Revisiting Happiness Economics through a Post-structuralist Lens

Zannis Kairis

I, Zannis Kairis, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Zannis Kairis
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Abstract

Despite the substantial growth in interest and publications in recent decades, Happiness Economics (henceforth HE) remains a largely problematic scholarly field as is evidenced by the field's failure to accumulate a considerable corpus of consensual knowledge. To the contrary, methodological approaches abound and conclusions often contradict one another. It is this project's contention that these mixed results should not be attributed to either simple methodological errors or to the interdisciplinarity of the field, as it has been suggested. Rather, while clear patterns of significant methodological flaws are, indeed, identified, the author makes the case that they are owed to the precarious theoretical framework that underlies HE, something which explains both their ubiquity and persistence. More specifically, the source of problems is traced in flawed assumptions that pertain, on the one hand, to problematic understandings of meaning and subjectivity and, on the other, to epistemology, broadly construed. The former concerns an unwarranted treatment of both meaning and subjectivity as stable, fixed, and universal, while the latter refers to an ill-conceived positivist framework that is not fit for purpose. Through a categorisation and analysis of the literature, post-structuralism emerges as a uniquely positioned theoretical toolbox to illuminate these difficulties and to clear the ground for a HE that addresses them effectively. In addition, the author proposes neo-pragmatism as the appropriate theoretical backdrop for any future HE projects. It is illustrated that not only is neo-pragmatism congruent with the post-structuralist critique levelled against HE but it also avoids the pitfalls of epistemic nihilism by embracing the sociological character of meaning and knowledge as well as its entailed contingencies. Finally, this project considers the general methodological implications of this intervention, how the quality of already existing literature may be improved, and explores a small number of broad policy implications.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction: Happiness Economics at a Crossroads

1.1: Introduction

The multidisciplinary field of Happiness Economics has been growing steadily since its inception in the 1970s and it should come as no surprise that during times of economic crisis, or soon thereafter (as in our case), its appeal spreads to the mainstream both academically and politically.[1] That is because its basic postulate, which supplies the raison d'etre of the whole project, is the following: measurements of the Gross Domestic Product (henceforth GDP), as well as all measures of the same logic (such as the Gross National Income (GNI) and the Gross National Product (GNP)) are inadequate, if not entirely ill-suited, indicators of well-being, for it does not necessarily follow that an increased aggregate economic output must translate into increased levels of welfare for either the average individual or a majority of individuals. Various explanations have been proposed for that, most compellingly from within the discipline of economics.

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[1] During periods when GDP is in decline or stagnant, almost by reflex, the academic and political interest shifts towards other metrics of well-being; however, HE's growing import and consequences extend beyond such periods. In 2008, French President Sarkozy, arguing that the GDP is an obsolete way of measuring well-being, commissioned a report by renowned economists (Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi) to identify its limits and to propose alternative measures of well-being. In a similar move, in 2011, UK's then Prime Minister Cameron, questioned the value of GDP as an indicator of societal progress and launched a plan to systematise the measurement of UK's happiness in an annual index. More countries and organisations have followed their example since or are currently considering plans to do so. See: S. McHugh (ed.), *The Changing Nature of Happiness* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 3-5.

Indeed, while the concept was first standardised by Kuznets with an explicit warning against its use as a metric of wellbeing,[2] it has come to be seen -almost ubiquitously- as the intuitive measure of wellbeing based on a rationale along the following lines: higher output implies higher income which, even when unequally shared, should translate into the satisfaction of more preferences and, therefore, into higher welfare, too. Since almost all countries have welfare systems with some redistributory mechanisms, even growth combined with extreme inequality, the logic goes, should lead to better welfare outcomes, let alone if we consider potential trickle-down effects. Later developments in welfare economics reinforced that logic. Based on the branch's two fundamental theorems (which stated, respectively, that competitive markets produce Pareto efficient outcomes and that all such outcomes can be supported as competitive market equilibria), as well as on revealed preference theory, individual welfare was axiomatically taken to increase with disposable income. Despite critiques from various quarters, most prominently from the multifarious camp of heterodox economics,[3] the influence of logics that equate income and spending (in the micro level) and output (in the macro level) with well-being only grew both in the social sciences and, perhaps more importantly, in the policy mainstream. The adoption of GNP in the 1940s by the then-newly created International Monetary Fund and the World Bank as the key indicator of economic development marked the culmination of this trend.[4] It was then only a matter of

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[2] S. Kuznets, *National Income, 1929-1932* (Washington, US: US Government Printing Office, 1934), p. 7.

[3] For instance, economists of the Austrian School took issue with the imputed cardinality of social welfare functions, as well as with the assumed knowability and/or definability of both ends and means variables used in such functions. Quite predictably, thinkers from schools critical of laissez-faire economics, on their part, stressed that utility functions cannot be taken to be tantamount to welfare functions and that a more comprehensive approach is needed; for some, the emphasis fell on income distribution and inequality and, for others, on domains of life that were ignored by national accounts (e.g. health, education, and environment). Sen's capabilities approach is a prominent example of the latter, which later inspired so-called objective-list theories which, in turn, led to the creation of a number of alternative composite metrics of well-being of the Quality of Life type (henceforth QoL), most notably the UN's Human Development Index (HDI). These are sometimes considered within the broader context of HE but the relationship is ambivalent and often draws critique for not going far enough (from the growthist paradigm). See, for instance: J. Schimmel, 'Development as Happiness: The Subjective Perception of Happiness and UNDP's Analysis of Poverty, Wealth and Development', *Journal of Happiness Studies*, Vol. 10, Issue 1, pp. 93-111. We shall return to consider such approaches in Chapters 2 and 4.

[4] J. Fox, 'The Economics of Well-Being', *Harvard Business Review*, January-February 2012, pp. 80-83.

time until this straightforward metric was elevated into being the most prevalent proxy for the measurement of broader success and progress in common parlance and beyond.

However, in recent decades, the critiques against the predominance of GDP as the main, if not sole, measure of well-being have been slowly gaining traction. The key arguments against it can be summarised as follows: Firstly, the GDP of a country does not capture non-market activities (e.g. unpaid housework and leisure) that have, however, a clear impact on well-being. Secondly, such indicators can sometimes count net negatives as positives (e.g. the increased economic activity caused by the response to a natural disaster or the increased consumption of medication during an epidemic). Thirdly, such measures take only market prices into account while being completely unresponsive to the kind and the quality of goods and services that are being produced which, however, have an undeniable effect on wellbeing (e.g. due to technological advancements, the quality of products tends to increase and their price to decrease but this would be read as a negative development from a narrow GDP-based viewpoint). Fourthly, they completely ignore income distribution (one could conceive plenty of plausible scenarios wherein this could cause a huge distortion, in spite of the earlier-made point about income redistribution), and, lastly, they fail to capture the impact of externalities such as noise pollution, environmental degradation, and similar that can, however, have a profound effect upon the well-being of people.[5]

Moreover, Easterlin's observation (often termed 'the Easterlin paradox') in 1974, viz. that happiness among countries does not vary significantly with income once an income level sufficient to satisfy basic needs has been reached, dealt a further blow to GDP's reign. While

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[5] For a fairly balanced and in-depth exploration of these (and other) arguments, see: D. Coyle, *GDP: A Brief but Affectionate History* (Princeton, US: Princeton University Press, 2014), esp. ch. 6. Also on this matter, see: J. Gadrey, 'What's Wrong with GDP and Growth? The Need for Alternative Indicators'. In E. Fullbrook (ed.), *A Guide to What's Wrong with Economics* (London, UK: Anthem, 2004), ch. 24.

that blow may not have been decisive at the time, it helped spawn HE: it generated an immense body of literature that sought not only to account for this counter-intuitive phenomenon but also to propose other potential relationships (both direct and inverse) between happiness and a plethora of independent variables with the ultimate goal typically being the maximisation of happiness.[6] Multiple theories of happiness were constructed upon it, from a variety of disciplines, with the aim of explaining the mechanisms regulating happiness so as to construct models of it that would, in turn, help us determine all the relevant factors that are affecting it. Utility functions and economic aggregates would no longer monopolise the welfare discourse.

Nevertheless, as the project is about to enter its fifth decade of existence, the quest for a satisfactory understanding of the determinants of happiness remains largely inconclusive. Therefore, the ideal of maximising aggregate happiness, too, remains elusive. To be sure, several interesting conclusions have been drawn from HE research thus far (as we establish in 2.1), but the project was not as fruitful as its founders anticipated. Its embryonic state is, after all, reflected by the fact that there is only very little consensus among HE scholars; something patently uncommon for most other fields of study (including in the various disciplines that comprise approaches to HE) with comparable lifespans. As we shall explore in 1.2, the problems that encumber HE do not only entail an ineffectiveness vis-à-vis its aims but can potentially have other negative consequences, too. That is because current HE scholarship is based on, and, at the same time, provides ostensible justification for the assumption that happiness can be accurately measured and, consequently, that hypotheses relating its various metrics with certain variables can be accurately tested. As a result, it presents policymakers with prima facie very powerful tools that claim to have the capacity to enhance a society's wellbeing. Nonetheless, as is shown throughout this work, these metrics

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[6] R. Easterlin, 'Does Economic Growth Improve the Human Lot? Some Empirical Evidence'. In P. David, and M. Reder (eds.), *Nations and Households in Economic Growth* (New York, US: Academic Press, 1974).

suffer from a series of flaws and present -at best- a distorted picture. Therefore, the implementation of HE-informed policies, especially in top-down politics (as we shall see), runs the risk of limiting the liberty of people in the name of a merely nominal metric of happiness, which could, in turn, result in having unintended consequences that lead to the opposite of the desired outcome.

Despite, however, the strong criticisms that are developed here, this project does not argue for an outright rejection of HE, as is the case elsewhere in critical literature where the field's weaknesses are in focus. Such arguments are generally based on practical grounds (happiness is seen as inherently resistant to measurements/quantification) and/or on grounds of it not having a worthy/relevant subject matter for the social sciences (other than psychology), especially with regard to its potential to affect policy-making.[7] Here, instead, happiness is treated as being both a legitimate and a potentially very productive focus for study. However, it is the author's contention that the potency of HE scholarship is severely undermined by certain tendencies detectable throughout current literature, and that the ideas and main premises associated with what we can term post-structuralism can help identify and problematise these tendencies, and thereby supply the theoretical tools to encourage a more self-critical mode of HE research which accounts for and adapts to the peculiar indeterminacy of its object of study. Further, neopragmatism will help us channel the implications of that self-critical impetus into positive and concrete measures that pertain to HE's epistemological premises with implications for methodology, the status of produced knowledge, and policy.

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[7] Indicatively, for a review of arguments along the lines of the former see: A. Frawley, 'Happiness Research: A Review of Critiques', *Sociology Compass*, Vol. 9, Issue 1, pp. 62-77. For the latter, see: H. Johns, and P. Ormerod, *Happiness, Economics, and Public Policy* (London, UK: The Institute of Economic Affairs, 2007), and M. White, *The Illusion of Well-being: Economic Policymaking based on Respect and Responsiveness* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

It should be noted that post-structuralism is not understood here as a consistent and homogenous movement but rather as a useful shorthand for the aggregation of a range of independent approaches that broadly share the same critical attitude towards meaning and knowledge. More specifically, that attitude critiques the posited self-sufficiency of any given structural system (with an emphasis on linguistic formations), rejects the fixed conceptions of identity and difference that underlie them, and, ultimately, interrogates the -usually implicit- hierarchies that they impose by privileging specific terms in what are ultimately unstable binary oppositions.[8] These hierarchies often prove contingent upon the workings of the power/knowledge nexus and, therefore, represent social preconceptions or ideological stances rather than neutral, objective facts. While poststructuralist ideas and methodologies have not been applied before to the field of HE research, this project does fit into a growing body of scholarship that draws on post-structuralism to analyse, or to address issues that emerge in the study of phenomena that preoccupy the disciplines of the social sciences.[9] Crucially, like all such interventions, this project will not result in calling either for the rejection of all established scholarship in the field or for a shift towards a purely post-structuralist or neo-pragmatist paradigm of HE. Instead, it will seek to address the self-undermining tendencies of the field, in order to increase its social utility and to avert the practical dangers that stem from non-reflexive scholarship. To that effect, practical steps for the improvement of already-existing scholarship will also be considered (esp. in Chapter 4) but our main focus will remain on the broader consequences of our intervention for the field's methodology and scope. As regards the former, it will be illustrated that many

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[8] Examples of such binary pairs in the context of HE scholarship include: presence-absence, mind-body, self-other, happiness-unhappiness, knowledge-intuition, and so forth.

[9] Perhaps the key development that led to the engenderment of such approaches was Derrida's ethical turn in the latter part of his career (which was contested by him, however, certainly took place at the very least on a thematic level). See, for instance: J. Derrida, 'Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority'. In G. Anidjar (ed.), *Acts of Religion* (London, UK: Routledge, 1989/2002) and: J. Derrida, *Politics of Friendship* (London, UK: Verso, 1994/2005). Indicatively, examples of such undertakings can be found in the essays collected in: A. Finlayson, and J. Valentine (eds.), *Politics and Post-structuralism: An Introduction* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), in: L. Thomassen, 'Deconstruction as method in political theory.' *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft*, Vol. 39, Issue 1, 2010, pp. 41-53 and in most of the essays that discuss European politics (inter alia) in: D. Levy, M. Pensky, and J. Torpey (eds.), *Old Europe, New Europe, Core Europe: Transatlantic Relations After the Iraq War* (London, UK: Verso, 2005).

problematic studies could benefit from ex post data enrichment as well as from the corroboration of evidence through an integrated approach that encompasses a number of different methodological avenues. With reference to the latter, in turn, the broad, large-scale and aggregatory, top-down spirit that characterises so much of current HE literature will be found lacking as HE's façade of positivist scientificity will be shown to be just that. Instead, it will be established that such designs will need to give their place to narrower and more focused ones that will both acknowledge and be receptive to the intricacies and contingencies of the local and specific, as well as to the radical heterogeneity of subjects and its implications for HE.

The first problematic tendency in HE that this project identifies is to play down either the importance of defining happiness or/and the inherent difficulties and contingencies of this task. This oversight results in crude and ultimately problematic conceptualisations (and corresponding operationalisations) of happiness. Thus, for instance, certain concepts may be treated as being interchangeable and, thus, commensurable, too, with concepts that clearly refer to other distinct emotions (e.g. 'satisfaction with life' ones and concepts based on more hedonic notions of happiness). Or, conceptualisations may give no to very little regard to the temporal aspects of happiness. Indicatively, the ephemeral hedonic aspects might be given equal weight with deeper evaluations about happiness in life or, worse still, an aggregation of several data points of the former might be taken to amount to the latter. Further, the fact that the contingency of any definition, and, even more so, of a concept as complex as happiness, is overlooked results in the construction and design of rigid concepts and methodologies, respectively, which are unresponsive to the contingencies of the cultural and socio-economic context and, therefore, unfit for purpose. Since so much of HE consists of studies that seek to substantiate hypotheses by using the comparative method (in cross-national, intertemporal, and other similar designs), such severe conceptual problems inevitably (and, often, irreparably) cause difficulties and distortions.

The second systematic flaw is the presupposition of a universal and atemporal subjectivity. This enables scholars who adopt a notion of a centred subjectivity to treat self-reported happiness as accurate and even provides justification for some to bypass the step of defining happiness altogether, as the task of definition is left to the individuals participating in surveys. In the case of scholars who, on the contrary, posit a decentred subjectivity (e.g. most adaptation level theorists), the models of the subject that are being used (often implicitly) are conveniently simplistic, narrow, and static, enabling them thus to extrapolate large numbers of theses from relatively small samples. In any case, both approaches that assert a fixed subjectivity naturally presume its universality and thus corroborate the legitimacy of the liberal use of data (by way, for instance, of aggregations and comparisons) collected in the context of different research designs and on different historical and geographical occasions. However, both moves are oversimplifying and unwarranted and, as we shall see in detail in Chapter 2, end up further distorting the interpretation of empirical evidence.

The final, and broader, troubling tendency comes from the implicit theory of knowledge that characterises most projects in the field of HE. Their strong positivist assumptions aggravate the difficulties caused by the problems of defining and measuring happiness by diverting scholarly attention away from the discussions of the theoretical meta-HE domain (such as the ones relating to the aforementioned problems). They deem that the questions of the latter have been answered conclusively and that HE's current task is solely to quantify and model happiness around the established proxies in order to discover the allegedly universal laws of its maximisation, the existence and knowability of which is taken for granted. Nevertheless, as we have argued, the ill-conceived theoretical underpinnings raise questions both about the quality of the data that are being used and about the methodologies employed that are being left unanswered by the studies themselves. At best, when difficulties are acknowledged they are either not addressed (they are disregarded as having negligible effects) or are dealt with as immanent and, therefore, fail to address systemic flaws that are

independent of the particulars of each study.[10] Instead, the self-assured and authoritative manner in which HE-research conclusions are often formulated, owing to, in large part, the positivist attitude that underlies them, paves the way for their ample use in public policy which comes with further problems of its own, as we shall see.

Ultimately, if we accept that there is no privileged point from which we can fix the meanings of terms such as happiness, that there are no foundations which are ultimately indisputable, self-evident, and final, and that the subject resists all fixed essences and has the potential for self-transformation, being located in a historically, culturally, and politically contingent context, we will be forced to reconsider the scope of HE. Nonetheless, despite the fact that what we can know about happiness and its determinants appears to be less than originally thought, and the accuracy of such knowledge could be lower than envisaged, the project should not be abandoned. While the aforementioned post-structuralist approaches and a wealth of related insights will allow us to identify the structural flaws of HE, Rortian neopragmatism offers a way out of the ostensible deadlock that the instability of meaning and the fluidity of subjectivity present HE with.[11] Following Derrida, neo-pragmatism repudiates notions of universal truth, representationalism, and epistemic objectivity.[12] [13] As a nominalist approach, it 'denies that natural kinds and linguistic entities have substantive ontological implications' and focuses, instead, on the social dimension of knowledge.[14] Instead of collapsing into an epistemological nihilism, therefore, it conceptualises 'truth' as being always provisional and relative to specific contexts (societal, historical, and other),

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[10] For example, studies may cite the repeatability of their findings (reliability) as proof of their validity. Or there could even exist separate tests of validity and reliability that, however, fail to address any of the epistemological concerns raised here.

[11] As is developed, for instance, in some of his most important papers of the 1980s collected in: R. Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth, vol. 1* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[12] Whose work on language Rorty sees as congruent and fully compatible with the tradition that began with the later Wittgenstein, Quine, and Davidson (as argued, for instance, in: R. Rorty, 'Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism'. In C. Mouffe (ed.), *Deconstruction and Pragmatism* (London, UK: Routledge, 2005), ch. 2).

[13] With elements from the definition of 'neo-pragmatism' in: N. Bunnin, and J. Yu, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2004), p. 467.

[14] Ibid.

practices, and goals. Thus, it does not brush aside (like HE scholarship does) the discussion about the dubious grounds of the foundationalisms, essentialisms, and claims of accurate representation that HE's literature is replete with. Rather, it embraces their existence as something unavoidable and potentially fruitful; something to work with rather than something to ignore or pretend that it does not exist. In the context of HE, it shall propound a speculative turn that will, however, be alert to the always-provisional status of such underpinnings. Therefore, while the adoption of some provisional metaphysics might be inescapable for the conduct of HE research, their validity will always be at issue, and their contingency will always remain acknowledged. Certainly, the impact of both theoretical interventions will also have concrete consequences on methodology (which we explore in detail in Chapter 4) and will open up new avenues for HE research (which will be discussed in Chapter 5). Overall, the project intends to, on the one hand, describe the preconditions for developing the basis of a less-distorted modelling of happiness, in order to open the field to a new approach which draws on a neopragmatic framework and which redefines HE's scope as narrower than originally envisioned and, on the other, to explore the implications of these preconditions for methodology, epistemology, and even policy.[15]

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[15] Indeed, while the vast majority of HE scholars understand as the field's sole scope the prescription of top-down policies in order to maximise happiness, there are a few exceptions. Frey and Stutzer (In B. Frey, and A. Stutzer, 'What can economists learn from happiness research?', *Journal of Economic Literature*, Vol. 40, Issue 2, 2002, pp. 402-435), one of the most notable among them, are sceptical about inferring interventionist policy prescriptions and, instead, argue that meaningful intervention may ultimately be desirable only at the broader institutional level (e.g. constitutional).

1.2: Risks Emanating From a Problematic Happiness Economics

The obvious risk stemming from a flawed HE is that it will fail to meet its stated aim: to develop a satisfactory understanding of happiness and its key determinants so as to devise prescriptions towards its maximisation. To the extent that this is deemed both a worthwhile and feasible aim (and, as is natural, there is consensus across HE that it is both), failing to achieve it is self-evidently problematic in its own right. Indeed, the same can also be said for HE research that is of low quality and fails to fulfil the field's full potential. However, as HE makes strides towards the mainstream, two new distinct risks are introduced. The prioritisation of happiness along with the confidence of having adequate knowledge of its determinants, can result, on the one hand, in paternalistic and even authoritarian policies, and, on the other hand, in the promotion of a widespread perception of happiness as imperative (and/or an obligation) which can be self-defeating (a problem often studied in the context of 'paradoxes of hedonism'). What is more, the measurement problems that were mentioned earlier (and that will be discussed extensively in the following chapters) may mean that such effects can be untraceable from within any given HE framework, precluding, thus, the possibility for the introduction of self-correcting mechanisms that would address such concerns. Instead, as we shall see, effectively tackling both issues entails solutions that are not immanent to HE but, rather, belong to the domains of policy and the meta-HE level.

It is commonly recognised that liberal and illiberal regimes alike generally allow the existence of a realm of negative liberty. That is, an area of activities that are, at a minimum, free from active repression but can also be free from government meddling and, at a maximum, are not regulated at all. For the former case of regimes this is more or less self-explanatory: it reflects a commitment (constitutional or ideological, usually a mix of both) to

liberty. For the latter, some degree of individual, social, and economic liberty is usually seen as useful for pragmatic reasons (e.g. conducive to better living standards and/or the resilience of the regime). Therefore, it is rare for a regime to be as totalitarian as to practically eliminate the sphere of negative liberty altogether. Indicatively, let us consider the case of Namibia. While it comes only 71st in a reputable index of democracy (falling under the category of a 'flawed democracy' and being only six places above the second worst classification), it is also ranked 17th in terms of press freedom, according to the most widely used index for the same year.[16] [17] Conversely, while Singapore is deemed a 'flawed democracy' that is only 'partly free' according to Freedom House's freedom index it is consistently ranked among the world's top three or five countries in terms of economic freedom.[18] [19] [20] In a nutshell, full control of the private and social life is undesirable by liberal and non-liberal regimes alike either due to principles or on grounds of expediency or both. However, the emergence of the idea that happiness should take precedence provides justification for policies that could significantly limit negative liberty in previously unimaginable ways. HE, with its self-assured methodologies and hypotheses, provides the tools for such developments to materialise.

The curtailment of liberty is more pronounced in policy areas that even authoritarian regimes rarely take an interest in (conceivably because they do not pose a visible threat to the maintenance of the status quo), such as the sphere of lifestyle choices. Granted, government

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[16] The Economist Intelligence Unit, *Democracy Index 2016: Revenge of the 'deplorables'* (London, UK: EIU, 2017)

[17] Reporters Without Borders, *2016 World Press Freedom Index* (Paris, France: Reporters Without Borders, 2016). Available at: https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2016 [Last accessed: 22 August 2017].

