to argue that we value a great variety of conditions other than happiness, it is important to counter a version of Layard's claim that is usually known as 'motivational hedonism'. This is the idea that everything we do we do for the sake of pleasure or happiness: and to the objection that people have all sorts of other motives, the motivational hedonist may respond that, perhaps deep down, people really find pleasure, albeit sometimes of a strange kind, in what they do, otherwise they would not do it. The self-sacrifice of the individual who rushes into a burning house to save a child, for example, then becomes reinterpreted in term of his or her brief but intense enjoyment of their own nobleness. (We suppose here for the sake of simplicity that the heroic individual has no belief whatever that they will get their reward in heaven.) Other examples can be found easily

enough: the person who risked their life and endured years of fear rescuing Jews from the Nazis, the doctor who works in a leper colony, people who face torture and death because of their principled opposition to their own government.

Though these examples and others like them appear to demolish his case, the motivational hedonist often responds to the effect that ‘they *must* be doing it for the sake of happiness’: of course this is to take the theory of motivational hedonism as proven, and demonstrates the extent to which the person who makes this response is in the grip of a theory and unwilling to consider inconvenient counter-examples. In cases like the ones sketched above it seems very implausible to suggest that people are ‘really’ acting for the sake of happiness or pleasure, especially since more persuasive explanations are available. The rescuer says ‘I just couldn’t do otherwise’; the doctor explains that her patients will suffer without medical help, and we sense the demand on her that she feel this makes; the opposition leader says that someone has to make a stand. These ordinary and diverse explanations only invite scepticism if there is a reason for scepticism. Otherwise there is simply no requirement for any further explanation; and there is something rather insulting in the idea that people of courage, compassion and principle—and perhaps a combination of all three—are in truth only motivated by a kind of self-indulgence.

With this theoretical obstacle removed, it becomes easier to see that we value other conditions than those that involve pleasure or happiness or, to put it differently, that Layard’s notion of happiness as ‘feeling good—enjoying life and feeling it is wonderful’ (Layard, 2003, p. 4) does no kind of justice to the variety of what we pursue, value and find worthwhile. As is often the case, philosophy can do valuable work here by assembling reminders, in Wittgenstein’s phrase (*Philosophical Investigations*, §127), of what we know perfectly well if we are not in the grip of theory. A fuller and different kind of paper would consist largely of such reminders, set out at sufficient length to demonstrate their richness. For reasons of space I shall indicate some examples briefly and then develop two more fully.

First, it seems evident that we engage in all sorts of puzzles—crossword puzzles, sudoku, Rubik’s Cube and so on—where we may encounter difficulty and frustration rather than the pleasure or happiness of ‘feeling good’. Of course it may be said that we relish the difficulty, but this involves being thwarted, baffled, coming up against the limitations of one’s knowledge, following blind alleys. These can hardly be called states of happiness, and to suggest that we endure the frustration for the sake of the happiness of getting the puzzle out simply does not feel true to the experience, which is of a few moment’s satisfaction in having, say, completed the crossword after what may be hours of working through it.

A child playing may be engaging with difficulties in much the same way. Building the sandcastle or the house of cards involves many failures before the brief moment of success, and it is interesting how the child often immediately begins on a still more elaborate attempt which she must know will be equally taxing and bring similar failures. We talk rather too easily of children ‘happily playing’ almost as if the phrase were a

tautology, but from the home to the school yard play brings with it as much pain as pleasure—the disappointment of losing the competitive game, anger when other children dominate the longed-for toys and equipment, the sense that what one was trying to make was a sorry thing in the end. Of course this is one reason that play is valuable, because it is partly through play that we learn to cope with negative emotions. As with puzzles we certainly relish play, but we play for the sake of play itself, and to say that we do it for the sake of the happiness it brings seems to get something wrong.