[18] The Economist Intelligence Unit, *Democracy Index 2016: Revenge of the 'deplorables', op. cit.*

[19] Freedom House, *Freedom In The World 2017: Populists and Autocrats: The Dual Threat to Global Democracy* (Washington, US: Freedom House, 2017)

[20] Singapore has, for the past years, been consistently in the top five of the countries enjoying the most economic freedom and is currently ranked as the second economically freest country in the world in two of the most oft-cited indices of economic freedom, see: The Heritage Foundation, *2017 Index of Economic Freedom* (Washington, US: The Heritage Foundation, 2017), and J. Gwartney, R. Lawson, and J. Hall, *Economic Freedom of the World: 2017 Annual Report* (Vancouver, Canada: Fraser Institute, 2017).

meddling in such policy areas is not uncommon, albeit it is typically carried out through mild interventions. For instance, through positive reinforcement measures and indirect suggestions or 'nudges' (such as subsidies for sports and so-called 'sin' and Pigovian taxation for substances that are widely regarded as harmful such as tobacco and alcoholic drinks) as opposed to hard measures, such as outright prohibition. The latter, rather, may be evidenced in authoritarian regimes which generally may take more proactive measures insofar, and to the extent, that a specific lifestyle choice might be perceived as a potential means to subvert the regime and/or when it runs against its posited ethos. However, even such interventions are limited in scope (especially in non-liberal regimes) and extent (especially in liberal regimes) or in both dimensions for, otherwise, there would be a risk of excessive and unsought for (as explained above) restriction of negative liberty. Nonetheless, the advent of HE reverses that decisively by offering a seemingly forceful justification: the guarantee of the happiness of the many. If policymakers can know the determinants of happiness, they are, therefore, in a position to make decisions for their citizens who may irrationally (for whatever reason) opt for less-than-optimal happiness preferences. Unlike, therefore, with traditional lifestyle-choice policies such as those about smoking whereby government steps in, if only reluctantly and in a measured manner (for instance, with the imposition of an extra tax and/or regulations pertaining to how such products may be advertised) since it merely wants to balance the satisfaction one may derive from smoking with the avoidance of its adverse consequences (e.g. the health of smokers and passive smokers and the corresponding drag on healthcare services), it is now in a position to act forcefully. For if it can assess the full impact of all the actions on the overarching good that is happiness and, given that it is what allegedly drives people's decisions, it follows that the state must intervene (or, as a minimum, is justified in doing so) to ensure optimal outcomes. By this logic, the state's interventions are no longer based on complex and unclear calculations about possible trade-offs between happiness (or the liberty to pursue it as one deems preferable) and health (which is hardly quantifiable anyway) but, rather, a much simpler calculation for the maximisation of happiness which comes only at the potential cost of

having to sacrifice it for the present and defer it to the future. In essence, paternalism is no longer about protecting the citizen from self-destructive choices in the pursuit of happiness but, rather, from having to live with suboptimal levels of happiness.

Such worries are not just theoretical. Bhutan, a pioneering country in HE-inspired policymaking, bore witness to the material reality of these concerns. More specifically, a national dress is compulsory and until recently the Bhutanese government banned television and the internet, citing, among other things, the maximisation of happiness.[21] [22] Interestingly, conventional HE seems to empirically corroborate the view that the introduction of television in Bhutan and other countries has had a clear negative effect upon happiness or similar measures.[23] Such measures may intuitively sound at odds with the promotion of happiness, if not morally wrong, but to the extent that one deems HE research to be accurate and robust and, even more so, accepts the pursuit of happiness as primary, it could be impossible to argue against them. In fact, if one considers the numerous posited relationships of various independent variables with happiness, it would be hard to argue against a very interventionist state that would prohibit everything that is negatively associated with the citizenry's operationalised wellbeing. By that token, for instance, following Schwartz's widely-cited conclusion that a wide range of choices for consumers is detrimental to their well-being, the government may reasonably take action to create oligopolies in almost all markets (assuming that the ensuing reduced effective spending power of consumers will have no effect upon their happiness).[24] Similarly, in the case of the well-studied relationship between happiness and marriage, should not this be reason enough for the government to make weddings mandatory or, at least, to ban divorces unless both

[21] H. Johns, and P. Ormerod, *Happiness, Economics, and Public Policy,* op. cit., p. 70.
[22] G. Legler, 'The Happiness Index', *Orion Magazine*, January 2014. Available at: https://orionmagazine.org/article/the-happiness-index/ [Last accessed: 2 September 2017].
[23] D. Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness: The Elusive Psychology of Well-Being* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 278, and: R. Layard, *Happiness: Lessons From A New Science*, 2nd ed. (London, UK: Penguin, 2011), ch. 6.
[24] B. Schwartz, *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less* (New York, US: Harper Perrenial, 2004), esp. ch. 5.

partners are prepared to marry other partners immediately thereafter?[25] Indeed, if we are to be consistent, the government (as the sole source of legitimate power) should take action on each of the many identified determinants of happiness. Ultimately, there would be very few, if any, areas of the private and social life of people that would be outside the purview of government policy. The ensuing polity would, quite predictably, be characterised by an encroachment of liberty that even the most authoritarian regimes do not dare dream of.

It should be reiterated here that, in principle, this project does not argue against all HE-informed policy. However, it is the case that the modus operandi of current HE scholarship tends to oversimplify the complex and intricate relationships between happiness and its posited determinants. In doing so, it presents correlations as relationships, brushes away conceptual problems, and ignores conflicting evidence. For instance, what are we to make of theses such as the above-mentioned that justify government intervention and other theses that show a positive relationship between happiness and freedom (including the subcategory of 'economic freedom' which is restricted even by soft punitive measures and subsidy policies, such as ad hoc indirect taxation and redistribution, respectively)?[26] [27] The straightforward solution in such a problem that is available in a number of other fields of the social sciences (namely, conducting a time series study where the overall effects of a policy upon happiness can be monitored over time) is problematic here for, even if we put conceptual and other methodological concerns aside, the problem of controlling for a very long list of potentially relevant variables is insurmountable. Yet, by dismissing such

[25] For a brief yet adequate review of related literature and an empirical reinforcement of the relationship, see: J. Helliwell, and S. Grover, 'How's Life at Home? New Evidence on Marriage and the Set Point for Happiness', *NBER Working Paper*, No. 20794, December 2014. Available at: https://www.nber.org/papers/w20794.pdf [Last accessed: 11 September 2017].
[26] R. Inglehart, R. Foa, C. Peterson, and C. Welzel, 'Development, Freedom, and Rising Happiness A Global Perspective (1981–2007)', *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 2008, pp. 264-285.
[27] For a study studying the same relationship but with an emphasis on the importance of economic freedom see: R. Veenhoven, 'Freedom and Happiness: A comparative study in 46 nations in the early 1990's'. In E. Diener, and E. Suh (eds.), *Culture and Subjective Well-being* (Cambridge, US: MIT Press, 2000), ch. 10.

concerns, HE opens Pandora's Box of policy-making on such dubious bases which enables politicians to encroach on the liberty of individuals in most every facet of life with potentially devastating outcomes. What is more, the opening of new policy areas is unlikely to be reversible. Aside from the instinct of self-preservation that the new entities (bureaucratic and other) involved in the new policy area will naturally have, the policy area may be captured by special-interests which will also have an interest in maintaining the policy area open, if not lobby for its expansion.[28]

Worse, still, it might be used to provide justification for actions that merely further the interests of an ill-intentioned government. This risk is especially worrying for many large scale studies are funded directly or indirectly by governments and semi/quasi-independent government bodies. Consider the aforementioned case of Bhutan wherein happiness studies are carried out (and the Gross National Happiness (GNH) index was first developed) by the government-established and funded 'Centre for Bhutan Studies & Gross National Happiness'. It is not unthinkable that policies such as the banning of television and of the internet could have been intended as ways of limiting the expression of opposition. What is more, as some detractors of Bhutan's government-driven HE policies have argued, the introduction of HE-informed policy can also serve as means to legitimise controversial state policy (even ex post) or even as a way of disseminating state propaganda in order to distract from human rights abuses, poverty, and corruption.[29] However, simply decoupling HE research and state oversight and/or funding would not be a fool proof solution, either. That is because, on the one hand, with the extensive proliferation of HE research in recent years,

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[28] For the tendency of bureaucracies to self-preserve see the classic: R. Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (New York, US: The Free Press, 1962 / 1968). For the persistence of the agents of policy capture see: OECD Public Governance Reviews, *Preventing Policy Capture: Integrity in Public Decision Making* (Paris, France: OECD Publishing, 2017), esp. ch 1-2.

[29] Indicatively see: L. Munro, 'Where did Bhutan's gross national happiness come from? The origins of an invented tradition', *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 47, Issue 1, 2016, pp. 71-92, M. Ansari, *A Shangri-La Economy: Exploring Buddhist Bhutan* (Boca Raton, USA: Universal Publishers, 2012), and S. Thapa, 'Bhutan's Hoax of gross national happiness', *Wave Magazine*, Issue 187, July 2011. Available at: http://wavemag.com.np/issue/article3775.html [Last accessed: 14 September 2017].

and, on the other, with the fact that conflicting conclusions can freely coexist in published research, governments that are inclined to use HE to justify questionable policies can simply pick and choose from already-existing scholarship that is congruent with their political motivations.

In addition, the inclination of HE methodology towards the use of aggregations and averaging entails the risk of an inherent bias in favour of the interests (narrowly construed) of majorities: either due to ecological fallacies (e.g. aggregation bias)[30] or, simply, because policy-makers may only be interested in the purported interest of the majority (aggregate happiness maximisation); after all this also ensures popular support and increases the likelihood of re-election in democratic contexts. If happiness is deemed to be the ultimate goal of policy, then, it could be argued that individual rights serve only as a means towards the maximisation of happiness and are, therefore, only secondary to it. As such, if one variable is demonstrated to be a stronger determinant of happiness (on the aggregate level) than the protection of a given right, in the case that it is antithetical to that right it could be argued that it should trump that particular right. Clearly, this could lead to a host of problematic consequences: for instance, it could restrict individual freedoms and even pave the way for policies that would lead to the oppression of minorities (of all kinds). In fact, there already exists empirical evidence that could be used to support such interventions. For instance, ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity have been shown to have a negative

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[30] Particularly relevant ecological fallacies here are inferences that wrongly assume that when a hypothesis appears robust on the aggregate level it should more or less be translated as being valid on the individual level, too. For an exhaustive exposition and discussion of the problem faced by most social sciences, see the classic: M. Dogan, and S. Rokkan (eds.), *Quantitative Ecological Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, US: MIT Press, 1969).

relationship with happiness.[31] [32] [33] It could be countered that liberal democracies have

constitutional and other guarantees that would prohibit the infringement of individual rights

but this, too, is problematic for: i) it -unjustifiably- assumes that the protection is complete

ii) it takes the political (including the very fact that a liberal democracy will remain one),

legal, and/or constitutional status quo for granted when by their very definition, at least in

liberal democracies, they are anything but static iii) it still leaves all possibilities open for

non-liberal regimes. We shall return to consider corollary difficulties (owed to the

aggregatory character of HE) and other policy-specific difficulties in 4.3. We shall now turn

our attention to the second risk emanating from a problematic HE.

As argued before, one of the consequences of the advance of HE is that happiness is

prioritised more highly and the goal of its maximisation may be even seen as deserving

precedence over most other goals.[34] Granted, this may also be attributed to the rising

popularity of self-help books and similar discourses that emphasise the importance of

happiness by offering advice on its maximisation or on the elimination of perceived enemies

of happiness (e.g. stress, bad mood, the side-lining of our 'true' self etc.), but this is not at

issue here.[35] For, if anything, the diversity of discourses that contribute to the

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[31] See, for instance: R. Putnam, 'E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century. The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. 30, Issue 2, pp. 137-174.

[32] Longhi, for example, found that there is a negative relationship between well-being and the degree of cultural diversity in communities where white British people live in. In: S. Longhi, 'Cultural diversity and subjective well-being', *IZA Journal of Migration*, Vol. 3, No. 13, 2014. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1186/2193-9039-3-13 [Last accessed: 19 September 2017].

[33] See: M. Berg, and R. Veenhoven, 'Religion and Happiness in Nations', *Ethiek en Maatschappij*, Vol. 12, No. 4, 2009, pp. 49-69. The evidence overwhelmingly suggests a negative relationship between religious diversity and happiness in most countries with the exception of a handful of Western countries where in fact the relationship is inversed (although not as strongly). More focused looks on the same variable in specific countries lend further support to the aforementioned findings. For instance, for a study of the phenomenon in South Africa, see: T. Hinks, 'Fractionalization and well-being: Evidence from a new South African data set', *New Zealand Economic Papers*, Vol. 46, Issue 3, pp. 253-271.

[34] Indeed, for Bhutan, this is the -by law- foundational goal of all domestic policy. See: M. Anielski, *The Economics of Happiness: Building Genuine Wealth* (Gabriola Island, Canada: New Society Publishers, 2007), p. 137.

[35] This phenomenon is well-documented in literature, for instance, see: A. Elliott, *Reinvention* (London, UK: Routledge, 2013), esp. ch. 1, and M. Jackson, *The Age of Stress: Science and the Search*

aforementioned outcome reinforces and entrenches their influence. Furthermore, this tendency, variously described as 'happiness ideology', 'happinessism', and similar, is not limited to the audience of HE discourses (or to the audience of the aforementioned self-help discourse) or to recipients of and/or people affected by HE-inspired policies but, rather, has a broader effect upon the general public (partly, but not exclusively, due to these policies).[36] What is more, the effect does not merely consist of a prioritisation of happiness by individuals on a theoretical level but also with pressures towards introspection for the assessment of one's happiness 'performance' and the maximisation of one's own perceived well-being. That is because not only is happiness now seen as primary but, also, because empirical evidence and its interpretation in HE can point us to tangible ways of maximising it. It, therefore, may appear reasonable that it must become our own responsibility to put all the effort we can in order to attain and maximise happiness, as Bruckner argues.[37] However, the outcomes of such pressures are, perhaps not surprisingly, quite often contrary to the expected ones.

This stems mainly from two facts. First, this inducement to constant introspection is an endless race (and, thus, a race that cannot be ever won) that distracts us from living in the moment. That is not automatically a problem. After all, some degree of introspection is both unavoidable and essential if one is to plan on how to improve their circumstances. However, it appears that only a modicum of that can be healthy in the longer-term. The concept of mindfulness, namely 'the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment' as defined by Kabat-Zinn (the professor who first coined the term and is one of the

for Stability (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), esp. ch. 5-6, and, finally, M. McGee, *Self-Help, Inc.: Makeover Culture in American Life* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[36] A diverse range of thinkers have made similar arguments. See, for instance, the influential: W. Davies, *The Happiness Industry: How the Government and Big Business Sold Us Well-Being* (London, UK: Verso, 2015), and C. Cederstrom, and A. Spicer, *The Wellness Syndrome* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2015).

[37] P. Bruckner, *Perpetual Euphoria: On the Duty to Be Happy* (Princeton, US: Princeton University Press, 2010).

foremost thinkers of the concept), has been developed to, among other things, help study the negative effects of failing to live in the moment for considerable stretches of our daily lives.[38] Indeed, evidence in support of this relationship is mounting to the extent that mindfulness-based therapies are currently being used by a number of different approaches to psychotherapy (including in purely mindfulness-based ones such as MBCT and MBSR) to treat stress, depression, and other mood and personality disorders.[39] Further, it has been demonstrated that an active pursuit of happiness causes a perception of reduced time availability which, ultimately, may lead to actual reduction of happiness.[40] The broader implication is that even if a right set of happiness predictor variables are in place for an individual, the distraction entailed by the constant self-analysis and evaluation will be at the detriment of their well-being and, indeed, mental health. It follows, of course, that the negative effect will be even more pronounced in cases where the basic determinants of happiness are absent.

Second, it contributes to the cultivation of the idea that permanent happiness is of the essence and, therefore, if one consistently fails to attain it (as is natural) she ends up mired in a trap of guilt, sense of failure (and, thus, also shame), and, ultimately, unhappiness. The negative effect of this is almost self-evident in the case of an unhappy individual; the guilt owed to the so-called ideology of happiness introduces a wholly unnecessary layer of unhappiness which further deteriorates the individual's situation. Nonetheless, it is also present in the case of individuals that lead generally happy lives. That is because, as we shall see in Chapter 2, there is overwhelming evidence in support of the 'happiness adaptation

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[38] J. Kabat-Zinn, 'Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Context: Past, Present, and Future', *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, Vol. 10, Issue 2, June 2003, pp. 144-156.

[39] For a compelling overview of evidence, as well as of the wide range of possible applications, see: R. Baer (ed.), *Mindfulness-Based Treatment Approaches: Clinician's Guide to Evidence Base and Applications*, 2nd ed. (London, UK: Academic Press, 2014), and M. Barker, *Mindful Counselling and Psychotherapy* (London, UK: Sage, 2013), esp. part I.

[40] A. Kim, and S. Maglio, 'Vanishing time in the pursuit of happiness', *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 2018, pp. 1-6. Available at: https://link.springer.com/article/10.3758%2Fs13423-018-1436-7 [Last accessed: 7 March 2018].

thesis', namely the view that happiness levels tend to adapt over time, even in the face of the determinants of happiness remaining present (or even when their values increase).[41] Zizek describes the phenomenon eloquently (even if one does not subscribe to his Lacanian psychoanalytical perspective) by arguing that in the face of the ideological injunction to be happy (or to enjoy), the superego inverts the usual Kantian 'you can, because you must' and turns it into 'you must, because you can' thereby turning happiness into a duty and, as a result, the lack thereof into a sense of overwhelming guilt for failing to fulfil it.[42] [43] Further, the discrepancy between the ideology of maximal happiness and our, natural to an extent, failure to attain it is even more problematic for individuals whose own values and preferences may be at odds with even modest pursuits of happiness. Indeed, while preference for happiness is often intuitively taken to be strong (if not supreme), self-evident, and natural, evidence shows that this is not, in fact, always the case (at least not with all types of happiness).[44] In essence, for such individuals and to the extent that the societal dominates the individual level (of values and preferences), the divergence from the norm of happiness is injurious not only for the fairly intuitive reason of a sense of alienation from society but also due to guilt for failing to meet an established standard (notwithstanding the fact that they did not freely set it for themselves).

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[41] As we shall see in 2.1, not everyone in HE subscribes to the adaptationist outlook, however, there is a consensus that such effects exist in varying degrees either over time and/or over additional units of any given determinant of happiness. Indeed, it could be seen as a HE variation of the law of diminishing marginal utility.

[42] This is a recurring theme for him, especially in his writings from the decade of the 2000s, but the following provides a very concise summary: S. Zizek, 'You May!', *London Review of Books*, Vol. 21, No. 6, March 1999, pp. 3-6. For a congenial critical approach of the 'injunction to be happy' also see: C. Wright, 'Happiness Studies and Wellbeing: A Lacanian Critique of Contemporary Conceptualisations of the Cure', *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research*, Vol. 6, 2014, pp. 719-813.

[43] For a broader discussion of feelings of shame as a result of deviation from social norms, see: J. Elster, *Alchemies of the Mind: Rationality and the Emotions* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), esp. sections 3.1-3.2.

[44] Indeed, Joshanloo and Weijers go as far as to show that some people can even be averse to happiness (or, at the very least, to many of its types) in: M. Joshanloo, and D. Weijers, 'Aversion to happiness across cultures: A review of where and why people are averse to happiness', *Journal of Happiness Studies*, Vol. 15, Issue 3, June 2014, pp. 717-735. For a succinct review of papers studying the diverse attitudes towards common conceptions of happiness, see: J. Aaker, and E. Smith, 'Not Everyone Wants to Be Happy', *Scientific American*, October 2014. Available at: https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/not-everyone-wants-to-be-happy [Last accessed: 22 September 2017].

In the same way that we have argued that if there existed a perfectly accurate way to gauge happiness we would perhaps be able to eschew the worries of HE-sanctioned paternalism and authoritarianism, the same would arguably be even more so the case in the two aforementioned troubling effects. For if we could quantify the negative effect of the increasingly influential happiness discourse (both in HE and elsewhere) the field would be able to make arrangements so as to minimise (if not eliminate) it. However, it is worth mentioning that even if we hypothesised a perfectly accurate measure of happiness, the problem would still surface under certain scenarios primarily affected, again, by ecological fallacies. Consider, for instance, the case of an unhappy subject that has experienced a further decrease in their happiness levels due to the reasons mentioned in the previous paragraph. If that decrease is smaller than the equivalent increase for a happy individual, or if simply there are fewer unhappy people, the above-mentioned tendency would not register as a problem on the aggregate level and, thus, the interests of such subjects would be completely overlooked. Certainly, this problem is not unique to this type of scenarios. On the contrary, it is rather ubiquitous in HE. However, firstly, it is easier to identify and deal with it when, as is the case elsewhere in HE, a scholar studies the impact of a given determinant upon a cohort of subjects for it is both straightforward and intuitive. The former is due to the already-existing focus on an operationalised concept and the latter because it is fairly intuitive to consider that a determinant might have a negative impact. Secondly, the here discussed tendencies are broader in scope and more entrenched in character and, therefore, are likely to have a graver negative effect. In any case, and independent of whether HE will be able to devise measures of higher validity in the future, the issues elaborated in this section merit particular attention. This attention should be sought primarily by HE scholarship itself (e.g. with appropriate designs explicitly tackling those issues but also with meta-HE undertakings) for once its conclusions leave HE's 'jurisdiction' they may be used in the aforementioned adverse ways (both intentionally and unintentionally).

1.3: Methodology and Structure

This is a literature-based project that will use logical argumentation in order to analyse the (mostly) empirical research in HE but, as already explained, it will also make use of insights from post-structuralist and neo-pragmatist scholarship. The former will be used largely to critique HE and identify its main difficulties, as well as to pave the way for possible solutions, while the latter will be used to frame such solutions into a coherent epistemic framework that would evade such (and other) difficulties. The approach was deemed to be the most appropriate given the area wherein this project locates the source of systemic problems in HE: the field's epistemological substratum and the area of meta-HE concerns. From these premises, it follows that an immanent critique would not be able to effectively address the source of difficulties and, therefore, even if it tackled particular instances of them, the difficulties (or, at a minimum, the potential for difficulties) would persist. Yet, on occasion, this project will also delve immanently into HE scholarship but mostly by way of illustration (e.g. by discussing a research practice as a case of a broader phenomenon/tendency, by showing that all methodological options are imperfect, or by considering how it may be impacted by the changes proposed here); the focus will always remain on a higher level of abstraction. Thus, for example, instead of considering immanent mitigating techniques for every flawed methodology that we identify, we will trace the underlying foundations that made them possible in the first place with an eye to either foreclosing any possibility of their re-emergence (in the given or ostensibly new forms) or, to the extent that they are deemed unavoidable, to lowering the status of the produced knowledge from what it currently is. As we shall see, the most important implications of both moves transcend the confines of any given study. They will impel us, for instance, to prescribe multidisciplinary corroborative studies, a renewed and narrower scope for HE, and a more qualified and cautious use of HE scholarship in policy.

To be sure, and in spite of the approach taken, the author aspires to both engage with and, hopefully, affect standard HE scholarship (both qualitative and quantitative) and ignite an epistemological and, more broadly, meta-HE debate that is so far missing. Indeed, even the proto-epistemological discussions in HE studies (such as in the justifications of certain methodologies), when existent, are usually in an embryonic form and in no case do they lend themselves to elaborate debates.[45] While this work also considers a number of concrete (if - mostly- broad) implications of the here-proposed intervention (e.g. methodological ones), it is certainly the case that further studies will be required to specify and particularise these implications, especially with respect to specific applications in given contexts. We shall return to that with more detail in our concluding chapter. Let us now lay down this project's structure.

This chapter attempts to introduce the project by detailing its thesis, explaining its importance with an exploration of the dangers of ill-founded HE scholarship and, finally, by presenting the way (form and structure) that its thesis will be substantiated (in this section). Chapter 2 offers a critical review of the literature which lays bare how the problematic inclinations (briefly presented in preceding sections) emerge and affect, in different degrees and ways, the three main categories of approaches to HE that we distinguish. Chapter 3 establishes why post-structuralism is apposite in order to address each of them effectively. More specifically, it is argued that post-structuralism has a critical relation to science, albeit not with an eye to undermining it, but, to the contrary, to subject it to critique so that it can be potentially reworked, expanded, and developed in new directions. Conclusions drawn from Derrida's deconstruction are used to shed light upon the inherent limits of implicit accounts of identity and representation in HE, and can help uncover the metaphysics of

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[45] Usually brief engagements with epistemological issues in lieu of justification for the adoption of controversial methodological approaches.

presence that constitute the theoretical backdrop of such accounts.[46] Furthermore, the heterogeneous but complementary work of Foucault and Deleuze on knowledge can explain why such ill-conceived understandings of difference and meaning often lead to the formulation of truth claims (which, in turn, pave the way for the development of grand narratives) that attain the status of undisputed objectivity, despite their contingent foundations and assumptions.[47] [48] Finally, the self-creating subject of later Foucault,[49] as well as the rhizomatic subject of Deleuze and Guattari,[50] as opposed to the dominant (in HE and other social sciences) arborescent models, problematise the narrow and fixed accounts of subjectivity currently employed in the field.

The shift to a more open-ended and historically situated subject, as we shall see in Chapter 4, does not only have an impact on how we evaluate self-reported happiness but should, just as importantly, affect how HE-related data is to be understood: as local, temporal (and

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[46] The main idea, around which revolves a variety of themes of particular relevance here, is that the limits of knowledge claims play an active and unavoidable role at its supposedly stable and secure centre. Such themes recur throughout his corpus but were more clearly discernible in his earlier phase, in works such as: J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore, US: The John Hopkins University Press, 1967/1997), J. Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (London, UK: Routledge, 1967/2001), and J. Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago, US: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), in the latter one of which appears the here pertinent quote about knowledge. Namely, that 'it is not surrounded but rather traversed by its limit, marked in its interior by the multiple furrow of its margin' (Ibid., p. 25).
[47] As expounded in: M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London, UK: Routledge, 1966/2002) and, a lot more briefly, in his essay addressing the Enlightenment and its limits: M. Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?'. In P. Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (New York, US: Pantheon, 1984).
[48] Modicums of his theorisation of knowledge first appeared in his early books on Hume (G. Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity: An Essay on Hume's Theory of Human Nature* (New York, US: Columbia University Press, 1953/1991) and on Kant (G. Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy* (London, UK: Continuum, 1963/2008) but it is fleshed out in a more systematic and elaborate way in his critique of Western metaphysics and of its conceptions of identity and difference in: G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (London, UK: Continuum, 1968/2004) and, finally, in his and Guattari's critique of the arborescent models of knowledge in: G. Deleuze, and F. Guattari, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia vol. 2: A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis, US: University of Minnesota Press, 1980/1987).
[49] In: M. Foucault, *History of Sexuality, vol. 3: The Care of the Self* (New York, US: Vintage Books, 1984/1988). Most of the ideas linking up the ancient Greek 'aesthetics of existence' with the possibility of a self-constituting, to a certain extent, subjectivity were first discussed in the yet unpublished Berkeley Lectures: J. Pearson (ed.), *Fearless Speech* (Los Angeles, US: Semiotext(e), 1983/2001).
[50] G. Deleuze, and F. Guattari, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia vol. 2: A Thousand Plateaus*, op. cit.

temporary), and as being largely oblivious to potentialities that have yet to materialise.[51]

Neopragmatism is put forward as the most apposite epistemic framework for HE for it is shown to not only be congruent with the critical points of post-structuralism but also because it enables research with minimal commitments (metaphysical and otherwise). The implications of the transition to this new framework are considered in some depth with the main focus being on methodology but some policy implications will also be drawn, even if only in a cursory manner. Finally, Chapter 5 offers a recap, explores potential limitations and anticipates critiques of this project, and, finally, suggests areas for further research that are opened up by this project.

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[51] This refers both to potentialities of the subject herself but also of her environment too, as the two are inextricably intertwined.

CHAPTER 2: The Current State of Happiness Economics

2.1: Literature Review

2.1.1: Introduction

The very nature of this project calls on us to adopt a largely categorical approach to HE literature. That is because this study does not intend to provide a detailed counter-paradigm of HE, nor is it within its scope to correct all the various sporadic deficiencies and weaknesses of current approaches, instead, it aims to illuminate the most important systemic flaws and to consider the preconditions for a HE that would be best positioned to deal with them. Indubitably, categorising approaches in such a diverse field, even if we assume that the best of care has been taken so that the groupings are adequate and do justice to the scholarship that each of them comprises, comes with certain risks. Most prominently, that of oversimplification, the potential sidestepping of novel and peculiar insights and of irreducible intricacies of individual scholars, and hypothesising fixed and absolute categories at the cost of misrepresenting parts of the constituents of each category. However, the risk is one worth taking here both for the already-mentioned reasons and because it would have been practically impossible to tackle the subject by reviewing the work of the many thousands of HE scholars separately or at least in stricter categories: a meaningfully lower level of abstraction would have required the distinction of at least a couple dozen of categories, something that would have rendered the project unfeasible and would, in any case, be more suitable in the context of a work of encyclopaedic nature. We shall, however,

retain the acknowledgment of this calculated risk to the fore of our inquiry throughout this project and take whatever steps are available to us in order to minimise it.

The categories employed here will not be on a disciplinary basis as has been attempted by others elsewhere.[52] While there are broad affinities, shared methodologies, and, often, similar conclusions among approaches originating from the same discipline, such a taxonomy can be proven misleading, especially in view of our desideratum here. That is because commonalities in inquiry methods or/and terminologies can generate a spurious sense of similarity that may conceal the important differences that underlie them. Instead, we shall proceed with a categorisation according to the fundamental theoretical assumptions of each approach, something that will also help reveal counterintuitive similarities (usually - but not exclusively- covert ones) among projects that are being carried out under the auspices of different disciplinary and methodological approaches. This line of inquiry will work towards identifying the weaknesses of HE scholarship and rendering its gaps and self-contradictions more visible. It should be noted that even though the typology expounded below is original, it follows, to a certain extent, the broad lines specified in Veenhoven's oft-cited typology (albeit with modifications and some important differentiations) but shares perspectives -in varying, even if only small, degrees- with a number of other typologies as the number of potential meaningful groupings is finite and many have already been explored.[53] In particular, the groups of families of approaches considered below are the following three: Cognitive theories, set-point theories, and needs-based theories. Their respective sub-sections are organised in a similar fashion and structure, seeking to initially provide an overview of each position, subsequently to assess the plausibility of each by examining their theoretical and empirical supporting pillars, and, ultimately, to underline their limitations.

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[52] For example, in: S. David, I. Boniwell, and A. Conley Ayers (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Happiness* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[53] As developed for instance in: R. Veenhoven, 'How do we assess how happy we are? Tenets, implications and tenability of three theories'. In A. Dutt, and B. Radcliff (eds.), *Happiness, Economics and Politics: Towards a Multidisciplinary Approach* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2009), ch. 3.

Before delving into the discussion of the different approaches, however, we shall make some preliminary remarks about two categories of problems that are endemic to all current approaches (even if in varying degrees of importance) and are central to this project. Namely, the problem of defining happiness (in processes of conceptualisation) and that of measuring it (in processes of operationalisation). Let us begin with the former. While it is, by now, almost a commonplace to acknowledge the ambiguity of the term 'happiness' or, yet more radically, to dismiss attempts at providing a working definition altogether because of its elusive nature, it is this project's contention that the issue is not given its due weight in HE literature with grave consequences for the quality of its research output. Two paths are usually followed to address this almost universally-acknowledged difficulty: on the one hand, some scholars opt to use more specific and theoretically pinnable items (such as 'mood' and 'positive affect') or combinations of them as more-or-less satisfactory and rigid proxies of happiness and, on the other, others simply brush the issue aside either on pragmatic grounds or by undermining its import.[54] The latter generally tend to adopt self-reports of 'happiness' or 'well-being' and treat them as reliable and adequate; deferring thus the responsibility to construe (or to create working definitions of) happiness to the subjects of the surveys.[55] At any rate, the scholarly debate regarding conceptualisation issues comprises only a negligible part of HE literature as most scholars seem intent on moving on to the stage of the analysis of empirical evidence as swiftly as possible. This could be explained by a variety of reasons: some may, indeed, consider that it is more tangible and concrete and, therefore, meaningful, others may be most comfortable with it given that most HE scholars are of a positive science background wherein research is focused more on more quantitative forms of inquiry, and, finally, some may consider that an emphasis on the unsolved (or even unsolvable)

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[54] Some of the better known happiness scales include Withey's 'Semantic Differential Happiness Scale', Larsen's 'Affective Intensity Measure', and Kamaan and Flett's 'Affectometer', all of which target combinations of different items. More in: D. Hudson, *Happiness and the Limits of Satisfaction* (London, UK: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995), pp. 97-101.

[55] White (In M. White, *The Illusion of Well-being: Economic Policymaking based on Respect and Responsiveness,* op. cit., pp. 23-24.) cites the examples of Lyubomirsky and Gilbert as representative of a tendency in scholarship to argue against the necessity for a definition of happiness since individuals are assumed to instinctively know what the concept of happiness is referring to.

conundrum of the meaning of happiness may be detrimental to the status of HE as an exact science (which is a desideratum for many).

Conceptual problems, however, far from representing a trivial and isolated difficulty, lead scholars into committing serious methodological errors such as the treatment of entirely different spectra of meaning (e.g. life satisfaction with a transient boost of mood) as tantamount. Thus, for instance, while both of the aforementioned proposed ways out of the semantic deadlock present apparent problems (we will return to this), the situation is further aggravated by the fact that, on most occasions, the concepts produced via either path end up being used interchangeably.[56] To complicate things further, researchers rarely tackle the question of the translation of concepts related to happiness from one language to another. Thus, when comparing data gathered from different countries (often belonging to distant continents), they treat the evidence as homogeneous and perfectly comparable. Nevertheless, this lack of attention to cultural and linguistic specificity is not backed by any rationale and, therefore, leads to significant distortions. Kenny and Kenny, for instance, bring up the example of surveys in countries using Slavic languages where the operative word for happiness (in a majority of questionnaires and surveys) is one conveying 'moments of profound bliss' rather than the more general 'satisfaction with life' sense that HE surveys typically aim at.[57] Yet, even when seemingly relatively adequate translations exist, intercultural comparisons and aggregations are problematic in that the signification chains that naturally differ among different cultures can lead to understandings of happiness with subtle yet important differences and, therefore, to incommensurable responses, too. Kim, Peng and Chiu, for instance, attempt to account for the alleged tendency of Asian regions to report lower levels of self-esteem (a key ingredient in multi-items surveys of happiness),

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[56] Most scholars not only treat data referring to any of these terms as interchangeable but they often use two or more of these terms in the same paper. For a concise review of the terminology in HE and the interchangeable uses of these concepts see: N. Badhwar, *Well-Being: Happiness in a Worthwhile Life* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 5-11.
[57] A. Kenny, and C. Kenny, *Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Utility* (Exeter, UK: Imprint Academic, 2006), p. 150.

when there appears very little observable and/or logical justification for this difference, by citing the dialectical notion of the self in Eastern philosophy and religion and contrasting it to what they term the 'consistent' self of Western culture.[58] Self-esteem, for adherents of Eastern culture, is a contingent and temporary dominion of the positive self over its negative counterpart rather than an exclusively and decisively positive state. Therefore, even the best available translation will inescapably fail to produce commensurable data. Similarly, happiness conceptions are treated as being effectively static (in the sense of being ahistoric and non-contingent) since comparisons are liberally being made between data collected in different historical periods (indeed, even when field work was carried out decades apart). In fact, the logic of using long-term time series data, which is encountered in innumerable publications and is becoming increasingly prevalent, is based precisely on such comparisons. Researchers often assume that a longer period of data collection will yield more significant, reliable, and valid findings and completely ignore the temporal aspects of their key concepts.

In short, then, while the difficulty of defining happiness is widely acknowledged, the attempts to tackle it are largely superficial. Not only does the problem remain unresolved but the fact that the most key term of HE (happiness and its equivalents) is treated as having specific and fixed content that is comprehended universally in a uniform manner by all subjects (notwithstanding differences in chronological periods, areas, languages, cultures, and other) further aggravates the situation. These problematisations will be further explored later in the section with regard to their implications upon HE and, also, in the following section in the context of an overall discussion of the limitations of current approaches.

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[58] Y. Kim, S. Peng, and C. Chiu, 'Explaining self-esteem differences between Chinese and North Americans: Dialectical self (vs. self-consistency) or lack of positive self-regard', *Self and Identity*, Vol. 7, Issue 2, 2008, pp. 113-128.

As a consequence of the congenital defect that definitional problems represent, operationalising happiness is a priori problematic. Nevertheless, and even if we choose to ignore the problems presented above (for instance, on pragmatic grounds), there is a host of other, measurement-specific problems with each of the three main ways used for measuring happiness (self-assessment, 'objective'/physiological measures, and qualitative interviews). While self-assessment is by far the most widely-used approach, it by no means is the least troublesome. Indeed, it is preferred merely for reasons of practicality (it offers easier data gathering from larger samples while being less resource-intensive than the alternatives) and because it makes the quantification of happiness and the subsequent calculations more easily practicable. Happiness self-report surveys typically ask subjects to rank themselves either with respect to their lives as a whole or with particular sub-domains of life in mind (often both) on a seven, ten, or eleven point scale (where 0 (or 1) equals absolute unhappiness and 7 (10, or 11, respectively) equals absolute happiness) even though the wording might differ (e.g. 'life satisfaction' or 'overall well-being' might be used instead) or, on occasion, the numerical scale may be replaced by qualitative terms (e.g. 'very happy', 'not so happy', and similar). And while the effect of definitional difficulties is readily apparent, as argued, such research methods come with difficulties of their own. First, it is assumed that subjects can have clear self-knowledge and can (and are willing to) communicate it with satisfactory accuracy. However, developments in psychology have shown that the average mentally healthy individual has a variety of (mostly positive) cognitive biases that can affect her self-reported happiness levels (e.g. adaptation and optimism biases).[59] [60] Further, as Kahneman argued, individuals often forget or misremember (have a distorted memory compared to how they originally registered) their previous emotional states and cannot accurately provide the

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[59] An extensive discussion of cognitive biases can be found in: J. Caverni, J. Fabre, and M. Gonzalez, *Cognitive Biases* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Elsevier, 1990), esp. sec. 2 and 4.
[60] Eckersley points to specific examples wherein subjects were clearly (to the extent that happiness or its lack can be inferred) overstating their happiness levels. In: R. Eckersley, 'The Mixed Blessings of Material Progress: Diminishing Returns in the Pursuit of Happiness'. In A. Delle Fave (ed.), *The Exploration of Happiness: Present and Future Perspectives* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2013), pp. 232-234.

overall life average that surveys typically ask for.[61] For that reason he calls for a distinction between the 'remembering and evaluating self' (that is typically the one evoked in surveys) and the 'experiencing self'.[62]

Second, quantification is not as straightforward and rigorous a process as is commonly assumed. The upper and lower limits of each scale refer to theoretical conditions of absolute bliss or misery, respectively, that each individual will interpret differently and thus infer from there a fairly private ranking based on her very subjective terms. Additionally, people have varying degrees of familiarisation with scales and therefore it is only with a logical leap that we can expect that they will interpret each point of a given scale in a uniform way so as to return commensurable data; this choice, thus, fuels further distortions. Indeed, as McCloskey points out, forcing -in effect- qualitative answers onto a numerical scale merely compounds the problems of subjectivist interpretation and that of adaptation (that will be explored in subsection 2.1.3).[63] Further, Giorgino reviews evidence that not only shows that the mean results differ (both SWB and its determinants) when the questions asked alternate between the terms happiness, well-being, and life satisfaction (something that highlights the aforementioned conceptual issues), but they also vary when different scales are used.[64] Lim presents findings that further corroborate the latter effect;[65] the same questions appear to produce statistically significant differences when subjects are queried through the use of different scales.

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[61] His ideas on the issue have been published in a plethora of papers. A comprehensive presentation can be found in: D. Kahneman, and J. Riis, 'Living, and thinking about it: two perspectives on life'. In F. Huppert, N. Baylis, and B. Keverne (eds.), *The Science of Well-being* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005), ch. 11.

[62] His proposed way of breaking the apparent deadlock is via the extensive use of experience sampling methods. However, those are not exempt from the challenges raised here for they, too, constitute forms of self-reporting.

[63] D. McCloskey, 'Happyism', *The New Republic*, June 2012. Available at: http://www.newrepublic.com/article/politics/magazine/103952/happyism-deirdre-mccloskey-economics-happiness[Last accessed: 2 September 2016].

[64] V. Giorgino, *The Pursuit of Happiness and the Traditions of Wisdom* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2014), pp. 18-19.

[65] H. Lim, 'The use of different happiness rating scales: Bias and comparison problem?', *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 87, No. 2, 2008, pp. 259-267.

Moreover, HE self-report surveys suffer from the problems generally affecting surveys of all disciplines and fields. Among them, and in the context of happiness studies, so-called 'question anchoring' deserves particular attention. The nature of questions preceding or following the single-item question that pertains to happiness (or the researcher's equivalent of choice) have an important impact on the results. Strack, Martin, and Schwarz presented an example of that when they illustrated that a simple reversal of the order of the questions "How happy are you with your life as a whole?" and "How frequently do you go out for a date?" had a significant impact on the outcome.[66] When the above order was used the two measures had an almost insignificant correlation but when the order was reversed, presumably because respondents thought about their satisfaction with life more in terms of the question that preceded, there appeared a significant correlation (~ .66) in which case one could rush to the conclusion that the frequency of dates is an important determinant of life satisfaction (a complete reversal of the initial picture). Indeed, similar experiments saw the phenomenon being replicated with different measures elsewhere.[67] Although some research designs are particularly careful to alleviate the effects of anchoring (to the extent that it is possible) and, ultimately, the problem can be avoided completely if studies contain solely the single-item questions relating to happiness, correlational studies (which comprise the backbone of approaches such as needs-based theory) are largely doomed to settle for some distortion. Besides, and worse still, the bias owed to anchoring may, indeed, be intentional as it presents an easy way to drive responses towards the predetermined direction that an ill-intentioned scholar has chosen. To be sure, this is not a HE-specific difficulty, however, it is particularly pressing in the HE's context due to the inherent elusiveness and open-endedness of its key concept and the sheer number of the potential independent variables of interest.

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[66] F. Strack, L. Martin, and N. Schwarz, 'Priming and communication: Social determinants of information use in judgments of life satisfaction', *European Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 18, Issue 5, 1988, pp. 429-442.

[67] For instance, job satisfaction, marital satisfaction, and leisure time satisfaction were surveyed in different orders leading to different results in: N. Schwarz, F. Strack, and H. Mai, 'Assimilation and contrast effects in part-whole question sequences: A conversational logic analysis', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 55, Issue 1, 1991, pp. 3-23.

Finally, respondents could simply lie for a variety of reasons: they may subconsciously lie to themselves about their true condition and, therefore, lie to the survey too,[68] they might want to influence the conclusion of the study so as to benefit personally from its various potential consequences (e.g. a redistributive policy, in the context of a policy study), or simply for reasons of cultural response biases. More specifically, people from certain cultural backgrounds may find it inappropriate to respond that they are very happy and/or very miserable,[69] [70] while people from other cultures will tend to avoid the upper-end because of - among other reasons- an unusual concentration of modesty attributes in the population or, in some contexts, even due to reasons of superstition (e.g. as an attempt to tempt the fates). [71] [72]

Likewise, qualitative research in HE, although better equipped to address some of the concerns explored above, suffers from a range of problems of its own. While, for instance, semi-structured or even completely unstructured in-depth interviews seemingly provide a way to overcome -to a degree- the problem of the looseness of the term of happiness (on a basic level, by way of clarifying the specific notion of happiness that is being used in each case), they introduce the possibility of uncontrollable bias on the side of the researcher given its less structured form, both during the interview and at the stage of its interpretation. Moreover, as Cummins notes, the themes discovered through the use of focus groups can be, and, in fact, often are guided or even manipulated by the interviewer for the initial

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[68] D. Hunter, *A Practical Guide to Critical Thinking* (Hoboken, US: Wiley, 2009), pp. 139-140.
[69] A. Kenny, and C. Kenny, op. cit., pp. 150-151.
[70] A. Wierzbicka, 'Happiness in cross-linguistic & cross-cultural perspective', *Daedalus*, Vol. 133, Issue 2, Spring 2004, pp. 34-43.
[71] A. Lau, R. Cummins, and W. McPherson, 'An Investigation into the Cross-Cultural Equivalence of the Personal Wellbeing Index', *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 72, Issue 3, 2005, pp. 403-430.
[72] For a brief review of these biases and similar challenges to the validity of HE studies see also: R. Veenhoven, 'Happiness, Also Known as "Life Satisfaction" and "Subjective Well-Being". In K. Land, A. Michalos, and M. Sirgy (eds.), *Handbook of Social Indicators and Quality of Life Research* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2012), pp. 67-69.

exploration of thoughts and ideas.[73] This guidance from the interviewer, while reasonable,

often prevents potentially unexpected issues from being raised, shifting the focus towards a

direction that could be owed to the researcher's personal biases or that may be most

compatible with her pre-determined thesis. Furthermore, incommensurability problems

apply even more so here given, on the one hand, the wide variety of research designs and

questions (significantly wider than in quantitative counterparts) and, on the other, the

increased degree of subjectivism at play in such methodologies (on all stages). Indeed, the

non-universality of conceptions of happiness continues to have an impact upon the

interviewees' responses and is not simply eliminated merely because the questioning takes a

more elaborate and analytical form. With it, the various related problems that were explored

earlier persist. By a similar token, individual interviews, too, are susceptible to biases, as the

interviewer will almost always provide cues either intentionally (albeit sometimes for 'good'

reasons) or not (for example to test specific hypotheses).[74] In addition, the problem of

question anchoring discussed in the context of self-report surveys pertains even more so here

as the number of questions is typically larger and the looser structure of those interviews

increases the potential for unintended anchoring effects, as well as provides greater room for

manoeuvre for an unethical interviewer who wants to make deliberate use of such effects.

Finally, the lack of full anonymity (unlike with most surveys, it cannot be fully guaranteed in

interviews) coupled with the effects of group dynamics and comparisons (in the case of focus

groups), which, as we shall see below (esp. in 2.1.2), are particularly important in the domain

of happiness, pose further challenges to these methodologies; something that, along with

their increased requirements for resources (fiscal and other), explains their relatively low

rates of adoption in HE. However, this thesis is going to argue that a substantial element of

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[73] R. Cummins, 'Measuring happiness and subjective well-being'. In S. David, I. Boniwell, and A. Conley Ayers (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Happiness* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 189-190.
[74] For instance, it is typical for interviews with people with disabilities or with people belonging to a minority group to end up suggesting that 'integration', 'discrimination', and 'rights' are key determinants of their happiness. However, this is not always necessarily the case (as explained in: Ibid., p. 190).

qualitative research is indispensable for a robust and effective HE, albeit on a different basis as we shall argue in Chapter 4.