It is hard to explain why we value art—reading a demanding novel, for instance—in terms of happiness. (This reminds us of the problem John Stuart Mill had in justifying what he called the ‘higher pleasures’.) It is one thing to read a comic novel: here there are moments of laughing out loud, and the longer pleasure of seeing a scene building up to the comic *dénouement* and the unlovable character getting his just and entertaining deserts. But complex and often bleak novels (like those of Brian Moore, for example, some of whose titles convey the flavour: *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne*, *Cold Heaven*) can hardly be thought of in the same way. There is a sense of some of the darker aspects of life being observed with honest and compassion. Even to say one *enjoys* such novels is misleading, yet the reader returns to them, recommends them to friends, looks forward to the writer’s next one. They are perhaps to be thought of as moving and absorbing, and we value art that has these qualities even if it does not make us happy, often valuing it more than art that does straightforwardly make us happy, such as ‘feel-good fiction’.²

I offer as one extended example the following passage from the 19th century novel, *Tom Brown’s Schooldays*, by Thomas Hughes. The example may seem an odd one for the 21st century, but the 19th century school novel (there are many of them) is profoundly instructive about what can be valued in education without bringing the happiness of ‘feeling good’. In the following extract, from Part 2, Chapter 5, ‘The Fight’, Tom’s class are reading and translating from Homer’s *Iliad*. There is a new master, who:

... looks round in despair at the boys on the top bench, to see if there is one out of whom he can strike a spark or two, and who will be too chivalrous to murder the most beautiful utterances of the most beautiful woman of the old world. His eye rests on Arthur, and he calls him up to finish construing Helen’s speech. Whereupon all the other boys draw long breaths, and begin to stare about and take it easy. They are all safe: Arthur is the head of the form, and sure to be able to construe, and that will tide on safely till the hour strikes.

Arthur proceeds to read out the passage in Greek before construing it, as the custom is. Tom, who isn’t paying much attention, is suddenly caught by the falter in his voice as he reads the two lines—

‘alla su ton epeessi paraiphamenos katerukes sêi t’aganophrosunêi kai sois aganois epeessi’

He looks up at Arthur, 'Why, bless us,' thinks he, 'what can be the matter with the young un? He's never going to get floored. He's sure to have learnt to the end.' Next moment he is reassured by the spirited tone in which Arthur begins construing, and betakes himself to drawing dogs' heads in his notebook, while the master, evidently enjoying the change, turns his back on the middle bench and stands before Arthur, beating a sort of time with his hand and foot, and saying; 'Yes, yes,' 'Very well,' as Arthur goes on.

But as he hears the fatal two lines, Tom catches that falter, and again looks up. He sees that there is something the matter; Arthur can hardly get on at all. What can it be?

Suddenly at this point Arthur breaks down altogether, and fairly bursts out crying, and dashes the cuff of his jacket across his eyes, blushing up to the roots of his hair, and feeling as if he should like to go down suddenly through the floor. The whole form are taken aback; most of them stare stupidly at him, while those who are gifted with presence of mind find their places and look steadily at their books, in hopes of not catching the master's eye and getting called up in Arthur's place.

The master looks puzzled for a moment, and then seeing, as the fact is, that the boy is really affected to tears by the most touching thing in Homer, perhaps in all profane poetry put together, steps up to him and lays his hand kindly on his shoulder, saying, 'Never mind, my little man, you've construed very well. Stop a minute; there's no hurry (Hughes, 1857, Part 2, Chapter 5).

The plot now turns on the fact than one of the other boys, Williams, disgusted by what he sees as Arthur letting the class down by having prepared more than the conventional quota of lines to translate, calls attention to himself by mumbling threats and gets into trouble when he is asked to translate and cannot. After the class Williams turns on Arthur in revenge, and is stopped by Tom Brown, at the expense of having to take on Williams in a formal fight.