Finally, physiological (or objective) measures of happiness consist largely of brain scans (e.g. EEGs) and the simple observation of facial and bodily expressions. The assumed strength of such approaches is that the observer need not interpret her observations as these speak for themselves in a non-subjective fashion. But, while data collection may, indeed, be fairly uncontroversial and with strong reliability, there exists a number of competing theories as to the precise interpretation of these physiological measures. Since they do not measure happiness directly, the element of data interpretation (the translation of observations into happiness metrics) is of the essence and raises questions of construct validity; it is not clear whether what is being measured amounts concretely to happiness, even though there might, indeed, exist some correlation between the observed variables (for example, increased activity in specific parts of the brain and more smiles, respectively) with SWB or with its 'objective' determinants. Yet, in the latter case, causation cannot be simply assumed based on that alone. And, as is the case with other approaches, controlling for the large number of potentially relevant independent variables is not practicable. Further, the claim that what is being observed is the same happiness as that of the 'well-being in life' sense that is most commonly targeted by HE is problematic in that these observations relate, quite evidently, to momentary euphoric responses.[75] Indeed, even if a problem-free aggregation of a significant series of momentary affects were possible that would arguably not be tantamount to happiness in the well-being sense that is relevant for HE.[76] A final, and especially troubling

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[75] Indeed, reviews of the literature clearly suggest that physiological approaches only address the hedonic aspects of happiness and are, therefore, destined to fail to capture happiness as well-being which is most relevant for HE. See: R. Crespo, *Economics and Other Disciplines: Assessing New Economic Currents* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2017), ch. 6.

[76] Importantly, cognitivist and SWB-based approaches are not the only that refer to a completely different notion of happiness but so are most affective theories, even if their understanding of happiness is theoretically somewhat closer to that ephemeral sense. Emotional state theorists, for instance, go to great lengths to differentiate their position from hedonism and the understanding of happiness as a unidimensional response to 'positive' stimuli.

conceptual issue is the tendency of a part of physiological research to treat depression, a completely distinct phenomenon (typically understood as a mental disorder in the life sciences), as the mere lack of happiness.[77]

Moreover, considering that smiles or even -to a degree- excitement (that is monitored with the EEGs) are, in large part, culturally determined, no grand theory of happiness can be derived from this method alone nor can we extrapolate meaningful conclusions through comparisons of such data, since different measurements with different subjects inevitably cut across a variety of personality and cultural traits. Furthermore, due to their peculiar nature, such studies are particularly vulnerable to the bias and distortion of so-called observer effects (such as the Hawthorne effect and similar) given that the subjects can hardly 'forget' that they are being observed (or monitored) and thus operate as they would otherwise do. Additionally, it is very rare for such studies to have notable sample sizes given their prohibitive costs and the reluctance of adequate representative volunteers to be monitored for extensive periods. Finally, our scientific understanding of the brain and the related technical capacities are not always as advanced as is assumed. Indeed, Grinde underlines that 'our knowledge in neurobiology is not yet at the level where we can accurately delegate happiness to particular brain structures' so as to establish one-to-one relationships between findings in brain scans and happiness.[78] In summary, while objectives measurements can provide useful, if limited, insights in a less controversial fashion, they are not in fact measurements of the kind of happiness that is most relevant to HE. That said, and if the challenges discussed here are addressed effectively in the future, these methodologies

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[77] Lewis cites several studies that use physiological markers that treat happiness and depression as being part of a family of positive and negative emotions (or dimensions of emotions), respectively, wherein the one is the polar opposite of the other. See: B. Lewis, *Happiness: The Real Medicine and How It Works* (Honesdale, US: Himalayan Institute Press, 2005), esp. ch. 7. This, in essence, suggests that there is a linear spectrum of unhappiness-happiness which, while perhaps being fairly intuitive, as we shall see later (in 3.1.2), is, instead, arbitrary and, therefore, fairly problematic.
[78] B. Grinde, *The Biology of Happiness* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2012), p. 14.

can and should play a role in the integrated approach to HE that this project advocates but we shall return to that in Chapter 4.

2.1.2 Cognitive (or comparison) theories of happiness

This first category comprises approaches that hold that happiness levels are always essentially determined by the outcome of an ever-ongoing internal comparison of the subject's situation with some standards of 'the good life'. Happiness is then a matter of the individual's cognition of how successfully she meets these standards. Such lines of inquiry originate usually from the discipline of psychology (and more specifically from 'social psychology') but are not exclusive to it. Naturally, there exists a breadth of such approaches with a considerable diversity, even when these are largely launched from the same disciplinary springboard. Such differences pertain particularly to the following two accounts. Firstly, on how conscious that comparison is assumed to be, and, secondly, on what these standards are and how they are formed. Broadly, however, they are all in agreement in claiming that these standards are mainly dependent upon the subject's environment: determined, for instance, by the average income (or average wealth, and similar) of her peers or of their equivalents for the regional/national level but also from collectively held beliefs with regard to what conditions equate to 'the good life'. The only noteworthy exception is found in so-called 'lifetime comparison' approaches which assert, by contrast, that the most important comparison that one makes is that between her past and present circumstances. In any case, approaches falling under this category hold that these standards do not ultimately refer to necessary or objective conditions for happiness but are, instead, highly relative.

The implication is that, for this approach, HE-scholarship cannot derive conclusions about specific determinants of happiness that would be universally applicable. Thus, a lowering of income or, more generally, of living standards need not translate into lower levels of happiness if it affects everyone almost equally. Furthermore, such thinking is a priori almost incompatible with the idea of bringing about higher levels of happiness for a greater number of people (which is the goal of most HE scholarship) as people's standards will always adjust to the 'optimised' situation over time. In theory, scholars could attempt to arrive at optimal distributions of certain life conditions but the practical difficulties of such a task are apparent and the benefits would be questionable; it, therefore, comes as no surprise that there have been no such attempts.[79] Indeed, rather than taking that path, scholars have often embraced the ostensible paradox by predicting a tendency for happiness to vary around the neutral level. Easterlin, for instance, who ultimately subscribed to social comparison theory, created a model whereby absolute conditions (material, in his case) matter only minimally and what actually matters, instead, is each subject's standing vis-à-vis her peers.[80] Unger, arguing from similar premises, concluded that average happiness will always remain nearly static and close to neutrality levels.[81] These, and similar counterintuitive conclusions that contradict hitherto assumptions about happiness, while not necessarily wrong (in the sense that they do not present logical fallacies), render HE incapable of producing any positive recommendations (policy or otherwise), except perhaps for various reiterations of the approaches' main thesis in different contexts. We shall now proceed to consider and assess the grounds upon which comparison theories foreclose the possibility of any substantive positive HE conclusions.

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[79] The exploration of the impact of inequality on happiness is a notable exception, however, it is not always carried out within a cognitivist framework and it is rarely trouble-free anyway, as we shall see in: 2.1.4 & 4.3.2.

[80] First appeared in: R. Easterlin, 'Does Economic Growth Improve the Human Lot? Some Empirical Evidence', op. cit.

[81] H. E. Unger, 'The feeling of happiness', *Psychology*, Vol. 7, 1970, pp. 27-33.

Employed methodologies typically consist of two basic stages: subjects are first asked to evaluate their happiness levels and, subsequently, researchers attempt to assess the subjects' level of contentment. The latter is carried out either by measuring and registering known indicators of contentment and/or by an attempt to establish the fulfilment of real or inferred standards where possible. Next, the cross-tabulation of the collected data allegedly presents robust correlations between happiness and success in meeting one's standards, regardless of the variations between what specific standards are actually set by each subject which, in theory, proves the approaches' main point. The aforementioned 'lifetime comparison' approaches, similarly, typically make use of follow-up studies to illustrate that standard-formation is immediately dependent upon previous life events and circumstances, while social comparison theories choose to focus on parameters that each deems relevant. The list cannot be exhaustive (for practical reasons, given the immense width of proposed causal factors) but the ones most commonly used look at the impact of average income, average wealth (usually inferred by savings and various illiquid possessions), and even of non-financial factors, such as health, upon standard formation.[82] Commonly, a variety of factors are examined at the same time as in Michalos's sophisticated 'Multiple Discrepancies Theories'.[83] Once the standard-formation process has been presumably explicated, comparison theorists move on to argue that the gap between whatever these standards are for each subject and what this subject perceives herself as having achieved explains her reported level of happiness.

While a considerable amount of empirical evidence appears to support the broader thesis of comparison theorists, the proposed causality is far from being firmly established. So, for

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[82] Research has shown, for instance, that the mere presence of a handicapped person during an interview resulted in higher levels of reported happiness. More in: F. Strack, N. Schwarz, B. Chassein, D. Kern, and D. Wagner, 'The salience of comparison standards and the activation of social norms: Consequences for judgements of happiness and their communication', *British Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 29, 1990, pp. 303-314.

[83] A. Michalos, 'Multiple Discrepancies Theory (MDT)', *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 16, Issue 4, May 1985, pp. 347-413.

instance, Wills presented extensive evidence that suggests that favourable (or downward) comparisons increase reported happiness, though people are normally more prone to make upward ones.[84] Gardner and Oswald seemingly confirmed the main hypothesis of lifetime-comparison theorists when, through the use of follow-ups with subjects who had experienced a substantial but one-off economic gain, they showed that the subjects' standards adjusted fairly quickly.[85] Further, Hagerty, surveying two large-sample studies focusing on income, concluded that their findings provide ample support for social comparison theory.[86] However, detractors of this approach point to other empirical studies that paint a picture that directly contradicts comparativism. For instance, Headey et al. suggested that the oft-cited correlation between happiness and contentment (or the sense of fulfilling ones standards) has the opposite causality than the one supported by comparison theorists.[87] More specifically, they found that happiness determined comparisons and, in particular, the subject's estimations apropos of the distance between reality and standards. Further, Diener and Fujita have carried out a series of studies that again disprove the main thesis of cognitive theories by showing, for example, how the effect of income on happiness was left unaffected by the average income of the subjects' geographical environment.[88] The two concluded that while comparisons are central to one's assessment of one's own situation, they have different effects upon different individuals: some people are motivated by an upward comparison, others are devastated by them. Ultimately, for the two scholars, comparison must be seen as a coping strategy. As such, its effects upon different individuals cannot be systematised in any meaningful (for HE) way; they are contingent upon a myriad of contextual parameters.

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[84] T. Wills, 'Downward comparison principles in social psychology', *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 90, Issue 2, Sep 1981, pp. 245-271.

[85] J. Gardner, and A. Oswald, 'Money and mental wellbeing: a longitudinal study of medium-sized lottery wins.', *Journal of Health Economics*, Vol. 26, Issue 1, Jan. 2007, pp. 49-60.

[86] M. Hagerty, 'Social comparisons of income in one's community: Evidence from national surveys of income and happiness', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 78, Issue 4, Apr 2000, pp. 764-771.

[87] They did so in the context of a follow-up study focusing on satisfaction with the subject's standard of living and their job status: B. Headey, R. Veenhoven, and A. Wearing, 'Top-down versus bottom-up: theories of subjective well-being', *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 24, 1991, pp. 81-100.

[88] E. Diener, and F. Fujita, 'Social comparisons and subjective well-being'. In B. Buunk, and R. Gibbons (eds.), *Health, coping, and well-being: Perspectives from social comparison theory* (Mahwah, US: Erlbaum, 1997), ch. 11.

Besides, as Headey et al. claim,[89] causality in the happiness-comparison nexus is often found to run oppositely of what cognitivists assume, something that further undermines their extrapolations.[90] Moreover, in the domain of health, Wright found that while the subject's self-rated health condition has a clear impact upon happiness, this did not show any signs of correlation with the variable pertaining to whether the comparisons were upward or downward.[91] Finally, as Veenhoven notes, a finding that rather invalidates life-time comparison theories is the fact that people tend to generally be steadily happy (to report a rating higher than five in a scale of one to ten, although naturally with some variations within these bounds) while, as explained, the premises of some cognitivist theories predict that the average must be about neutral or even below that (especially for variants that emphasise the importance of upward comparisons).[92]

Nevertheless, even if one sets the conflicting evidence aside for a moment, there is an assortment of theoretical difficulties that also problematise the cognitivist approach. Firstly, the problems of defining and measuring happiness, which were explored in the previous subsection and affect almost all approaches, are of particular relevance here for proponents of this perspective base their assertions on little else than data gathered through the use of happiness self-assessment surveys. The pertinence of these problems is made more palpable in cases such as the one discussed earlier wherein healthy interviewees appeared to report being happier when they were in the presence of disabled fellow-interviewees. Can this measurement of happiness be taken to be at all indicative of, or at least meaningful in relation to, the broader context of each subject's life? It is clear that the timeframe and specificities of this observation are such that it has very limited, if any, generalisability value,

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[89] B. Heady, R. Veenhoven, and A. Wearing, op. cit.
[90] Also see: R. Lucas, and E. Diener, 'Subjective Well-being'. In M. Lewis, J. Haviland-Jones, L. Feldman Barrett, *Handbook of Emotions*, 3rd ed. (New York, US: Guilford Press, 2008), ch. 29.
[91] S. Wright, 'Health satisfaction: A detailed test of the multiple discrepancies theory model', *Social Indicators Research*, October 1985, Vol. 17, Issue 3, pp. 299-313.
[92] R. Veenhoven, 'How do we assess how happy we are? Tenets, implications and tenability of three theories', op. cit., p. 58.

at least as far as notions of happiness in life are concerned (most relevant for HE). This troubling dimension is further corroborated by papers such as those of Maennig, Steenbeck, and Wilhelm,[93] and Kavetsos, Dimitriadou, and Dolan,[94] which both establish the unambiguous existence of calendar effects on self-reported happiness. Additionally, the latter paper also demonstrates that the mere presence of others generally tends to reduce SWB which also contradicts the key postulate of comparison theory (namely that only upward comparisons have a negative affect).

Secondly, the claim that underlies cognitivism, to wit, the idea that happiness is the outcome of cognition, while reasonably plausible, cannot be taken to offer a complete and absolute explanation of the phenomenon. In fact, there are concrete reasons to doubt that cognition is happiness' exclusive source. While for a majority of comparison theorists the standard-setting process and the estimation of the gap between standards and reality is not always carried out consciously or wittingly, it still presumes the existence of a somewhat sophisticated cognitive mechanism. By induction, however, one would have to claim that categories of people like toddlers, who, arguably, lack the capacity to set detailed standards for themselves, to track how their equivalent peers are doing, and to calculate upon that basis how happy they should feel, are incapable of feeling happiness or to experience any differentials in their sense of well-being for that matter. It does not only sound counterintuitive but it is also at odds with the fact that happiness processing faculties and the corresponding biochemical processes are already developed and working at this developmental stage.[95] [96] Following an analogous line of argument, the same could also be

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[93] W. Maennig, M. Steenbeck, and M. Wilhelm, 'Rhythms and cycles in happiness', *Applied Economics*, Volume 46, Issue 1, 2014, pp. 70-78.

[94] G. Kavetsos, M. Dimitriadou, and P. Dolan, 'Measuring happiness: context matters', *Applied Economic Letters*, Vol. 21, No. 5, 2014, pp. 308-311.

[95] C. Saarni, J. Campos, L. Camras, and D. Witherington, 'Emotional Development: Action, Communication, and Understanding'. In N. Eisenberg (ed.), *Handbook of Child Psychology, Vol. 3*, 6th ed. (Hoboken, US: Wiley, 2006), ch. 5.

[96] Indeed, plenty of papers focus on aspects of toddler's happiness. See, for instance: L. Aknin, J. Hamlin, and E. Dunn, 'Giving Leads to Happiness in Young Children', *PLoS One*, Vol. 7, Issue 6, 2012. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0039211 [Last accessed: 2 October 2016]

said of individuals suffering, for instance, from severe dementia. Nevertheless, empirical evidence does not seem to lend support to it: dementia clearly does not preclude its sufferers from experiencing happiness construed as well-being.[97] [98] At a minimum, thus, there must co-exist other mechanisms (than the one maintained by cognitivists), too, that partake in regulating happiness and that may, under certain circumstances, even take supremacy.

Thirdly, the optimism that comparativists have in assuming that they can decode how people formulate standards and how prevalent they are in each domain of correlation (income, health, and similar) is largely unwarranted as they are not backed by either logic or evidence. And while the latter has been discussed previously,[99] the former becomes evident when one thinks of simple scenarios such as that of two people of the same social and economic standing that can (and often do) display different levels of contentment or aspiration, contrary to what cognitivist HE would have anticipated. The one-size-fits-all approach adopted, does not allow for diversity in subjects: they are assumed to respond similarly (at least on average) to variables in their environments and, thus, to also shape standards in a uniform manner. In turn, they are also expected to have similar responses to the various degrees of fulfilment of those standards. While the need for some practical concessions is understandable, when the grounds of the generalisation are so shaky, the distortion that they are bound to cause is so large that the value of the overall project should be called into question. Finally, the inference that real conditions do not matter is logically precarious: if taken to the extreme, for example, a hypothetical of a theoretical hell and that of a theoretical

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[97] R. Ready, and B. Ott, 'Quality of Life Measures for Dementia', *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*, Vol. 1, Issue 11, 2003. Available at: http://www.biomedcentral.com/content/pdf/1477-7525-1-11.pdf [Last accessed: 2 September 2016]
[98] For a detailed review of assessments of SWB in people with dementia also: M. Wingyun, 'Beyond the Observable: Examining Self-Reported Well-Being in People with Dementia', *All Theses and Dissertations (ETDs)*, Paper 224, 2009. Available at: http://openscholarship.wustl.edu/etd/224 [Last accessed: 5 September 2016].
[99] We saw, for example, how causality is inverted (from what comparison theories expect) in some cases and also that, as Argyle remarked, people generally 'choose their own targets for comparison' and a trend that can be identified in one domain may not be at all applicable to other ones. In: M. Argyle, *The Psychology of Happiness*, 2nd ed. (Hove, UK: Routledge, 2001), pp. 46-48.

paradise will be expected to have no effect whatsoever on people's happiness (except maybe in the short-term), as their standards would quickly adjust to the new reality that is similar for all (lifetime-comparison theory is evidently exempt from this criticism). Countless other thought experiments based on the aforementioned inference can lead to similarly absurd conclusions posing, thus, logical challenges on top of the methodological and empirical ones explored above.

All things considered, cognitivist approaches are far from being able to provide definitive and conclusive answers to the main questions that HE seeks to answer. To be sure, as illustrated, there may be some merit in their two main claims. Namely, on the one the hand, that the assessment of how far we are from achieving our standards has an effect upon happiness and, on the other, that these standards generally fluctuate according to changes in the subject's environment. However, the task of translating these tendencies into formal relationships or, at least, into broadly defined laws is much more elusive than most of the supporters of this approach are willing to admit. The widely-adopted fixed and narrow conceptions of the subject lead to the one-size-fits-all conclusions that were found lacking. Empirical support is not always strong, as we have seen, and even when seemingly supportive of the main thesis of the approach, its theoretical underpinnings are replete with misconceptions about either happiness (consider, for instance, the confusion of momentary joy with happiness recounted earlier in this subsection) or human nature to extents that jeopardise the validity of each given project. Consequently, such generalisations are hardly ever trouble-free. This is not to say that comparison theory cannot provide any useful insights. As stated, its two key postulates have some undeniable validity and in certain domains this perspective may have high explanatory value. Where it lacks, though, is in the certainty, the precision, and the universality of its claims and, thus, its undertaking of the role of a grand narrative of happiness is problematic and a source for potential problems that will be explored in the next section of this chapter. An alternative way of thinking about the

undisputed (by this project and a majority of HE scholars) fact of the adaptation of happiness is offered by the group of thought that we will examine next: adaptation level theory.

2.1.3 Adaptation level (or set-point) theories of happiness

Approaches falling under this category maintain that -barring ephemeral divergences- individuals' happiness will oscillate closely around a largely predetermined level, regardless of actual life circumstances. Proposed reasons for this claim vary among different scholars: some hypothesise a homeostatic mechanism of happiness that developed for evolutionary purposes, others claim that happiness is dependent mainly upon genetically-determined factors, and others that happiness is determined purely by personality traits (mostly of a genetic origin but environmentally-determined ones, too, albeit usually finalised at the early stages of life). Given that from this outlook the scope for HE to effect meaningful change is fairly narrow (and certainly narrower than that of the already problematic in that respect cognitivist approaches), it is perhaps surprising that these theories dominated the field for the best part of the last 40 years. With the phrase 'we are all on a hedonic treadmill' being a good layman's summary of this family of theories, as Headey notes,[100] the implication is that we can do very little to increase happiness for a greater number and, at best, we can only marginally increase the base-level of individuals with counselling and potentially even genetic engineering. More importantly, there appears to be little value in trying to increase happiness for another reason, according to the premises of this approach. Namely, such

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[100] B. Headey, 'Set-Point theory may now need replacing: death of a paradigm?'. In S. David, I. Boniwell, and A. Conley Ayers (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Happiness* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013).

efforts do not have any positive synergies for happiness is seen as merely an attribute like any other, the thriving of the individual is ultimately unrelated to it.[101]

The methodologies that are employed to substantiate this approach are rather predictable and fairly cognate: by measuring happiness through follow-up questionnaires, adaptationists seek to establish the main thesis of this perspective, namely that happiness is relatively static (for each individual) in the long-term. Some contradictory and inconsistent empirical evidence that has appeared throughout the years has led to several minor updates and tweaks of the theory but, to the extent that an approach remains within this family of approaches, its goal is always, ultimately, to prove that happiness adapts over time (for one of the various aforementioned reasons) with only some provisions for exceptions on certain domains. Because studies within this group are carried out in a largely incremental fashion, unlike the more sporadic nature of comparison theory scholarship, we shall trace its development by looking at the various chronological steps of its evolution through trial and error (although it was not always as neat and unambiguous as the phrase implies) and, accordingly, assess its soundness and legitimacy.

It was towards the late 1960s and early 1970s that the scholars, mainly from the discipline of psychology, first articulated the adaptationist thesis of happiness, taking up the thread from developments in the broader adaptationist movement elsewhere in psychology that had come to prominence a bit earlier.[102] It is important to note that at that point, there was no other scientific discussion of happiness going on (in effect, adaptationist theories preceded the other two families of approaches) and, thus, what the first scholars sought to challenge

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[101] Veenhoven eloquently likens the importance that adaptationists place on happiness (in their view of it as an attribute) with that one would reasonably attach to the matter of whether one likes chocolate or not: it is 'fine if you do but no real problem if you don't'. In R. Veenhoven, 'How do we assess how happy we are? Tenets, implications and tenability of three theories', op. cit., p. 53.
[102] More specifically in the mid-1960s with the publication of: H. Helson, 'Current trends and issues in adaptation-level theory', *American Psychologist*, Vol. 19, Issue 1, 1964, pp. 26-38.

was not preceding scholarly work but, rather, commonsensical and intuitive views about happiness. Chiefly, the idea that 'more is generally better' (when it comes to friends, holdings, income, and so on) for happiness or, more broadly, the idea that life circumstances can (and usually do) effect permanent changes to happiness. Campbell and Brickman, for instance, took issue with the latter idea and attempted to show that even major life events do not have a permanent effect on self-reported levels of happiness as individuals reverted to their baseline levels after a period of time (typically expected to be relatively short).[103] Indeed, that and subsequent papers illustrated that winning the lottery or the misfortune of having a grave health impediment were not exempt from the rule.[104] No matter the importance of life events, then, individuals always adapt to their new circumstances and their reported happiness ultimately returns to the base level.