There is much here that repays study. Arthur is immensely moved by the lines from the *Iliad*, but is hardly made happy by them, since he bursts into tears. The whole business of translating Homer, and much else in these boys' curriculum, is grindingly hard work and is not valued simply for some kind of outcome, felicitic or otherwise, that emerges from having done the work. The work itself is seen as valuable. It is worth noting too that there is something similar in the relationship—one of care and protection—between Arthur and Tom on the one hand and Helen and Hector on the other. The forces at play in Arthur's reading of the text—the reasons for his relishing it, we might say, are highly layered.

Thus we can value something that makes us cry. We can value things that puzzle us and daunt us. We value play, but are not always sure quite why: we talk, as I noted above, of how nice it is to see the children playing happily, or we fall back on instrumental talk of the development of fine and gross motor skills. We are in danger of losing subtleties of language as well as subtleties of thinking here, subtleties that come to be as remote to us as the world of Tom Brown and its ways of feeling and being.

My last example is of another language and way of life that are almost lost to us: that of craftsmanship. In his recent book *The Craftsman* Richard Sennett (2008) argues that the idea of craftsmanship has been ‘hollowed out’ by modern ways of working. A culture dominated by targets, the demand for efficiency and the requirement of the ‘audit culture’ that we sometimes seem to spend nearly as much time showing what we are doing as in actually doing it all work against the slow building of deftness that we associate with the kind of craftsman who made a violin or a cathedral.⁴ Sennett argues that it is craftsmanship, dedication to good work for its own sake, which makes work seem worthwhile. The craftsman is attuned to his materials, whether this is a traditional context of carpentry or the modern one of Linux programming. He is willing to make mistakes, even to seek out challenges where he is bound to make them, because this is how skills become refined further. He ‘feels fully and thinks deeply’ about what he does, not least because his identity is bound up in his craft (it is no accident that many of us have names derived from craftsman ancestors: Baker, Archer, Thatcher, Mason). The mechanical routines typical of modern work militate against all this: against the proper development of skills, with its ‘repetitions and slow revisions’ (p. 291) partly because we democratically suppose that anyone can pick them up from a quick training course, and against the identification of self with craft because the insecurities of modern economies and the rapidity of change mean that it is both practically risky and emotionally dangerous to ‘put yourself into’ your job too much.

Craftsmanship, on Sennett’s account, is at the root of human dignity and the individual’s sense of his or her self-worth. A human being is, in Hannah Arendt’s phrase, ‘the creature that works’, *animal laborans*,⁵ whose life can be ‘enriched by the skills and dignified by the spirit of craftsmanship’ (p. 285). At the heart of craftsmanship lies pride in one’s work ‘as the reward for skill and commitment’ (p. 294), the very ‘slowness of craft time’ (p. 295) being bound up with the kind of satisfaction that is involved. The harmony, then, of being attuned to tools and materials; pride in one’s work and not, as the last sentence of the book reminds us, pride in oneself: yet again a distinctive kind of value, different from the other conditions and activities that we choose, relish, find satisfying, engaging or absorbing.

4 HAPPINESS BY THE WAY

As I have described it, the ‘long slide to happiness’ begins with the unexceptionable observation that an education system dominated by targets and testing is experienced as arid by both pupils and students on the one hand and those who teach them on the other. It proceeds, with the encouragement of ‘positive psychology’ and the kind of social science espoused by Richard Layard, to identify fulfilling education with teaching children, in Seldon’s words, ‘how to live and be happy’. In this, I have argued, it risks being seduced by over-simplified conceptions of happiness

as a matter of ‘feeling good’. At the end of this long slide it becomes harder for us to remember that there is a vast range of goods that we value and relish, not all of them by any means a matter of ‘feeling good—enjoying life and feeling it is wonderful’ (Layard’s words again, quoted above). Seldon seems to know this well. In his *Guardian* debate with Furedi from which I have been quoting he writes of a ‘wider vision’ in which children, as well as being taught to pass exams, ‘will also be prepared to embrace life in all its fullness’. This resonant phrase, ‘life in all its fullness’, captures much of what I have been urging here about the diversity of value. The problem is that the siren-call of ‘happiness’ lures us towards a false and one-sided vision of that fullness.