Having established this tendency, later research focused on attempting both to account for why the base-level of each individual is different and, by extension, for how it is determined. Costa and McCrae pioneered a theory which held that it is the personality of an individual that regulates the base-level of happiness.[105] According to them, it is a host of -more or less fixed- personality traits that explain differences in happiness baselines. Therefore, for instance, their research looked for correlations of extroverted and 'neurotic' traits with base levels and arrived at an assortment of conclusions. Most notably, they found that the base-level of happiness for extraverts -ceteris paribus- was higher than that of more introverted individuals and, similarly, that 'neurotic' individuals had a lower baseline. Later studies adopted the same framework and utilised a similar categorisation of what were seen as critical traits, a practice that, however, raises plausible questions concerning the finitude of

[103] P. Brickman, and D. Campbell, 'Hedonic relativism and planning the good society'. In M. Appley (ed.), *Adaptation level theory* (New York, US: Academic Press, 1971), pp. 287-302.
[104] Two key studies of these phenomena can be found in: A. Campbell, P. Converse, and W. Rodgers, *The Quality of American Life* (New York, US: Sage, 1976) and in: P. Brickman, D. Coates, and R. Janoff-Bulmann, 'Lottery winners and accident victims: is happiness relative?', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 36, 1978, pp. 917-927.
[105] P. Costa, and R. McCrae, 'Influences of extraversion and neuroticism on subjective well-being', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 38, 1980, pp. 668-678.

their enquiry, if not about the arbitrariness of the selection of the traits in question. The late 1980s saw the emergence of hybrid theories that, seeking to remedy challenges on the aforementioned grounds, sought to establish a connection between the abovementioned traits and life events: the selection of these categories was justified, their argument went, for it appeared that personality traits could predict life events. Magnus et al. and Heady & Wearing, among others, showed that non-neurotic extroverts experienced significantly more positive life events.[106] [107] What is more, the latter developed a 'dynamic-equilibrium theory' that argued that these happiness-predicting traits help their bearers magnify the importance of these positive life events, whereas negative life events were shown to have a greater impact upon introverted and 'neurotic' individuals.

Taking the personality adaptationist theory to the macro level, Inglehart argued that since personality traits determine happiness and since different cultures have distinct concentrations of traits, it is, ultimately, the culture one is born in that determines one's base-level of happiness and there can only be negligible variations around it or, at most, statistically insignificant outliers that should be dealt as exceptions.[108] Further, publication and/or granting of access to significant happiness-related datasets in recent years has spurred a comeback of theories that make such broad claims; theories reminiscent of the early era of this approach. Thus, Cummins et al.,[109] after noting that the majority of people globally report happiness levels in the upper half of the scale (of 1 to 10), arrived at the conclusion that humans are equipped by what they termed a 'homeostatic maintenance mechanism of happiness' akin to the mechanism regulating our body temperature that

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[106] K. Magnus, E. Diener, F. Fujita, and W. Pavot, 'Extraversion and neuroticism as predictors of objective life events: A longitudinal analysis', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 65, 1993, pp. 1046-1053.
[107] B. Heady, and A. Wearing, *Understanding happiness: A theory of subjective well-being* (Melbourne, Australia: Longman Cheshire, 1992).
[108] R. Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton, US: Princeton University Press, 1990).
[109] B. Cummins, E. Gullone, and L. Lau, 'A model of subjective well-being homeostasis: the role of personality'. In E. Gullone, and R. Cummins (eds.), *The Universality of Subjective Well-being Indicators* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer, 2002), pp. 7-46.

ensures that our happiness is always kept between the levels of 7 and 8. Lykken,[110] who coined the name 'set-point theory', reinforced by a large-n study of twins in Minnesota, revised his initial claims about the extent to which genetics determine happiness from about 50% in his earlier publications to close to 100% in his 2000 book. This reflected a broader renewal of optimism around the turn of the century about blanket theories of adaptation. But how justified was it? We shall assess this next with an overview of critical literature.

While each of the above studies was -or claims to have been- built upon robust empirical evidence, the overall picture is not as unequivocal as it might at first appear. Ehrhardt et al.,[111] for instance, estimate that in the course of a lifetime less than 30% of the starting rank order (of a representative cohort) in happiness will remain as it was originally. Several other longitudinal studies and follow-ups cast further doubts upon claims of alleged immobility in self-reported happiness. Lucas attributes evidence to the contrary (originally used by proponents of the theory) to a flawed selection of statistical models and argues that 'although life satisfaction is moderately stable over long periods of time, there is also an appreciable degree of instability that might depend on contextual circumstances'.[112] Likewise, it was shown that certain major life events (both 'positive' and 'negative') can and, in fact, often do effect permanent changes in happiness, contrary to what one would expect following the adaptationist theory. For instance, Lucas et al. illustrated that some married individuals become and remain happier in the long-term.[113] Furthermore, Diener, Lucas & Scollon showed that the adjustment of people to external shocks is not always complete and,[114] more

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[110] D. Lykken, *Happiness: The nature and nurture of joy and contentment* (New York, US: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

[111] J. Ehrhardt, W. Saris, and R. Veenhoven, 'Stability of life-satisfaction over time: analysis of change in ranks in a national population', *Journal of Happiness Studies*, Vol. 1, 2000, pp. 177-205.

[112] R. Lucas, 'How Stable is Happiness? Using the STARTS Model to Estimate the Stability of Life Satisfaction', *Journal of Research in Personality*, Vol. 41, Issue 5, 2007, pp. 1091-1098.

[113] R. Lucas, A. Clark, Y. Georgellis, and E. Diener, 'Re-examining adaptation and the set point model of happiness: Reactions to change in marital status', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 84, 2003, pp. 527-539.

[114] E. Diener, R. Lucas, and C. Scollon, 'Beyond the hedonic treadmill: revising the adaptation theory of wellbeing', *American Psychologist*, Vol. 61, 2006, pp. 305-314.

recently, Clark et al. found that long-term unemployment has a clear impact on the base-levels of happiness.[115] Further, the cultural adaptationist theory was problematised by Veenhoven and Hagerty who found that happiness fluctuates within and among nations and has, for example, risen across most nations during the last three decades.[116] Finally, homeostatic adaptationism was shown to be overly West-centric as it generalised mostly from the broadly comparable (although far from homogenous) situation across Western nations, while disregarding evidence from troubled and/or developing countries. More specifically, Veenhoven points to the examples of Tanzania which has an average happiness that drops well below the middle of the scale (3.1, on a scale of 10) and of Russia during the Ruble crisis in the late 1990s which dipped from an average ranking of 5.1 to 4.1.[117]

Most theorists of this perspective concede the validity of some (or even of a majority) of the above and similar empirical evidence that poses challenges to the dogmas of adaptationism but do not necessarily abandon the coordinates of their camp. Instead, they deem those to be exceptions to the general premises of their theory and seek to identify other potential exceptions and/or to evaluate published work that seemingly contradicts the camp's tenets (as evidenced, for instance, in the abovementioned case of Clark et al.). Indeed, even if not explicitly, scholars from this camp understand the pinning down of an as exhaustive list as possible of the exceptions of the adaptationist norm (as they perceive it) as the contemporary adaptationist's main duty. Others, instead, call for a major revision of the approach. Headey, for instance, calls for a new adaptationist paradigm by pointing to evidence that paints a much more complex picture than the one initially assumed.[118] Preferences in multiple categories such as these relating to life goals, outlooks towards community and other social

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[115] A. Clark, E. Diener, Y. Georgellis, and R. Lucas, 'Lags and leads in life satisfaction: A test of the baseline hypothesis', *Economic Journal*, Vol. 118, 2008, pp. 222-243.
[116] R. Veenhoven, and M. Hagerty, 'Rising happiness in nations, 1946-2004. A reply to Easterlin', *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 77, 2006, pp. 1-16.
[117] R. Veenhoven, 'How do we assess how happy we are? Tenets, implications and tenability of three theories', op. cit., p. 54.
[118] B. Headey, 'Set-Point theory may now need replacing: death of a paradigm?', op. cit.

activity, and religious views have a permanent effect on happiness and it appears that certain individuals (the ones who rate high on extraversion and/or 'neuroticism') are more open to changes in happiness than others. A minority of other scholars concedes that adaptationism can only explain part of the picture and that other approaches (such as needs-based theories) should also be taken into account.[119] While the adaptationist project is clearly at a crossroad, and arguably very few actually continue to share the afore-described optimism of Lykke, it is, at large, a very much alive project and its key tenets still garner considerable scholarly backing. Yet, even though the evidence presented above warrants some support for this viewpoint, this cannot, certainly, be either unlimited or unqualified.

Indeed, for example, it is clear that there is at least some validity in claiming that happiness adjusts towards a base-level over time and that different individuals have different base-levels. Evidence related to this simple and broad claim, as demonstrated, is overwhelming. Nevertheless, as was shown, the assumptions about the details of the functioning of this mechanism are questionable. Thus, it is not surprising that the wealth of empirical evidence collected in support or in critique of this approach leaves it -at best- only with just a few sporadic and partially substantiated sub-hypotheses. Adjustment, for instance, has been shown to be far from complete in a variety of scenarios. Further, base-level points appear to be far less static, at least for some, than the adaptationists assume. Strong statements such as the assertion that happiness is exclusively determined by genetic factors or those implied by the cultural homeostatic approach are no longer regarded as convincing accounts even by a majority of adaptationist scholars. They were proven to be grounded on shaky evidence (and in the case of the latter on an unwarranted West-centric focus) but weaker claims are not without problems, either. Enumerating possible exceptions to the adaptationist rule is a

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[119] Examples of such voices can be found, for instance, in the later Diener. See, for instance: E. Diener, R. Lucas, and C. Scollon, 'Beyond the hedonic treadmill: revising the adaptation theory of wellbeing', op. cit. and: A. Jebb, L. Tay, E. Diener, and S. Oishi, 'Happiness, income satiation and turning points around the world', *Nature: Human Behaviour*, Vol. 2, January 2018, pp. 33-38.

fragmented and largely arbitrary process that is, in any case, very far from being conclusive at this point. In fact, it is reasonable to doubt whether all potential exceptions could ever be uncovered. And while the stronger approaches are evidently essentialist in that they expect humans to experience happiness and its effects in predictable and very uniform ways, essentialism creeps in, to some extent, in weaker approaches, too. Indeed, this is what explains why 'exceptions' are to be treated as 'exceptions' in the first place and not as natural variation among subjects and, additionally, why they are to be systematised: so as not to threaten the integrity and stability of those essentialist systems. Altogether, while there can clearly be potentially useful applications of this theory, HE should be cautious not to fall prey to the aforementioned totalising tendencies that this approach entails or even advances. On the whole, adaptationism -notwithstanding its potential usefulness- does not constitute a compelling or robust paradigm nor does it provide satisfactory responses to the main questions of HE. Its value can be realised only as part of an integrated approach to HE.

2.1.4: Needs-based theories of happiness

This category is the most diverse of the three. It comprises approaches that identify or have been labelled -other than with the name of this subsection- as "affect theories of happiness", "self-determination theory", and with a variety of other, less established, names. These emerged from both the more empirically-minded disciplines such as economics, political science, and psychology and more theoretical ones such as philosophy (most commonly in political and moral philosophy). To be sure, if our goal here was to provide a very detailed and exhaustive typology of approaches, we would definitely have to split this grouping into at least five or six more. However, as explained in the beginning of this chapter, our aim here is fundamentally different and is best served by this grouping. What then do all these ostensibly heterogeneous approaches have in common? The connective tissue that binds

them together is that they all, effectively, believe in a specific roadmap to happiness or, at the very least, in the feasibility of having one; for philosophical approaches this is drawn in an aprioristic and rather abstract manner whereas for the more empirical ones with a combination of assumptions of an analytical nature with corresponding empirical elements for the testing of hypotheses. For both poles, as well as for the majority of approaches that is situated between them, happiness is seen as apodictic of good choices and/or luck in life for either of two main reasons: either because the circumstances they brought us in lead to a fulfilling life that must be naturally happy or because we are wired to be rewarded with happiness for evolutionary advantageous choices we make and/or circumstances we find ourselves in. As a result, this group comprises more positive approaches to HE than the two previously explored ones in the sense that they regard happiness as resulting from the existence (or lack thereof) of certain preconditions and/or life conditions. As such, they understand HE as having the role of undertaking the scholarly speculation about the determinants (positive and negative alike) of happiness, whereas cognitivism and adaptationism seek, to a large extent, to account for our limited capacity to affect substantial long-term change and to explore ways of working through it. Next, we shall review the diverse ways by which the constituents of this group seek to carry out their projects.

Affect theory, in stark contrast to the postulates of cognitivism in HE, holds that happiness is not something we calculate consciously but, rather, something that we infer from how we feel: a subject considers herself happy for a period of time if she has positive feelings for the majority of the time in question.[120] Happiness from this perspective is an affect, not a product of cognition. As a result, the task of HE, for them, is to identify the conditions that bring about the desired affect. Needs-based approaches, predominant among psychologists, argue that primarily -if not exclusively- it is the satisfaction of needs that makes people

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[120] N. Schwarz, and F. Strack, 'Evaluating one's life: a judgment model of subjective well-being'. In F. Strack, M. Argyle, and N. Schwarz (eds.), *Subjective Well-being* (Oxford, UK: Pergamon, 1991), pp. 22-47.

happier. Thus, it follows that HE should formulate and test hypotheses by way of correlating potential needs and their satisfaction with happiness. However, as Veenhoven, a founding figure of affect theory, concedes, needs, unlike wants, cannot be measured directly and, thus, scholars have to resort to indirect means of testing the theory; in essence, they merely test the validity of its implications.[121] For instance, when Estes, reviewing empirical evidence from 'failed states', came to the -rather intuitive- conclusion that 'the attainment of personal or collective happiness is not possible for the vast majority of inhabitants of collapsed or collapsing societies', it was treated as evidence supporting the affect theory thesis: the apparent inability to fulfil basic needs resulted in widespread suppression of happiness levels.[122] Elsewhere, assuming that rising GDP per capita equates to the satisfaction of more needs, Veenhoven takes the rising levels of happiness in Western nations as further corroboration of the needs-based approach.[123] Moreover, there have been various efforts to correlate happiness and satisfaction of specific perceived needs (for instance, acquisition of certain education levels, provision of healthcare, or fiscal ones such as absolute income and total wealth) but the speculative nature of such projects,[124] as well as the ambiguity of the empirical evidence they produced, render their substantiation (and, as a consequence, their overall status) precarious.[125] On a more fundamental level, and contra cognitivism, some

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[121] R. Veenhoven, 'Need Theory'. In A. Michalos (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2014), p. 4294.

[122] R. Estes, '"Failed" and "Failing" States: Is Quality of Life Possible?'. In K. Land, A. Michalos, and M. Sirgy (eds.), *Handbook of Social Indicators and Quality of Life Research,* op. cit., p. 577.

[123] R. Veenhoven, 'Is life getting better? How long and happily people live in modern society', *European Psychologist*, 10, 2005, pp. 330-343.

[124] For if, as most needs-based theorist concede, there are tens if not hundreds of different human needs any correlation can be spurious (due to either coincidence or, more likely, due to the presence of confounding/lurking variables) and need not imply causation. That is because it is practically impossible to explore other possible causative relationships so as to foreclose spurious association, given the potentially infinite number of human needs.

[125] For instance, the effect that education has on happiness is very disuniform and cannot be simply explained by the practical implications that 'good' education has in each reference area (for example, the impact appears stronger in Austria, South Korea, Mexico, Former Yugoslavia, the Philippines, and Nigeria; all countries with different levels of development and economies of various states ranging from crisis to strong growth. More in: M. Argyle, *The Psychology of Happiness*, op. cit. p. 46). Similarly, Diener and Suh (in E. Diener, and E. Suh, 'Measuring quality of life: Economic, social, and subjective indicators', *Social Indicators Research*, Vol.40, Issue 1, 1997, pp. 189-216) found that combinations of 'objectively' positive social indicators (incorporating, among others, indicators about life expectancy, income, and health) point to a happiness paradox as Austria and Nigeria scored very similarly in happiness (Austria was ahead by only 2 points), whereas Austria was 41 points ahead in the objective indicators index. Surely one would expect that Austrians satisfy a lot more of their needs

needs-based theorists point to findings in neurology, such as in Damasio's work, that seem to

establish that affects precede cognition and, thus, argue that happiness is primarily an affect

and should be studied as such.[126] However, this too is problematic since chronological

antecedence does not foreclose the possibility of an ex post determination of an emotional

state (by way of cognitive processes), especially given that in HE the 'ex post' does not refer

to an one-off event but to a cohort of situations and conditions, the evaluation of which is

definitely an incomparably lengthier process than the marginal chronological precedence (in

the order of magnitude of milliseconds) of affect over cognition.[127] In any case, even if the

above objections are ignored, there are a number of other contestations of such approaches.

Perhaps the most critical of which is to be found in self-attribution theory which holds that it

is bodily arousal combined with a cognitive state that induces emotions (such as happiness)

and that neither suffices alone.[128] From the preceding, it is clear that evidence used to justify

this perspective is at best circumstantial when not altogether flawed.

A somewhat similar but distinct approach to happiness is that implied by concepts and

assumptions of mainstream economics, most commonly found in Neo-Keynesian and

neoclassical economics, as well as in their amalgamation (the neoclassical synthesis). Its

roots can be traced to the subfield of welfare economics but it has since expanded to other

subfields of the discipline. The most important of these assumptions for HE is that of

rationality according to which individuals act to maximise their utility. Coupled with that is

the idea that consumption leads to a potentially unbounded increase in utility (in spite of the

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vis-à-vis the Nigerians but this is not reflected in their happiness as needs-based theorists would
anticipate.

[126] As expounded, for instance, in: A. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human
Brain* (New York, US: Avon, 1995).

[127] A post-structuralist perspective would be particularly pertinent here for the relation between affect
and cognition appears to be an undecidable that exceeds and goes beyond the controversy in
neuroscience, to the extent that emotions become meaningful via language but language cannot
exhaustively represent them; there always remains a residue of meaning.

[128] K. Heilman, and D. Bowers, 'Neuropsychological studies of emotional changes induced by right and
left hemisphere lesions'. In N. Stein, B. Leventhal, and T. Trabasso (eds.), *Psychological and
Biological Approaches to Emotion* (Hillsdale, US: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1990), pp. 109-110.

acknowledgement of the diminishing marginal utility of specific goods/services) and the cognate assumption of revealed preference theory: preferences of individuals are, in effect, revealed by their habits; one need not look elsewhere.[129] Quite evidently, the adoption of these tools in the context of HE cause its scope to shrink and renders its import questionable. For if individuals are axiomatically presumed to be acting rationally to maximise their utility, then, even for those who -justifiably- make a distinction between utility and happiness, it follows that the same should apply to happiness, too. Not least because, even if not identical, the two have a strong relationship but, additionally, provided that we axiomatically accept the above-outlined mechanics of utility there is little reason to assume that those of happiness will be fundamentally different. Consequently, one could even go as far as to claim that instead of worrying about maximising happiness (many economists are, after all, suspicious of self-reporting and particularly of SWB),[130] it should suffice to provide the conditions for a maximisation of the GDP or individuals' disposable income since that would entail the satisfaction of more of one's preferences. In other words, mainstream economics' postulates, in effect, entail that HE is almost redundant as its aims largely overlap with those of economics. In many ways, then, they end up implicitly promoting a call for a return to the pre-HE commonsensical views summarised in the oversimplifying logic of 'more is better ' or, at best, to the utility functions of welfare economics. Of course, not all economists subscribe to these axioms when addressing HE-related issues, and even when they do not take issue with either the apparent circularity of employing the hypothesis of rationality or the hypothesis of revealed preference in order to come to happiness conclusions, they increasingly call for a shift in focus towards other directions.[131]

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[129] In fact, this is to be preferred for another reason: many economists are largely sceptical of self-reported cardinal happiness. For a discussion of a phenomenon and its background, see: N. Powdthavee, *The Happiness Equation: The Surprising Economics of Our Most Valuable Asset* (London, UK: Icon, 2010), ch. 2.

[130] Ibid. Also, Manski surveys this scepticism in: C. Manski, 'Economics Analysis of Social Interactions', *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2000, pp. 115-136.

[131] As Krueger argues, even the fact that economists publish a lot more pure HE papers than a couple of decades ago, recognising, thus, the autonomy of happiness from utility is telling. See: A. Krueger, 'Introduction and Overview'. In A. Krueger (ed.), *Measuring the Subjective Well-Being of Nations: National Accounts of Time Use and Well-Being* (Chicago, US: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

More specifically, Frey and Stutzer, reviewed the reasons that some economists who engage with HE topics have moved away from the abovementioned models that assume rationality, and identified three fairly plausible causes.[132] Firstly, the abandonment of cardinal utility in favour of ordinal alternatives, secondly, the acknowledgment by many economists that individual preferences (even when discussed in an ordinal way) are not to be equated with individual happiness as the two have been patently shown to differ (for instance, by the observation that the satisfaction of a want does not guarantee gains in happiness), and, thirdly, the further undermining of rationality by recent developments in psychology, neuroscience, and behavioural economics which unveils and stresses the importance of contextual influences, of cognitive biases (over-optimism, the endowment effect, loss aversion due to asymmetrical valuation of gains and losses of the same magnitude, and other), and the inability of individuals to accurately predict their future tastes. Furthermore, the popularisation of Easterlin's (an economist himself) formulation of his paradox,[133] according to which happiness appears not to be rising indefinitely with income, has further stimulated interest within the discipline with one direction of scholarship being that of trying to prove or disprove the paradox and with the other being one that approves it (sometimes with some qualifications or with conceding some limitations) and seeks to account for it.[134] Efforts of the latter camp generally tend to result in schemata resonating with either adaptation theory or comparison theory (most notably by way of examining the correlations

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[132] B. Frey, and A. Stutzer, *Happiness & Economics: How the Economy and Institutions Affect Well-being* (Princeton, US: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 19-23.

[133] First appeared in: R. Easterlin, 'Does Economic Growth Improve the Human Lot? Some Empirical Evidence', op. cit., but has been refined and presented elsewhere several times since.

[134] It remains at large an open question to this day as, as argued by Scott (In: K. Scott, *Measuring Wellbeing: Towards Sustainability?* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2012), pp. 27-28.), defenders and detractors alike pick and choose the evidence that fits their argument best but, at large, there is a considerable consensus around the claim that after a threshold the significance of the relationship between income and happiness declines.

of inequality and/or relative income and happiness)[135] or a hybrid with elements of both, the limitations of which, however, have been discussed earlier in the relevant subsections.[136]

Finally, there also exists an assortment of approaches that are more focused on the theorisation of happiness than on the empirical testing of hypotheses and are usually articulated from philosophical standpoints. While philosophical takes on happiness are almost as old as philosophy, their impact on the recent upsurge of HE has generally been very limited. This can, on the one hand, be attributed to a thematic divergence. Philosophical approaches are often preoccupied with issues that precede (or that should precede) the undertaking of HE projects, such as the demarcation of the different kinds of positive affects that are associated with happiness and similar semantic issues but also with broader questions relating to the importance of happiness, such as whether it should be sought at all costs (hedonism) or if it should be our societies' goal to maximise it (utilitarianism), and whether all happiness is equal regardless of what brings it about in each case. On the other hand, the aforementioned tendency to adopt a disciplinary insular and exclusively theoretical form of argumentation usually comes at the cost of overlooking relevant empirical evidence which means that such contributions end up taking the form of a parallel (to the empirical HE projects) monologue instead of that of an actual debate. To be sure, this is not to say that there is no value in either examining the pre-HE and the post-HE questions

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[135] Empirical evidence does not paint a conclusive picture. As Graham and Felton, while reviewing the literature that examines this relationship, pointed out: the field is replete with 'strong normative judgments that outweigh the existing empirical evidence, and debate is often acrimonious and polarized' (In: C. Graham, and A. Felton, 'Does inequality matter to individual welfare? An initial exploration based on happiness surveys from Latin America'. In A. Dutt, and B. Radcliff (eds.), *Happiness, Economics and Politics: Towards a Multidisciplinary Approach,* op. cit., p. 158.).
[136] Since most quantitative data is analysed using statistical techniques that are pretty common in econometrics, a great number of economists partake in the mainstream of HE and make use of SWB data simply because they are better trained and positioned to do so. However, the fact that the R-squared measures of the ensuing regression lines are consistently lower than is the norm in economics is a key reason why many economists are dissatisfied with the quality of the data and, as a result, have been drawn to alternative directions. See: C. Graham, 'Happiness Measures as a Guide to Development Policy? Promise and Potential Pitfalls'. In C. Sepuvelda, A. Harrison, and J. Yifu Lin (eds.), *Annual World Bank Conference on Development Economics 2011: Development Challenges in a Post-crisis World* (Washington, US: The World Bank, 2013), esp. pp. 318-319.

(a field of meta-HE, if taken together) or in discussing the issue from a solely philosophical perspective. On the contrary, this project strongly emphasises the importance of both. However, the former has not so far been addressed effectively or consistently so as to impact the core of HE scholarship, while the latter comprise arguments that are either given in non-falsifiable forms or are otherwise incommensurable with the standard forms that HE literature takes.[137] [138] Nevertheless, there is a small number of exceptions that seek to engage with the approaches of the social sciences or to even incorporate some of their more empirical developments as evidenced for instance in the recent work of Haybron,[139] Alexandrova,[140] and of Tiberius & Plakias.[141] It is this project's contention that such efforts are at their strongest when dealing with the following: conceptual and semantic issues, the interpretation of findings, a normative discussion about HE's role, the ethical questions relating to HE-informed policy-making and other meta-HE issues, or, to inform the hypotheses of empirically-minded scholars.[142] To the extent that they depart from these objectives, however, they become problematic for their positive assertions effectively lack proper, if not all, substantiation. A cross-examination of such approaches with the more empirical study of happiness inevitably exposes this comparative weakness and, ultimately,

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[137] Indicative contributions of the kind discussed here can be found for instance in: L. Bruni, and P. Porta (eds.), *Handbook on the Economics of Happiness* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2007), esp. ch. 1-6.

[138] For instance, holistic packages that theorise in a priori manner about the determinants of happiness are extremely common. These are often contemporisations of the engagement of Aristotle's ethics (that take virtue and its exercise as the key constituents of happiness, but also acknowledges the importance of satisfying certain external needs) with the Stoic stance (that deems virtue to be a necessary and sufficient condition for happiness). Evidently, such packages, while oftentimes containing useful insights, can hardly be tested as such or, indeed, partake in the scholarly HE debate.

[139] Haybron is among the most prolific philosophers working in the field. One of the most comprehensive presentations of his main theses can be found in: D. Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness: The Elusive Psychology of Well-Being,* op. cit.

[140] Alexandrova attempts a novel philosophy of science approach to HE which incorporates some empirical evidence: A. Alexandrova, *A Philosophy for the Science of Well-Being* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[141] V. Tiberius, and A. Plakias, 'Well-Being'. In J. Doris (ed.), *The Moral Psychology Handbook* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), ch. 12.

[142] For instance, Waterman examined the concept of Aristotelian eudaimonia and contrasted it with a more hedonic construct. Despite a number of convergent points, the two were shown to be far from identical. See: A. Waterman, 'Two conceptions of happiness: Contrasts of personal expressiveness (eudaimonia) and hedonic enjoyment', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 64, Issue 4, Apr 1993, pp. 678-691. It can, however, even take the form of a direct test of theories of happiness, as in: R. Veenhoven, and J. Ehrhardt, 'The cross-national pattern of happiness: Test of predictions implied in three theories of happiness', *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 34, Issue 1, January 1995, pp. 33-68.

leads to their defensible dismissal from the mainstream. We shall return to consider understudied meta-HE issues that call for further attention in Chapters 4 and 5.

As is clear, this group is the most diverse of our taxonomy, both in terms of the nature of its constituent approaches and in terms of their conclusions. It is, therefore, difficult to speak of it as a unitary whole. However, while it is the most promising in terms of its disposition to produce positive HE conclusions with wide-ranging effects (unlike the pessimism found in the other two groups that only allowed for limited, if any, long-term change), it would be wrong to claim that it has lived up to these expectations. Like with the preceding categories of approaches, to an extent, this is due to the fundamental difficulties identified in this study that hamper most HE projects. However, there are also problems specific to each.

For needs-based approaches, this is largely due to the unwarranted leap from wants to needs. One could perhaps tentatively disregard it as unimportant if the empirical evidence in support of the theses of this approach was compelling but, as was shown, this is far from being the case. That said, wants already pose difficulties of their own in that, just like needs, they are not unidimensional (e.g. their temporal aspects is a significant factor that is overlooked by current approaches) and there is a potentially infinite number of them so as to render impossible the task of ruling out the possibilities of multiple interrelations, spurious associations (due to, for instance, hidden variables), and so forth. For quasi-HE approaches stemming from mainstream economics, the failure can be attributed to the initial unreflecting adoption of the oversimplified models of the self used in mainstream economic theory. In face of that failure, most economists dealing with HE have, by now, emigrated to approaches that were developed by other disciplines or have developed their own separate projects which, in any case, are discussed elsewhere here. Finally, the more philosophical approaches fail to contribute to the carrying out of HE research in that they offer mostly normative preordained happiness packages that are beyond empirical or, indeed, any other

kind of rigorous testing. In any case, and in spite of the problems identified here, perspectives from within this group offer useful insights, especially with regard to destabilising approaches of the other two groups (by showing, for instance, that real life circumstances matter more than they predicted), and also ask crucial questions relating to the meta-HE sphere and, therefore, will definitely have a role to play in the here-advocated integrated approach to HE. What is more, the empirical evidence in support of some of the here-posited relationships (especially from needs-bases approaches) is fairly sound and, as a result, a large part of the diminutive scholarly consensus in HE can be attributed to approaches of this category.

2.2: Issues and Way Forward

2.2.1: Strengths and weaknesses

The preceding review of literature illustrated that HE, while lively and diverse, is a largely unfulfilled project. Although knowledge in most (if not all) disciplines and fields of study can never be final or complete, in the specific case of HE it has only made elementary steps. Indeed, one would be hard pressed to find pieces of uncontroversial dicta/axioms/findings in HE and, even where that is the case, they typically fail to contribute to the promotion of happiness maximisation to a satisfactory degree. The mere fact that so many diverging (and largely mutually exclusive) approaches coexist and count thousands of publications yearly each, testifies to that. One explanation could perhaps be that most approaches originate from distinct disciplines that, for better or for worse, lack sufficient communication. However, in the opinion of this project, this is only a superficial explanation. Even though there might be some truth to it, it should be seen more as an effect of HE's failure rather than vice versa.

That is because if one of the parallel running projects had been compellingly fruitful, it would have, eventually, led its competitors to extinction, even if there was no direct communication between them. To be sure, the existence of multiple approaches and conclusions in the study of such an ambiguous and elusive concept as happiness is to be expected and welcomed, to a degree. However, in HE there co-exist a myriad of theses and sub-theses alongside their completely antithetical ones. A fruitful HE, on the contrary, would have had a level of consensus around at least a considerable amount of basic theses. In addition, the claim that there is no communication between the approaches is questionable for, as was illustrated in 2.1, there is a wealth of interdisciplinary critical literature including studies that focus specifically on disproving claims of competing approaches. Furthermore, some of these approaches originate from the same discipline and thus the explanation of non-contact cannot apply to them.[143] This leaves only the possibility of language and methodological incompatibilities but this can only account for a small part of the phenomenon since, as was shown, some of the inter-disciplinary critical work has been productive, which effectively showed that the disciplinary barriers are not unsurpassable. After all, most mainstream approaches are from disciplines of the social sciences which typically employ roughly similar tools, even if in diverging ways and with slightly different terminologies. Instead, in the opinion of this author, this wide -for a field of study that now counts more than four decades of life- conflicting diversity is best explained as a symptom of the ineffectiveness of the HE project: it can sustain so vastly different approaches since none of them has been particularly fruitful individually.

Moreover, as was shown in the previous section, this study does not argue for the superiority or calling for the abandonment of any one approach or, even, for the abandonment of the whole project because of its non-fruition. Instead, it recognises that there are certain

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[143] Consider, for instance, the case of cognitivist and adaptationist approaches: both are predominantly supported from scholars from the discipline of psychology and their key proponents are often even from the same sub-field, too (chiefly positive psychology).

strengths and weaknesses in all strands of thought and that the project itself is one worth pursuing, albeit it needs to address the flaws in its methodology and perhaps settle for a different and narrower scope than the one initially undertaken. Next, we will briefly recapitulate these strengths and weakness in order to pave the way for the exploration of what needs to be changed, and how, which will be then discussed in the chapters that follow.

Without a doubt, the study of happiness has come a long way since its inception in the early 1970s when commonsensical assumptions (mostly permeated by the logic of 'more is (always) better') were almost axiomatically considered to be valid. We may not have, as elaborated above, a conclusive account of happiness yet (or we might never have one, for that matter), but several claims have been developed and, at least some of them, have unambiguous merit. For these claims to be made, new methodologies were contrived mostly from existing research tools of various disciplines and approaches and a staggering amount of data has been gathered. One of the effects of the systematisation of the study of happiness in HE is that no extemporaneous assertions are taken seriously anymore; substantiation of some sophistication and depth is invariably required. And the claims themselves manifest palpable, no matter how small, progress. For instance, it is now more or less uncontroversial that, as cognitivists argue, our environment is important for the targets we set for ourselves and our happiness depends to some degree on their satisfaction;[144] or, as adaptationists argue, that many happiness-inducing life events that may even last for very long (or even forever) do not have a permanent effect on our happiness; or, finally, need-based approaches have shown that the satisfaction of at least some basic needs is necessary for happiness. The latter is perhaps intuitive but systematic work has been carried out to determine what those needs may be, as well as their relative importance (even if with mixed results). Equally, the advancement and flourishing of HE scholarship during the past few decades has helped

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[144] For, as was shown, the incompleteness of the project allows even for some of the most obstinate scholars to refuse to doubt the slightest element of their orthodoxies and, thus, enables them to insist on the absolute validity and superiority of one of the three polar positions presented in 2.1.

debunk misconceptions, not least via the field's foundational observation, namely the fact that a growing GDP over a period of time says very little, if anything at all, about variances in the well-being of citizens over the same term. And while this may sound like a truism nowadays, it and other HE insights that run counter to previously held beliefs do not seem to attract the attention they deserve, especially when compared to the focus given on domains that were based on these older and now-debunked views (e.g. using the social welfare function of welfare economics as a means of maximising wellbeing).[145]

Clearly, the potential of HE to effect meaningful change is not realised. As noted in the beginning of this section, the HE project has certain weaknesses which, as it currently stands, outweigh its strengths. These critically limit the impact of HE on the academic and socio-political mainstream. However, even when HE researchers concede these weaknesses, they typically assume that they can be overcome through immanent means: by increasing the number of studies in order to corroborate findings, or by instituting some variation in the finer details of existing methodologies in a bid to increase the validity of their constructs (and, correspondingly, of their findings). Nevertheless, it is the contention of this study that addressing the field's weaknesses is a lot more complex than they assume, because the problems affecting HE overflow the applied realm (concrete methodologies and the specificities of research designs) of scholarship and cannot be dealt with in an immanent manner but, rather, require a meta-HE treatment.

HE's key problems, as explored in subsections 2.1.1-2.1.4, can be distinguished into three broad categories: those emanating from problems of defining and conceptualising

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[145] The reference to the agents of the 'attention' and 'focus' is purposely vague for, as we shall see in later chapters, this project takes the position that the management of happiness should not be addressed with proactive top-down policies of the state or to be simply delegated to any form of government (local/national/supranational) and that, instead, it should be carried out by a plethora of decentralised agents: individuals themselves, civil society, and a number of formal and informal institutions at the same time.

happiness; those related to problems with its operationalisation; and, finally, in the most heterogeneous category, problems caused by various methodological and interpretative flaws. As far as the first category is concerned, we need not go as far as to call correspondence theories of language into question for the problems of definition which beset HE to become apparent. While some of the conceptions of happiness employed in HE are clearly problematic, the difficulty does not simply boil down to how to correct them by uncovering the one, authoritative, and/or authentic definition that would replace the ones used in hitherto concepts. Indeed, this project takes the position that such an undertaking would be impossible anyway and would, instead, obfuscate the actual locus of the problem. Instead, it is, on the one hand, the inescapable incompletion of any definition and, on the other, the multiplicity of different definitions of happiness that are being treated as authoritative that constitute the heart of the problem. To be sure, happiness designates a mental and/or emotional state that is too vague and, thus, quite naturally, invites a variety of different interpretations of it. However (as explored in 2.1), the conceptions used at times refer to completely different spectra of meaning (e.g. SWB vs. gratification or eudemonia vs. hedonism) or at best at overlapping (but not identical) ones and,[146] at other times, they are problematic in that they blindly equate happiness with specific metrics (e.g. self-reported happiness) or, yet more controversially, with perceived utility,[147] typically without any substantial effort to justify such choices theoretically. This limitation has, nevertheless, not generated a self-critical spirit among scholars: HE scholarship frequently makes strong claims of authenticity and/or accuracy that renders it harder for approaches to engage

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[146] This problem, while universal in HE, is most noticeable in elaborate/multi-dimensional conceptions of happiness, the use of which is becoming ever more common. Lyobomirsky and Lepper's 'Subjective Happiness Scale' is a prime example of that, which studies four items on a seven-level Likert scale (see S. Lyubomirsky, and H. S. Lepper, 'A measure of subjective happiness: Preliminary reliability and construct validation', *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 46, Issue 2, 1999, pp. 137-155). As each such approach qualifies happiness in detailed but different ways and prioritises different aspects of it, it adds more points of departure from competing perspectives than are possible in cases of single-unit measures or unidimensional understandings of happiness.
[147] It largely follows Bentham's equation of utility with happiness. For a thorough discussion of this equation in literature and a forceful explication of why it is problematic, see: B. Kaufman, 'Integrating Emotions into Economic Theory'. In M. Altman (ed.), *Handbook of Contemporary Behavioral Economics: Foundations and Developments* (Armonk, US: M. E. Sharpe, 2006), pp. 82-85.

constructively with one another. Most approaches seek, to the contrary, to close down the debate about the meaning of happiness in order to, on the one hand, preclude the possibility of a destabilisation that may be caused by an acknowledgement of the notional incompleteness of any concept, and, on the other, to set ostensibly solid conceptual and operational foundations that will, in turn, enable a swift transition to the empirical stage with which scholars are more comfortable.

Conceptual issues are further aggravated, firstly, by the fact that HE research relies heavily on comparisons and, secondly, by the lack of ample datasets of empirical evidence given the field's relatively recent flourishing. As a result, comparative studies often have limited options in terms of the data sets they can select from. Thus, different notions of happiness are being treated as interchangeable for, inter alia, reasons of expediency. Indeed, some scholars (Easterlin is a striking example) may even be explicit about doing so without deeming it necessary to assess the distortive effects that such moves may have.[148] Equally troubling is the fact that scholars tend to treat concepts from different languages as interchangeable even when it is clear that the notional content and the connotations of each concept differ. Not only, then, is current HE research not sufficiently sensitive to the difficulties of defining happiness, but it also ignores or chooses not to consider the historical (as evidenced by the liberal comparisons across decades), cultural (as evidenced by the treatment of translated terms as equal) or, indeed, any other contingency affecting concepts of happiness. Instead, problems are often made worse by an ill-considered conflation of terms that clearly cover different, and only at best partly overlapping, spectra of meaning. A fair overall assessment would be that HE pays insufficient attention to the inherent

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[148] Easterlin has explicitly declared in several places that he takes 'well-being, utility, happiness, life satisfaction, and welfare to be interchangeable'. See, for instance: R. Easterlin, 'Happiness and economic growth: The evidence', Discussion Paper Series, *Forschunginstitut zur Zukunft der Arbeit*, No. 7187, 2013. Available at: http://hdl.handle.net/10419/69363 [Last accessed: 2 October 2016]

indeterminacy surrounding its object of study and therefore requires radical revision on that account.

Further, problems relating to the operationalisation of happiness are equally endemic to HE. As was established in 2.1.1, on a first level, the definitional problems discussed above further complicate the tricky task of measuring happiness for surveys using problematic concepts of happiness are naturally bound to produce questionable data. For instance, self-report surveys that use terms for happiness that are associated with different time-frames amongst different subjects naturally invoke responses that will undoubtedly be heterogeneous and, thus, ultimately incommensurable and non-comparable. Nevertheless, certain measurement-specific problems arise that would have been worrying even if constructing an absolute concept of happiness were feasible. For one, as was established (esp. in 2.1.1), a majority of methodologies over-relies on self-reporting and is, therefore, liable to the problems that come with it, which are not, of course, exclusive to HE.[149] These include, most notably for HE, the unwarranted assumption of full and accurate self-knowledge and the non-consideration of the difficulty of quantifying that self-knowledge and of mapping it onto the various scales, not to mention the productive role of the latter on the responses provided (as discussed towards the end of 2.1.1). To be sure, proponents of those methodologies point to evidence that seemingly justifies their use,[150] however, upon closer inspection, they do not

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[149] For a fairly balanced transdisciplinary review of self-reporting, see: D. Chan, 'So Why Ask Me? Are Self-Report Data Really That Bad?'. In C. Lance, and R. Vandenberg (eds.), *Statistical and Methodological Myths and Urban Legends: Doctrine, Verity and Fable in Organizational and Social Sciences* (Hove, UK: Routledge, 2009), Ch. 13.

[150] See, for instance: E. Diener, and R. Biswas-Diener, *Happiness: Unlocking the Mysteries of Psychological Wealth* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 251-252. In this review of the validity of scientific measurements of happiness, while they accept that self-reporting may not always suffice, they conclude that it is a valid route for the measurement of happiness with good correlation with the supposedly objective biological measures (For another instance of the discussion of such correlations see: J. Hirata, *Happiness, Ethics, and Economics* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2011), pp. 17-18). However, and even though Diener and Biswas-Diener are open to a hybrid approach, they, and most other advocates of self-reporting, too, end up using those correlations of self-reporting measures with the alternative measures merely to justify the exclusive use of the former.

withstand the objections.[151] Moreover, so-called qualitative surveys still involve self-reporting of some kind (even when they are carried out via interviews) and are, therefore, prone to fall prey to the same problems. And, while interviews are generally better positioned in order to neutralise distortions owed to misunderstandings and quantification issues (that are both particularly prevalent in HE as we have seen),[152] they introduce new challenges that are not exclusive to HE and are, therefore, already well-studied. These include the various forms of researcher bias (e.g. question anchoring, interpretation bias due to confirmation bias, or simply bad scientific practice), as well as other kinds of bias such as so-called 'social desirability bias'. The latter refers to the tendency of survey respondents to give status-enhancing responses that are closer to those considered socially desirable than to an accurate depiction of their reality. In the context of HE, and especially in the case of person-to-person (and therefore not completely anonymous) interviews considered here, this could lead to a significant overstating of happiness as it is one of the key ingredients for one to obtain a 'high' social status. Indirect methods of measurement based on preferences (usually employed by economics perspectives), are equally problematic in that they rely on a dubious proxy: the concept of so-called 'revealed preference'. Not only is it a circular concept (in the context of HE at least), as established in 2.1.4, but it also -unwarrantedly- assumes a fairly centred subject that is capable of maximising her happiness at will. Individuals are, thus, reduced to informed consumers (only not just of products and services), albeit apparently fairly efficient and knowledgeable ones (with regard to maximising their happiness at least) and the conclusions drawn seem to be -equally questionably- independent of the particular circumstances of each individual; the underlying assumption being again that they must

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[151] While it is more difficult to prove empirically why self-reporting is not accurate since there is no alternative safe way of measuring happiness (so as to look for potential discrepancies), we have illuminated in 2.1.1 a series of issues that problematise self-reporting along with empirical evidence for some (e.g. the effect of question anchoring, the productive effect of scales, and other).

[152] On top of difficulties with self-reporting mentioned in 2.1, there is a wealth of literature covering a host of other difficulties associated with self-reporting that affect most social sciences. Weiten, most strikingly, in a review of such literature (In W. Weiten, *Psychology: Themes and Variations*, 9th ed. (Belmont, US: Wadsworth, 2011), p. 62), finds that respondents misunderstand questionnaire items surprisingly often (it shall, therefore, not be dismissed as statistically insignificant) and, moreover, that even the phrasing of questions has a definite impact upon responses.

have a significant core of human nature in common in order to render such particularities negligible. A further source of limitations for those approaches is that utility, which mainstream economists tend to equate with happiness, is always an ordinal measure whereas happiness, when not discussed in the afore-discussed micro-level of individual revealed preference, is treated as a cardinal measure so as to facilitate its seamless aggregation that enables the extrapolation of macro-conclusions. Finally, the less popular physiological ways of measuring happiness confront a series of practical limitations that even immanent critiques uncover and are, thus, still far from offering any significant input to measurements of happiness.

Research methods, by and large (with the conditional exception of physiological approaches), are based around concepts that assume a centred, rational, and coherent subject with undistorted access to the full presence of its affective states. When one (or more) of the above is not the case, subjects are assumed to diverge in predictable and uniform ways; something that conveniently lends them for the use of self-reporting and/or complex statistical processing of their data (which has as a prerequisite their commensurability). At a minimum, thus, they posit that there exists a substantial core of uniform subjectivity, adequate to justify such methodological means. Outlier cases ultimately cancel each other out or are seen, in any case, as statistically insignificant. In other words, not only is an immutable human nature presupposed but it comes with very specific postulates, too. Nonetheless, not only do these assumptions come in stark contrast to what life sciences seem to suggest on the same issue (briefly reviewed in 2.1.1, but we shall return to that in the following chapter), they also presuppose a philosophical position that is untenable and rather liberally adapted from philosophical sources. Essentially, it constitutes an amalgam of misconstrued Cartesian rationalism and of Benthamite utilitarianism and of adaptations of various modernist philosophical optimisms regarding our understanding of human nature. Crucially, the theoretical assumptions framing these approaches are rarely

explicit. They remain implicit perhaps in an attempt to obscure their precarious underpinnings, however, they underlie them all in varying, but never insignificant, degrees. Despite these shortcomings, the possibility of useful empirical contributions to HE is not foreclosed nor is hitherto empirical research to be dismissed in a blanket fashion on the above grounds, since this project's critique is immanent to the field (broadly construed) rather than an attempt to move entirely beyond it. Consequently, my thesis calls for modifications in methodology as well as new, and more modest, interpretations of the findings and, as a result, a narrower scope.