We have, as so often in these fundamental matters, been here before. In his *Autobiography*, John Stuart Mill wrote:

I never, indeed, wavered in the conviction that happiness is the test of all rules of conduct, and the end of life. But I now thought that this end was only to be attained by not making it the direct end. Those only are happy (I thought) who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness; on the happiness of others, on the improvement of mankind, even on some art or pursuit, followed not as a means, but as itself an ideal end. Aiming thus at something else, they find happiness by the way (Mill, 1873, Chapter 5).

Many of the dystopian novels of the 20th century explore the limitations of a civilisation dedicated to happiness. Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* is perhaps the most famous of these, portraying a world where, as the Controller puts it, ‘We prefer to do things comfortably’, against which the ‘Savage’, the apostate from this anodyne vision, explicitly claims the right to be unhappy: ‘But I don’t want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin’. But the novel that we should most recall here is Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*.⁶ The firemen who are at the heart of this story have the job, not of putting out fires, but of burning books. Books are about good and evil, death and suffering, and they upset people. The fireman Montag is told by his captain: ‘We are the Happiness Boys. We stand against the small tide of those who want to make everyone unhappy with conflicting theory and thought’. Montag however cannot help wondering just what is in these dangerous books. He steals a volume of poetry which includes Matthew Arnold’s *Dover Beach*, with its devastating final lines:

... the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Montag senses that human life is here being accorded meaning and dignity even if (or because: ‘the world, which seems . . .’) our everyday certainties are here discomforted. At the end of the novel Montag joins other refugees from the world of reality television and tranquillisers. Each refugee learns a work of literature by heart and so keeps it alive: Montag learns *Ecclesiastes*. ‘Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, all is vanity . . . For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow’. The connections between education and anything we might call happiness are stranger and more complex than recent attempts to chart them readily allow.

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NOTES

- Other reasons include the following:
 - ‘It just happened’.
 - ‘I wanted to give someone else a sexually transmitted disease (e.g. herpes, AIDS)’.
 - ‘It was an initiation rite to a club or organization’.
 - ‘I wanted to change the topic of conversation’
 - ‘I wanted to gain access to that person’s friend’.
 - ‘I thought it would boost my social status’.
 - ‘I wanted to feel young’.
 - ‘I wanted to manipulate him/her into doing something for me’.
 - ‘I felt sorry for the person’.
- ‘Do you ever want to curl up with a novel guaranteed to have a happy ending? There are several authors who create communities with recurring, quirky characters who become a family. Authors such as Jan Karon, Ann B. Ross, Joan Medlicott, J. Lynne Hinton and Philip Gulley write warm, witty books that provide a great escape from the real world’. See http://www.plcmc.org/readers_club/features/feature.asp?id=139
- The lines come from *Iliad* 24. 771–2, where Helen is grieving over Hector, killed in combat by Achilles. In some editions of the novel they are translated: ‘[If anyone reproached me] you would reprove them, you would check them, with your gentle spirit and gentle words’. Some editions print the lines in the original and untransliterated Greek, in which Arthur would of course have read them.
- It is important that in both cases, one more obvious than the other, the craftsman did not work alone but cooperatively as a member of a workshop or guild with shared practices and traditions.
- Unfortunately this phrase becomes *animal laborens* throughout Sennett’s book.
- Fahrenheit 451, for those who do not know the novel or the Truffaut film based on it, is the temperature at which books burn. It is a pleasing touch that the novel, and its critique of happiness, takes its title from a *standard*. The paragraph above is adapted from my *Editorial in Journal of Philosophy of Education* 26.1, 1992. Hostility to ‘theory and thought’ takes different forms at different times.

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