The final category of problems identified in our review of HE literature comprises disparate issues and is perhaps too loose thematically to be considered a category in its own right. However, mainly for reasons of practicality, these issues will be discussed together, given that the goal here is not to deal individually and conclusively with each but to review them with a certain level of abstraction.[153] Their common denominator is that, and unlike the two previously discussed categories of problems, they do not constitute systemic threats to HE and, as such, they do not permeate the scholarship. Eliminating them, therefore, can be pursued through ad hoc interventions. These can be problems either with the methodology itself or in the interpretation of the empirical evidence gathered as part of given methodologies. And, while they are not caused by any of the problems of the other two categories, they are, at times, aggravated by them while, in some cases, their distinction is less than clear. Consider, for example, the case of the study of Strack et al. (discussed in 2.1.2) that has shown that the mere presence of a handicapped person during an interview results in raising the levels of reported happiness for non-handicapped subjects. As argued previously, the attempt to use this study in order to substantiate the thesis of comparison

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[153] This is why the previous section, as well as this one, merely seek to summarise HE's stronger and weaker points and do not claim to have been exhaustive in their presentations of difficulties in HE scholarship. Instead, the focus was on the most important ones so as to extrapolate what needs to be fixed in HE on a more abstract level.

theorists betrays an understanding of happiness that is clearly problematic, for it refers to an affect of a largely ephemeral dimension and not to happiness in the SWB sense. It is, thus, in equal measure susceptible to the problem of definition and to a flawed research design. Issues that have to do with the methodologies in a more straightforward manner include question anchoring both in self-report surveys and in interviews and various other interviewer biases such as leading questions. These are not HE-specific but they are very commonly found in HE literature and, as we have established, they can have an immense impact given, on the one hand, the sensitivity of the field's main concepts, and, on the other, the unstable theoretical grounding of the whole project. Additionally, scales present a further challenge, other than the ones already discussed: the measurements of happiness, while cardinal, have lower and upper bounds (0 and 7, or 1 and 10, or any other possible combination, respectively) whereas the variables with which they are often related are boundless (e.g. GDP, income, inflation, inequality with respect to its growth potential, and many more). Doubtlessly, positing relationships between a bounded cardinal measure and boundless variables are not inherently impossible but should be carried out carefully and should be modest in their aspirations for they can only reveal broad tendencies that are highly contingent and limited, instead of very strictly quantified relationships. Such an awareness is consistently missing from the literature with only a handful of exceptions.[154]

As far as problems arising from the interpretation of evidence are concerned, the key difficulty observed across many HE methodologies is that of spurious relationships: in the crudest form, this issue occurs when happiness is correlated with some variable(s) and a causal connection is immediately inferred from that statistical relationship alone without

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[154] For a discussion of the problem, as well as for literature's disregard of it, see: H. Johns, and P. Ormerod, 'The Unhappy Thing About Happiness Economics', *Real-World Economics Review*, Issue 46, 2008, pp. 139-146. In addition, for a brief discussion of the more general paradox that emanates from bounded scales of happiness according to which such scales necessarily entail that aggregate happiness has an unsurpassable upper limit (=n*x, where n is the upper limit of the scale and x the population), see: B. Roberts, 'Measuring Welfare'. In K. Banian, and B. Roberts (eds.), *The Design and Use of Political Economy Indicators: Challenges of Definition, Aggregation, and Application* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 115.

proper theoretical justification.[155] In a less crude form, albeit more common, a reasonable

correlation is read as a one-way and exclusive causation when clearly other factors could be

at play too (e.g. an extraneous variables affecting both happiness and the independent

variable in focus). Equally importantly, problems arise when after a causal pattern is inferred

(regardless of whether it is justified or not), the scholar rather too rapidly predicts that the

same causal pattern will apply again in other circumstances or for larger populations despite

there being several conceivable circumstances that problematise the generalisability of the

phenomenon/tendency in question. For instance, Thin points to cases wherein scholars

(usually needs-based theorists that disregard the basic -and rather safe- conclusions of

cognitivist approaches) neglect the fact that status competition has attributes of a zero-sum

game and, thus, presume that aggregate happiness can grow indefinitely with, for example,

rising relative incomes.[156] Finally, a widely observed tendency is for scholars to remain

within the intellectual boundaries of their own approach and to give little attention to

developments in alternative/competing approaches.[157] This isolation means that they both

miss out on other potentially useful conclusions and fail to first realise, and, consequently,

address the limitations of diverging theoretical angles, which could become more visible

through comparisons and contrasts.

As the issues discussed above are characterised by great heterogeneity, there is no all-

encompassing solution. Nevertheless, we can identify a few broad themes that arise from,

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[155] We came across such examples in our review of the literature (in 2.1) but for a more detailed survey of examples of this, see: H. Johns, and P. Ormerod, *Happiness, Economics, and Public Policy,* op. cit., esp. ch. 3. In a nutshell, they argue that correlations are often spurious because of a lack of adequate information on the independent variables and, instead, claim that sampling errors account for most happiness variations in time-series data. Thus, it is not surprising for them that several counterintuitive conclusions can be drawn from such evidence (e.g. happiness and crime rates appear to have a positive correlation).

[156] To illustrate the problem, Thin draws a simple analogy between this case and a theoretical one wherein an individual will have a better view if she stands up but if everyone from the crowd does so, the ultimate effect will be neutral but a naïve needs-based theorist would insist on predictions for a positive effect for all. In: N. Thin, *Social Happiness: Theory Into Policy and Practice* (Bristol, UK: Policy Press, 2012), p. 108.

[157] This phenomenon was clearly discernible in our review of the various approaches (in 2.1.2-2.1.4) wherein, apart from some very critical engagements, there was little synthesising disposition.

albeit in varying degrees, the aforementioned difficulties in spite of their sporadic nature: first, a tendency to direct disproportionate attention towards the aspects of research that involve a processing and an analysis of empirical evidence. This is often done with very little attention being given to the theoretical foundations of these studies as well as to their methodological tools. The latter brings us to the second tendency: that of treating happiness as any other cardinal and unidimensional variable that is to be used liberally in calculations and statistical processing. It was illustrated why this is not warranted at least not in the liberal and unqualified fashion that it is being carried out in routinely thus far. If even simple measurements suffer from a variety of problems that cause distortions, it should follow that each mathematical move made after that step cannot but introduce further distortions (e.g. by magnifying the primary ones). This betrays a forced positivist logic that insists upon reducing subjects (including their emotions) to an aggregate of measurable variables; a logic that rests solely upon purely metaphysical assumptions (often in the face of evidence from the natural sciences) and is, therefore, anti-scientific itself. Finally, there is a tendency for scholarly 'patriotism' greater than what is usually observed in many other fields of study. By impeding productive exchanges, this insularity inevitably restricts the quality of scholarship and, ultimately, leads to the various troubled certainties that, in turn, ground policy prescriptions. However, given HE's limitations discussed in this chapter, these alleged certainties can only exacerbate the highlighted (in 1.2) problems of HE-informed policy making and, therefore, must be tackled as a matter of priority.

2.2.2: Way forward

It could appear that, at this point, and following the various criticisms of HE in this chapter, it would be logical for this project to repudiate HE as a field of research altogether. Conceptualising and operationalising happiness are, at best, controversial and, at worst,

perhaps even futile tasks, the abstractions of human nature found in HE (especially with regard to self-knowledge and rationality) and their related assumptions (either implicit or explicit) are inconclusive and, at large, arbitrary and flawed, and measurement methods suffer as a result of the aforementioned factors but also because of operationalisation-specific issues. If these obstacles were not enough, HE is further burdened by a host of other significant problems, not least those related to the positivist interpretation of empirical evidence. Nevertheless, the fact that HE is beset with such problems is not reason enough to abandon the project but, actually, renders it an interesting site of exploration for the consideration of the questions which arise from trying to study human subjectivity *objectively* and from trying to account for cultural and historical contingencies in meaning creation. Importantly, one should answer such questions without either falling prey to a logic of simply cataloguing of examples without considering any broader implications, on the one hand, and without giving way to pure relativism, on the other, which would deny all possibility of having intrasubjective meanings and therefore meaningful knowledge. Moreover, the significance of the existing research for policy-making renders it incumbent upon us to think critically about its assumptions, methodology, and application.

Clearly, not all existing scholarship is without value, consider, for instance, the strengths of HE that were reviewed in the beginning of this section. Indeed, there is a wide variety of pioneering and fruitful contributions, albeit, on some occasions, these may require reinterpretation and, on other occasions, a refined scope. But for HE to truly fulfil its potential, on the one hand, and to minimise the risk for its potentially negative consequences, on the other, the specific areas highlighted earlier in this chapter need radical rethinking. It is this project's contention that post-structuralism offers the appropriate palette of theoretical tools in order to effectively unveil and address the roots of the problems in these areas. The intended implications of this intervention are twofold: not only will it seek to affect how HE scholarship is carried out but it will also seek to redefine its role in

respect to what HE itself perceives it to be (which will also have secondary effects upon scholarship) and in relation to applications of HE research in realms outside HE.

Post-structuralism, understood here not as a homogenous system but rather as the sum of independent approaches operating within the same spirit and abiding by a few broad tenets, is uniquely positioned to deal with the challenges HE is facing: its theorisation of the instability and contingency of meaning helps problematise definitions of happiness and can, therefore, facilitate the emergence of a new line of thinking about how the object of study is conceived; its theories of the subject allow for an open-ended understanding of subjectivity that HE was deemed to be lacking; and, finally, its stance towards knowledge is congruent with our criticism of HE's ill-conceived positivist and oversimplifyingly totalising tendencies. Undoubtedly, however, post-structuralism does not represent a panacea for all HE's ills, either. Yet, it serves to problematise HE's assumptions in a systematic and consistent manner and through those processes helps create scope for a critical shift within the field of study. Several of the difficulties (consider, for instance, the third category of problems explored in 2.1.1) in the field could be addressed even within currently adopted frameworks. However, the approach proposed here will not only benefit the areas affected by the first two categories of problems but also, given that, as we saw, problems from the third category compound those of the previous two, it will help resolve or, at the very least, ameliorate problems caused by factors ostensibly unrelated to the themes and approaches of post-structuralism.

Nonetheless, the empirical and the theoretical realm do not form a neat binary but mutually inhabit one another while remaining irreducible to one another. As we have seen, how we theorise happiness will affect how we frame empirical research, what we decide to study, and how we identify that object empirically. Similarly, we cannot theorise without reference to the empirical realm since theories will always be rooted in, and verified through events and

experiences, if they are to be convincing. Neither dimension exists without the other but cannot be said to completely replicate the other, either. If they were identical, after all, there would be no need for research in the first place as the world would be transparent to us. Despite frequently found vulgarised interpretations of post-structuralism,[158] its critical attitude towards the certainties of knowledge do not need to lead to epistemic nihilism but, instead, can and will pave the way for a neo-pragmatic outlook to HE that will embrace rather than ignore or marginalise the intricacies and contingencies of the fluidity of meaning and knowledge and the openness of subjectivity. Neo-pragmatism, with its emphasis on praxis rather than on metaphysical undertakings, will be the guarantor of the possibility and meaningfulness of a HE even after post-structuralism's undermining of the foundations of HE projects as well as of the essentialisms that are attached to them. We shall explore in the chapters that follow how these two moves can be achieved and what they will entail for HE.

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[158] Like the ones expounded in the context of the 'Science Wars' of the 1990s in books such as: P. Gross, and N. Levitt, *Higher Superstition: The Academic Left and Its Quarrels with Science* (Baltimore, US: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994/1998), and A. Sokal, and J. Bricmont, *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science* (London, UK: Picador, 1997/1999). While the criticisms that many scientific realists addressed towards the use of scientific concepts and language by some post-structuralists were, on many occasions, justified, some of the former unduly deemed all of the latter's critical engagement with science to be erroneous and bluntly equated it with crude anti-scientific relativism.

CHAPTER 3: The Post-Structuralist Diagnosis and Pharmakon

3.1: Conceptualisations, Operationalisations, and Discourse

3.1.1: Introduction and identity

It is, by now, clear that what is, fundamentally, at issue in this project are the knowledge claims that HE makes and, more specifically, those pertaining to its professed knowledge about the essential nature of individuals, about what constitutes happiness, and about how it can be measured. Indeed, these assumptions are what makes possible the progression to the stage of speculation about correlations between happiness and a series of variables, a process that, as we saw, comes with difficulties of its own. In this chapter, we shall concern ourselves with the former. In particular, this section will take issue with the aforementioned knowledge claims and will problematise them on three different levels: starting with the 'atomic' level of identity, we shall then move on to the next, and higher, level of abstraction, to wit, that of meaning, and, finally, we will consider problems that arise at the broadest level, namely that of the discourse within which HE narratives operate. As we shall see, difficulties on all three levels should attenuate the confidence with which HE makes the aforementioned knowledge claims. The upshot will be that the need for a HE freed from its current presuppositions will become apparent. Furthermore, subjectivity-related assumptions, as established in the previous chapter, are no exception to that. In the second section of this chapter, we shall look into the genealogy of these problems and, subsequently, consider ways of thinking about the subject that are (to the extent that this is possible) immune to the three loci of criticism that we identified and are about to investigate.

For our first endeavour, we shall make use of insights from Deleuzian metaphysics. More specifically, this refers mostly to the guiding thread of his metaphysics, as it was expounded in Difference and Repetition,[159] which represents a rupture with conventional ontological thinking about identity and difference. Deleuze subverts the traditional view that holds that difference is derivative from identity by arguing that difference is, in fact, what constitutes identities in the first place. Inevitably, this subversion undermines the importance of identity as its established order of precedence (linguistic, conceptual, logical, and/or other) is inverted decidedly. In his words, identity should be theorised as a 'principle but as a second principle, as a principle become; that it revolve around the Different'.[160] The consequences of this intervention are hard to overstate. As he puts it, the introduction of this new ontology amounts to a Copernican revolution which 'opens up the possibility of difference having its own concept, rather than being maintained under the domination of a concept in general already understood as identical'.[161] But what is it that makes such an ontological reversal necessary?

Deleuze maintains that, since Plato, philosophy has followed a simple model that -seemingly by intuition alone- takes the existence of stable identities for granted. The axiomatic adoption of this position results in a mode of thinking that reasonably ends up prioritising them.[162] For instance, if stable 'X, Y' identities can be said to exist, difference is no more than the mere outcome of the comparison of X and Y. It has no independent existence. As a result, difference is only discussed in the context of, or in relation with, self-identical entities; it is reduced to being 'difference between'. Deleuze thinks that this, effectively, entails a preclusion of the possibility of thinking about pure difference, which has two grave repercussions. On the one hand, it solidifies the status of identities as pure and real and, on

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[159] G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition,* op. cit.
[160] Ibid., p. 50.
[161] Ibid.
[162] G. Deleuze, *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974* (Los Angeles, US: Semiotext(e), 2004), esp. pp. 30-33.

the other, it renders them automatically superior vis-à-vis what is excluded by the stable core of each given identity. In other words, it creates a frame of reference by which what can be perceived as an identity is privileged and what is not is dismissed as a fake.[163] [164] Finally, prioritising identities has the unintended effect of impeding the possibilities of imagining the self-transformation of what they are attached to; assuming a relatively stable core for each identity (which, as we saw, is a prerequisite for its very conception) renders unclear the mechanism by which they could vary, both spatio-temporally and conceptually. It, therefore, entraps them into an unproductive static state.[165]

Deleuzian philosophy, on the other hand, counters the apotheosis of identities with a celebration of pure difference, or, as Deleuze puts it, of 'difference in itself'. However, while, as explained above, he calls, indeed, for an ontological reversal (between identity and difference) in the sense that he deems that difference should have precedence over the construction of identity, he does not simply want a reversal of roles. For such a simple inversion would leave the oppressive reign of identity intact, making difference just a negative form of identity. Clearly, this poses a problem of its own. Evading this regime, and even more so, overthrowing it, via the prioritisation of pure difference will inevitably mean that defining/pinning down the latter must also be elusive. Since the unity that identities consist of is always essentially artificial and in any case distortive, it must, therefore, be avoided at all costs. How, then, can we think of it in a meaningful and coherent way? While we cannot expect to tie pure difference down to a specific and fixed notional content, we

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[163] G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition,* op. cit.

[164] It is for this reason that Western philosophy had rushed to supress the category of simulacra, either by rejecting them as erroneous (rationalists, Cartesians, and others), or by treating them as purely negative and seeking to assimilate them into a higher form via a dialectic (Hegelians) for they represented a threat to identities; they are ostensibly identical with them but they (can) also have an unmediated, and therefore autonomous (with regard to the 'original' identity) existence. See: D. Smith, 'The concept of the simulacrum: Deleuze and the overturning of Platonism', *Continental Philosophy Review*, Vol. 38, Issue 1-2, April 2005, pp. 89-123.

[165] Indeed, similar conclusions can be derived from Derrida's treatment of identity as self-presence (although the two are not identical, either). However, Deleuze's more expansive focus on identity (explained by his inclination towards metaphysics) was deemed more relevant here but we shall return to Derrida's perspective in the next subsection.

should try to understand it as a quasi-agent that is itself always in internal self-differing. As such, and following Nietzsche and his repudiation of the theorisation of being (which, both he and Deleuze would agree, should be replaced with a notion of becoming), its existence is always transitory and temporary, always-already entwined in the ever-expanding web of becoming. Difference in itself, then, can only be known either through its actions, as a force of decentring and divergence within systems of representation, or can be inferred through the effects of its suppression. Its methods and its produced outcomes, however, are not fixed and therefore cannot be predetermined in the abstract.[166]

Given, however, the elusive and abstract character of the concept of difference in itself, it might seem unclear how it could contribute to any positive undertaking such as a critique of HE. Yet, this project argues that its positive potential lies in the critical analysis of representational phenomena. It can, at once, shed light on the suppression of representational alterity (or, in other words, of the Other of given identities) and expose the artificial foundations of all -seemingly stable and self-sufficient- identities. More specifically, this would refer, in our case, to the understanding and use of 'happiness' in HE literature. It is the contention of this project that HE conceptualisations of happiness are carried out in ways that betray a certain anxiety to preclude even the possibility of acknowledging the potential effects of pure difference. As we saw in our review of literature, such considerations are reduced to brief immanent reflections (typically exhausted in the discussion of the reliability of the measure, and, at best, of its internal validity) that are largely 'ceremonial'. More commonly, studies like that of Ott,[167] or that of Francis, Robbins, and White will choose an off-the-shelf operationalisation (in their case Cantril's survey and the Oxford Happiness Inventory, respectively) without devoting any space to analyse the conceptual underpinnings

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[166] This synopsis synthesises various disparate parts of Deleuze's thought, a summary of which can be found in G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, op. cit., esp. Conclusion.
[167] J. Ott, 'Good Governance and Happiness in Nations: Technical Quality Precedes Democracy and Quality Beats Size', *Journal of Happiness Studies*, Vol. 11, Issue 3, pp. 353-368.

of their decision, much less the identity of happiness and whether it allows for pure difference.[168] Lastly, studies may attempt to bypass such considerations completely by framing their theses explicitly in terms of SWB. Thus, whatever the technical difficulties with its operationalisation may be, they can at least claim convincingly that the identification of their key concepts is fairly uncontroversial. Nevertheless, this too is rarely trouble free. Mentzakis and Moro, for instance, explore the contentious relationship between income and SWB, however, even within their own paper they use 'happiness' interchangeably with SWB.[169] Yet, even if they were cautious and stuck with using SWB throughout their paper, their conclusions would still be liable to be taken up by other HE scholars to refer to happiness. The problem, thus, remains in all observed scenarios. It should be noted that all three studies were chosen at random from a myriad of similar ones, they are clearly indicative of dominant trends in HE scholarship. Regrettably, this comes as no surprise, for if a study were to acknowledge the effects of pure difference it would lay bare the shaky groundwork of any narrow definition of happiness. Indeed, a conception of happiness that would be open to the play of difference does not lend itself to fixed definitions; these would have required, at a minimum, a fixable and unitary identity.

Moreover, such an acknowledgment would also undermine the claim of scientific status (and, more specifically, that of exact scientificity) that many HE scholars make so ardently, as established in Chapter 2. This façade of scientificity is, in effect, predicated upon the idea that there can be a stable and precise identity of happiness and, therefore, a corresponding definition that shares these attributes and, thus, in turn, enables robust conceptualisations and operationalisations. When these are put into question, the whole edifice risks crumbling into dust. This is particularly the case with HE approaches that are based on a strict and

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[168] L. Francis, M. Robbins, and A. White, 'Correlation between Religion and Happiness: A Replication', *Psychological Reports*, Vol. 92, Issue 1, 2003, pp. 51-52.

[169] E. Mentzakis, and M. Moro, 'The poor, the rich and the happy: Exploring the link between income and subjective well-being', *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, Vol. 38, Issue 1, 2009, pp. 147-158.

apriori determination of the notional content (or at best of its contours) of 'happiness' on the side of the researcher.[170] Approaches that opt, instead, to rely on self-reported happiness usually leave it up to subjects to decide for themselves for a working, if only implicit, definition of happiness.[171] They could be seen as sidestepping the issue raised here. To be sure, this methodology is more compatible with the notional multiplicities that a conception of happiness that welcomes pure difference should be open to. However, it too, ultimately, is not immune to the criticisms that may be raised on the above basis. On the one hand, as we saw, using subjective happiness alone is no guarantee that the collected data will not be interpreted (by researchers and the general audience alike) in a way that seeks to create a unitary narrative that prioritises any specific notion of happiness. To the contrary, this is typically the case as evidenced by the fact that, to the knowledge of this author, no study of this category differentiates among responses given in the context of the same survey; all responses, ultimately, feed in into a single and essentially unitary concept. On the other hand, it would also be wrong to assume that subjects respond as if they operate in a cultural vacuum and can freely assemble a meaningful and, at the same time, original (in the sense of being external to the false unity of any one identity 'happiness' may take) notion of happiness. Obviously, the latter is a broader point of critique that relates to a variety of factors that exceed the scope of HE. Consequently, and, as it pertains to HE, it should mainly catalyse changes in the interpretation of evidence collected on the above basis. In particular, it should no longer be considered acceptable to treat such evidence as homogeneous and, as a consequence, to posit parity between their aggregation (via some 'translation' of data into a metric) and a concept of aggregate happiness. In a nutshell, then, research designs should respect the play of pure difference both at the stage of schematising the research question

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[170] This is exemplified in cognitivist and adaptationist approaches (as discussed in 2.1) but it by no means is exclusive to them as, ultimately, all non-self-report based studies come with preconceived unitary notions of happiness.
[171] As we have seen, approaches from all categories of scholarship rely on such tools, but they are nearly ubiquitous in needs-based theories (see 2.1).

and at that of analysing and interpreting the collected input of their studies (be it via surveys, interviews, and other). We shall look into how that could be achieved in the next chapter.

As for approaches based on predetermined notions of happiness,[172] while inherently inimical to the play of pure difference, they should not be discarded *en masse* because of the problems we have identified thus far. Nor, of course, would it be sensible to suggest that their methodologies be replicated and only corrected with a 'different' and/or 'improved' notion of the operative identity (and definition) of happiness. For, inasmuch as they are structured around a more or less simplified and unitary notion of happiness that is inherently at odds with notional multiplicity (our desideratum), they are *de facto* antagonistic to such a notion; these methodologies depend on a quantifiable metric of happiness that can be averaged, aggregated, and so forth. Rather, these approaches should acknowledge that what is being measured and calculated amounts to a limited and problematic snapshot of happiness, and, that, arguably, some of the calculatory steps that are -so often- taken are unwarranted and should be abandoned altogether.[173]

Overall, however, a HE informed by the understanding of happiness as a multidimensional spectrum of identities that is open to pure difference (rather than being built to preclude it, as is the state of HE currently) would entail multifarious changes. The new conceptions of happiness that would emerge will resist narrow definitions and/or modellings of happiness. In turn, the -currently pervasive- simplistic (mis)interpretations of correlations of such concepts will no longer be tenable. Instead, this new phase will call for an increased emphasis on qualitative research and some of the most ambitious aims of current

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[172] The most obvious example would be needs-based approaches and advocates of QoL composite measures.
[173] Examples include, as mentioned, the aggregation, comparison, and more complex statistical processing of incommensurable data. It should be noted that this does not amount to a blanket rejection of those methodological tools. Indeed, we shall explore potential uses for them in the later subsections of Chapter 4.

scholarship will have to be rethought and even abandoned, for its fruition depends on the

unwarranted reliance on the type of quantitative methodologies that rely existentially

specifically on the problematic understanding of identity adopted by current HE. A more

detailed discussion of the practical implications of this move will take place in the next

chapter. We shall now move on to consider the next category of limitations that the implicit

theories of knowledge that predominate in HE impose on the field.

3.1.2: Meaning

The stability of HE postulates is undermined further on the next (and higher) level of

abstraction, that of meaning. On that level, Derrida strikes a similar, albeit not identical,

chord to the one of Deleuze that was described in the previous subsection.[174] He shares

Deleuze's concerns regarding the impossibility of pure and stable identities and even

sustains his own version of a difference without positive terms, which is always caught up in

an undecidable relationship with identity (différance).[175] He traces the inception of this way

of thinking in the work of the early structuralists but holds that neither they nor later

structuralists fully realised its implications. In fact, he stresses that the whole of Western

philosophy, particularly starting with Aristotle's logic of identity (with its three entailed

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[174] While identity and meaning are intertwined and typically get attached to one another, they should not be confounded. Meaning is the notional substance that every identity consists of, and identity is, effectively, the name of that substance. It is usually the case that we identify and/or cognise an entity (be it physical, grammatical or otherwise) by its identity first, whereas meaning is, at best, only secondary and is usually implied or derived by the entity's context and its differential relation with it and/or its effects. But even when this order is reversed or not at all possible (for example, in the case of a discovery of a phenomenon that has yet to be named), this reversal is considered a temporary phase that will be ended once an identity is devised. The priority of identity over meaning results from the assumption that when identities become known or apparent via our senses, they bear a degree of immediacy and fullness that meaning lacks. Meaning is, instead, dependent on thoughts, and they, in turn, are dependent on elaborate linguistic constructs. Identities are thus typically prioritised over meaning for they are perceived as points of pure presence whereas meaning is seen as less pure due to the ostensibly long chain of mediation.

[175] As Bell puts it, Derrida's différance is 'pure difference' in the sense that it (indefinitely) delays the coming of identity, and, more importantly, it pollutes it with traces of otherness. In: J. Bell, *Philosophy at the Edge of Chaos: Gilles Deleuze and the Philosophy of Difference* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 28-30.

laws),[176] when it was not actively seeking to suppress it, was -at best- ignoring it. Suppressors of difference typically deploy mythologies of pure origin or rely on points of allegedly unmediated (and thus pure) presence, to resist any scepticism. Derrida's deconstructions were at large an attempt to expose, on the one hand, that there are no pure origins and, on the other, that presence is always mediated (by language, if not by anything else) and, therefore, is doomed to always be originarily impure. The stage where these suppressive techniques operate is that of meaning and it is for this reason that Derrida's work focuses on it.

Meaning is always found to be lacking concrete foundations, and instead, is shown to be based on contingent and unacknowledged choices. More specifically, Derrida traces claims about origins or first points that underpin Western metaphysics and finds that they themselves are also originated: every origin has an origin and is, therefore, part of an endless chain, rather than being an initiator (or the original component) of any one, as Williams puts it.[177] [178] Since the distantiation, or fall from the point of alleged origin, is treated as a loss both axiologically and in terms of purity, origins also become goals to be achieved. In the end, the distinction between origin and goal becomes blurry and even then, origins are shown to be nothing more than projections of what is supposed to follow from them in the (normative or descriptive) eyes of the writer/speaker/narrator. With regard to presence, whereby texts strive to find their supposedly purest point of access to reality or 'the truth', Derrida seeks to illustrate how complex mediations (not least language) are always at play and, thus, all

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[176] This refers to the laws of identity, contradiction, and of the excluded middle, as they were formulated in Aristotelian metaphysics (In: Aristotle, *Metaphysics* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1971), esp. Book IV).

[177] J. Williams, *Understanding Post-structuralism* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2005/2014), p. 32.

[178] This is a recurring observation for him. See, for instance in: J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, op. cit., p. 65. Trace is identified as the absolute origin which amounts, for Derrida to saying that 'there is no absolute origin' (In Ibid.); trace could be said to embody precisely this impossibility of a first point or of an origin. Indeed, as Guillemette and Cossette put it: 'it is the non-origin of origin'. (In L. Guillemette, and J. Cossette, 'Deconstruction and Difference', Signo, 2006. Available at: http://www.signosemio.com/derrida/deconstruction-and-differance.asp [Last accessed: 24 August 2016].

assertions constructed upon such seemingly secure grounds must always be illusive. In the context of HE, self-reporting is the most conspicuous example of that. It is treated by many (see 2.1) as the absolute (and perhaps sole) genuine point of presence. Indeed, even cautious reviews of such measures, such as that of Gröppel-Klein, posit that self-reporting provides our only access to the emotions of a subject since identifying complex secondary emotions indirectly is deemed impossible.[179] However, such accounts ignore the fact that language is a necessary and distortive mediator both within the subject (in the process of translating an emotion into quantitative/qualitative feedback) and in the translation of the subject's data by the researcher. Finally, and on a more fundamental level, meaning in language is constituted for all concepts in terms of their reciprocal delimitations (e.g. white/black, male/female, being/nothing, transcendent/immanent, and other) where one of the two terms is always privileged and governs the other. Derrida aimed to deconstruct those binary oppositions but not with an eye to suspending them conclusively or to merely overturn their implicit power relations.[180] Instead, he wanted to illustrate the importance of an unrelenting treatment of texts that makes explicit the arbitrary hierarchies and mediations that are intrinsic to all of them. This shall propel us to elaborate, on the one hand, defence mechanisms (in light of the inescapable 'conceptual violence') and, on the other, ways to take advantage of this new-found looseness of linguistic structures via 'play'.

Derridean play implies the recognition that meaning will always be produced differentially in signifying systems and, as such, it will always, necessarily, be neither final nor stable. Play is at once descriptive of a state (structures as *having* play) and of a possibility (structures as *enabling* play). The latter refers to the interpretations and deductions that one may carry out and is what renders the project of deconstruction a twofold one: negative, to the extent that it

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[179] A. Gröppel-Klein, 'No Motion without Emotion: Getting Started with Hard Facts on a Soft Topic', *GfK Marketing Intelligence Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2014, pp. 8-15.

[180] J. Derrida, *Positions* (Chicago, US: The University of Chicago Press, 1972/1981), pp. 41-42. Derrida, after all, concedes that they are ultimately inescapable and that some form of hierarchy will always re-establish itself eventually.

exposes and criticises 'authoritative' and 'final' statements and interpretations (given that structures *have* play) but, crucially, a positive one, too, in the sense that it opens texts up to new perspectives and to potentially endless creative readings (given that structures *enable* play). This affirmative sense of play is what makes deconstruction a productive critical tool and, therefore, useful for this project not only in order to help us criticise current HE scholarship, but also in order to seek ways of contributing to its improvement.

As we have already seen in 3.1.1 (and in more depth in Chapter 2), HE scholars are self-entrapped into using sterile notions of the identity of happiness that betray a certain scholarly hostility towards the potential effects of acknowledging the play of difference. Almost inevitably, this same insularity is also observed and is, perhaps, even magnified at the level of meaning where it is more pronounced given meanings' more intricate and elaborate character. Therefore, it is in the sphere of the discussion of the meaning of HE's key terms, and, in particular, of happiness itself, that notional inconsistencies and erroneous constructs are most easily exposed. Moreover, the prevalent assumption that happiness can be quantified with relatively negligible difficulties entails that it must also be isolable, which requires other convenient simplifications (such as, for instance, conceptualisations based on unidimensional understandings of happiness) that introduce further problems. We reviewed the most important of them in Chapter 2: Indicatively, the conflation between ephemeral happiness and the 'life satisfaction' sense of the word,[181] or the comparison and/or aggregation of happiness data from different eras and areas that presupposes (in a *de facto* manner) that the meaning of terms is not at all contingent upon their historical and cultural context.

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[181] And for that matter, the liberal use of several terms (or of the responses to questions of different research designs) as interchangeable is another example.

However, even when a study acknowledges some of the above-mentioned problematic modelisations of happiness (with respect to meaning), and, indeed, these represent a growing share of literature, scholars appear to be unconcerned with deconstruction's central message. Namely, that each and every term is constructed upon shaky foundations and, more specifically, on an artificial dipole which is inhabited by unfixed hierarchies and which is differentially contingent upon all other terms (which, incidentally, also face the same predicament). And while this applies to all meanings and discourses, HE is immensely affected due to the particularly intricate nature of its subject matter. As stated above, deconstruction does not claim for itself the ability to stand outside language or to conclusively remove the artificial binaries upon which language rests so as to access that which is not artificial. That would merely reintroduce the logic of the metaphysics of presence through the back door. Instead, it seeks to bring those limitations to light in order to enable us to work with and through them. This is precisely what we venture to do here with the focus being on the concept of happiness and its equivalents.[182]

Firstly, one has to consider what is implied by the term 'happiness' (in HE literature) on the most elementary level. With it, for example, it is taken for granted not only that happiness exists, but that this signifier refers to a very specific and unitary emotional state (hence the assumptions of a stable identity that were reviewed in the previous subsection). However, there is little that would support such strong claims. Götz, for instance, makes a convincing case that 'happiness in general' does not exist and sets out to trace different philosophical approaches to happiness which lead to several distinct conceptions of it.[183] Similar projects have been undertaken by others, who look at conceptions of happiness as contentment, as

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[182] The focus is on this term because of its self-evident centrality in practically all non-physiological HE studies. Crucially, scholarship that does not appear, on surface, to be directly reliant upon a set definition of happiness (most notably objective-factors approaches), is also affected to an extent, as we shall see later in this section.
[183] I. Götz, *Conceptions of Happiness*, revised ed. (Lanham, US: University Press of America, 2009).

virtue, as joy, to cite only a few.[184] In addition, the more empirical life sciences seem to square with the idea that what is termed 'happiness' in reality refers to more than one emotional state.[185] Interestingly, a large number of HE scholars themselves seem to acknowledge that too, when they provide their own (and consistently different, even if slightly so) working definitions of happiness in the prolegomena of their studies. Further, as discussed in 2.1, several languages have more than one word for happiness which clearly refer to different notions of it, or even to completely distinct emotional states. And yet, HE scholars deem adequate to simply pick one of the conceptions and hastily move on. Alternatively, they resort to arbitrarily selected itemised accounts of happiness (of the QoL type) that, however, naturally suffer from the same ills. Their conclusions and theses, after all, refer to (or are interpreted as referring to) the one general happiness and not to the qualified and ultimately private notion they have been working with. In practice, this conjoining of heterogeneous and diverse concepts under the umbrella of just one, ends up enabling other scholars (with their own or, in any case, different conceptions of happiness) to work upon their investigations, or to draw comparisons with them, which further compounds the problems of conflation and misrepresentation.[186]

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[184] One does not have to go back to the ancients to find a cleavage between different conceptions of happiness. Utilitarians, who are widely considered to be the modern precursors of HE, disagreed about whether all happiness is the same (Bentham) and whether we should separate pleasures qualitatively (Mill). Mill not only argued that intellectual pleasures ('higher pleasures') are superior to physical ones ('lower pleasures'), but even distinguished between contentment and happiness, favouring the latter (J. Mill, *On Liberty, Utilitarianism and Other Essays* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005)). More recently, several HE scholars have explored the different conceptions of happiness. Indicatively, Ong considers happiness to be a mosaic of many component parts and looks into their facets and functions (In: A. Ong, 'On the Measurement and Mismeasurement of Happiness: Contemporary Theories and Methodological Directions'. In A. Dutt, and B. Radcliff (eds.), op. cit., ch. 2), whereas others put forward the more traditional (even if overly simplistic) division between hedonistic and eudemonic happiness (Indicatively: E. Deci, and R. Ryan, 'Hedonia, Eudaimonia, And Well-being: An Introduction', *Journal of Happiness Studies*, Vol. 9, Issue 1, 2008, pp. 1-11).
[185] Seligman (In: M. Seligman, *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfilment* (New York, US: Free Press, 2002)), perhaps the most influential figure in the recent flourishing of the field of positive psychology, maintains that there are three distinct types of happiness (which lead to a pleasant, an engaged, and a meaningful life, respectively) and others argue for a variety of types ranging from two to more than ten. For a brief overview of the relevant literature in psychology, see: B. Moore, 'Flow Theory and the Paradox of Happiness'. In J. Sinnott (ed.), *Positive Psychology: Advances in Understanding Adult Motivation* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2013), esp. pp. 35-38.
[186] These problems have gained some recognition in recent years but all attempts to remedy them invariably fail for they unwarrantedly assume the translatability of data (e.g. via scale

Secondly, following our discussion of deconstruction's insight, it is clear that happiness cannot be exempted from the play of différance (or of supplementarity), which partakes in the construction of all meanings.[187] Nonetheless, the term often (as we saw) takes its meaning from a crude bipole of the general form: happiness-sadness. Indeed, this was first done explicitly in the work of the proto-HE scholar Jeremy Bentham and his felicific calculus.[188] More specifically, Bentham, being an ethical hedonist, deemed necessary to determine the net moral value of any act by calculating whether it increased or reduced aggregate happiness. In his complex system of weighting (his weighting factors included intensity, duration, fecundity, and other), he ultimately sought to sum up 'hedons' and subtract 'dolors' (units of happiness and pain, respectively) to reach a conclusion about any given act's net effect. In essence, happiness and sadness were treated as being of the same substance. And while Bentham's calculus has long been abandoned, his underlying logic remains at large at the core of current HE scholarship.

In particular, happiness is typically treated as the positive territory of a spectrum that ranges between absolute sadness, at its lowest point, and absolute happiness (or bliss), at its highest. This logic is most clearly evident in the -predominant in HE- self-assessment surveys (both in the format of a questionnaire and an interview, and both in general well-being questions and in domain satisfaction ones), wherein subjects are called upon to choose which number of a scale best describes their happiness (or unhappiness) levels. Scale indications typically read something along the lines of '1=very unhappy, 2=unhappy,

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transformations). See: T. Jonge, 'Methods to Increase the Comparability in Cross-National Surveys, Highlight on the Scale Interval Method and the Reference Distribution Method'. In G. Brule, and F. Maggino (eds.), *Metrics of Subjective Well-Being: Limits and Improvements* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017).

[187] For instance in: J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, op. cit., p. 215.

[188] In: J. Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Mineola, US: Dover Publications, 1789/2007). It would, of course, be unfair to judge Bentham on the same grounds as we do with HE as his goals were different and, at the very least, he offered conceptual clarity and honesty unmatched by most HE approaches.

3=neither happy nor unhappy, 4=quite happy, and 5=very happy' in the case of 5-point

scales and similarly, albeit with more nuanced steps, in the case of scales with more points

(usually seven, ten, or eleven).[189] In any case, happiness and unhappiness represent for most

of HE scholarship a linear binary, and are, therefore, considered to be of the same substance

like Bentham's 'hedons' and 'dolors' were.

Nevertheless, no matter how commonsensical it may sound, it is a huge and rather

problematic assumption to make. Given, in addition, that it is made implicitly, it evades the

need for substantiation, and, ultimately, eludes serious scrutiny even though there are clear

problems with it. Consider, for instance, the multi-dimensionality of happiness, as it was

established earlier in this subsection. If happiness in reality refers to (and/or consists of) a

variety of affects, even within the same temporal frame of reference (e.g. that of 'overall life',

and not of a momentary feeling of pleasure or pain), it does not seem very plausible that

there is just one unhappiness that corresponds to them all. Further, such a logic is what

enables and facilitates the drawing of paradoxical conclusions. For instance, if we

hypothesise a sample A where one half of the subjects lives in theoretical bliss and the other

half lives in theoretical absolute sadness and a sample B where all the subjects report being

in the middle of the spectrum, we would be given the misleading picture that, on average,

samples A and B are in a similar state. Such comparisons may appear simplistic or crude but

are typically being made in HE or, more broadly, in the public sphere using HE observations

(for example in the comparison of mean 'happiness' figures for two countries, or of cross-

sectional studies carried out at two different points of time in the same population). Even if

we set aside the serious problems with the process of the mapping of emotions onto scales

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[189] The above-presented scale is among these that one comes most often across in HE literature. For instance, Sirgy looks at several countries that were sampled for the Asian Barometer which uses that 5-point scale (In M. J. Sirgy, *The Psychology of Quality of Life: Hedonic Well-Being, Life Satisfaction, and Eudaimonia*, 2nd ed. (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2012), ch. 27, section 2) and McDowell, similarly, comes across the same scale in surveying WHO's attempt to devise a QoL measure (In I. McDowell, *Measuring Health: A guide to rating scales and questionnaires*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 619-622.

(especially with relation to the upper and lower bounds, as discussed in Ch. 2), it is clear that the cardinal understanding of a continuum between unhappiness and happiness is problematic and ultimately based on little else but its practicality.[190] Thereby, for HE scholars who rely on this construct, the laborious project of defining happiness need not go on forever. Their implicit conceptualisation of happiness, whereby it is simply treated as being the opposite of sadness, and, conveniently, as being of the same substance (merely of a higher quantity of it than sadness) and, therefore, can be treated as a ratio variable, is an ostensibly stable one while also being congruent with conventional wisdom. Indeed, popular opinion may perhaps categorise happiness and unhappiness as opposites. But it is also the case that common sense definitions of happiness and sadness invoke specifically positive (in the sense of autonomous/non hetero-defined) feelings; no dictionary defines happiness as the opposite of sadness and vice versa and few people, if any, would describe happiness as the emotion that appears when no sadness is present.[191] However, this is at odds with the unhappiness-happiness continuum approach. Scholars from the life sciences, in addition, hold that the positive field of responses should not be understood as merely the opposite of the negative as, at a minimum, there exists a clearly separate, neutral-like range of states that is pretty distinct.[192] Lack of anger and fear, for instance, does not guarantee that more positive emotions will appear and vice versa: lack of happiness, joy, contentment, and of similar positive emotions does not entail that intensely sad/painful feelings will necessarily take over. In other words, the absolute absence of the one, does not guarantee some presence of the other and, therefore, the two cannot be considered binary opposites, as is the case with

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[190] One could counter-argue that subjects are aware of the various dimensions of happiness and they provide an average of them by subconsciously calculating a mean level of happiness. This too, however, is laden with huge assumptions. We have seen in Ch. 2 how the self-awareness of individuals is problematic when it comes to assessing their happiness, especially when this involves recalling previous states (so as to provide a response for their broader quality of life, as opposed to their momentary state) and how this is further aggravated by their attempt to quantify it which was shown to be affected even by the scale of choice of each researcher.

[191] That is still the case even if, ultimately, all words take their meaning from their differential relations to other words, as we have seen. This dynamic, and, in particular, the relations between binary opposites (which are pertinent here), play a key part in the constitutive phase of a term, whereas later on the term is understood as autonomous and as floating -seemingly- free from such constraints.

[192] For instance, in: R. Harrington, *Stress, Health and Well-Being: Thriving in the 21st Century* (Belmont, US: Wadsworth, 2012), pp. 465-467, and in: M. Seligman, *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfilment*, op. cit.

actual continuums (e.g. temperature, humidity, darkness and light as perceived by the human eye, and similar).

To complicate things further, and as Pawelski argues, research in the life sciences also provides good evidence that happiness and unhappiness might, in fact, be sub-contrary opposites.[193] In other words, it is possible that the two may co-exist, or, to be more precise, that forces of both happiness and 'unhappiness' can operate at the same time on the same individual and the resultant force can be happiness on one domain and unhappiness on another with no satisfying way of calculating a hypothetical 'overall' state; especially not one that can be put into a single cardinal and ratio-level metric. And while we have seen in Chapter 2 how that may be explained, in part, by differences in the cultural contexts (for instance, in East Asia it could be seen as an effect of the there-dominant dialectical understanding of selfhood and happiness), it appears that the co-occurrence of positive and negative emotions is a universal phenomenon, completely independent of culture.[194] [195] It should also be noted that these observations resonate with a rich philosophical tradition that treats happiness and unhappiness as intertwined and/or as mutually dependent where unhappiness is seen as didactic (happiness as inconceivable in absentia of unhappiness) or as a precondition (suffering and lack create a fertile ground for needs and wants, the fulfilment of which will, eventually, bring about happiness) to happiness.[196] Interestingly, Derrida himself expressed a rare view which is fully congruent with the ambivalent character of the happiness-unhappiness nexus when he stated that for him it is the same 'to feel joy

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[193] J. Pawelski, 'Happiness and its opposites'. In S. David, I. Boniwell, and A. Conley Ayers (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Happiness* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 328-329.

[194] Researchers have found, for instance, that both Americans and Japanese may have ostensibly conflicting emotions and the only significant difference is with the kinds of situations that trigger this co-occurrence (In: Y. Miyamoto, Y. Uchida, and P. Ellsworth, 'Culture and mixed emotions: Co-occurrence of positive and negative emotions in Japan and the United States', *Emotion*, Vol. 10, Issue 3, Jun 2010, pp. 404-415).

[195] J. Russell, and J. Carroll, 'On the Bipolarity of Positive and Negative Affect', *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 125, No. 1, 1999, pp. 3-30.

[196] See for instance: J. Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Putting Ancient Wisdom and Philosophy to the Test of Modern Science* (London, UK: Arrow Books, 2006), esp. ch. 7.

and to weep over the death that awaits', implying that even his unhappy moments are worthy, and perhaps even satisfactory (especially in the 'quality of life' sense), as affirmations of life.[197] Undoubtedly, this is testament to the complexity of the matter in hand and underscores the futility of looking at it from a unidimensional perspective both when this is done by calculating arbitrary 'resultant forces' of happiness and by relying on implicit aggregations that the subjects themselves are expected to carry out. In essence, HE faces the impossible task of having to deal with a concept that is constructed upon a binary opposition when it is clearly the case (as we have illustrated) that this binarism does not hold for more than one reason; something which fully resonates with Derrida's more abstract discussion of différance.

A final objection that arises from this 'juxtaposition' of the insights of deconstruction and HE, concerns the ex-post analysis of data that have been collected over different periods and among different cultures. It is clearly unwarranted and, therefore, no longer viable. Indeed, we have already established the apparent problems with this practice (in 2.2), but it is the deconstructive reading that goes to the heart of the problem. If meaning is not ahistorical and if, moreover, its construction is local, contingent, and based upon inherently unstable and -ultimately- artificial binaries, then the ex-post synchronic discussion of happiness data that takes place in HE is destined to always fail. In addition, these binaries do not merely serve as the condition for the creation of meaning in HE, which as we saw is inescapable anyway, but represent the main logic that permeates the vast majority of current research.[198] As such, deconstruction does not only help us identify the precise source of conceptual

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[197] J. Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 51-52.
[198] The remaining minority is composed mostly of objective factors approaches which are, indeed, exempt from the objection raised here, to the extent that they avoid relying upon an implicit binarist happiness in the formulation of their hypotheses. Even though these should generally be affected less (vis-à-vis self-reporting approaches), fully avoiding the problem is impossible (for reasons mentioned) and, therefore, they, too, can benefit from the approach that we shall advance in Chapter 4.

problems but it should also be our starting point if we are to readdress them with an eye to escaping the logic of binarism. We shall set out to do just that in the following chapter.

3.1.3: Discourse

We have, so far, focused on the microscopic level of knowledge, namely that of identity and meaning. And while both are key in the formation of knowledge discourses, the 'whole' of knowledge is greater (and, in any case, different) than the sum of its sub-atomic and atomic parts. In this subsection, we shall concern ourselves with the broader level of discourse and see how it may impose constraints on HE, as well as with potential ways of minimising the effect of such constraints. More specifically, what is at issue here are the -often implicit- rules that determine which statements could possibly be considered within a discourse, or, in other words, what Foucault would call the episteme: 'the strategic apparatus which permits of separating out from among all the statements which are possible those that will be acceptable within […] a field of scientificity, and which it is possible to say are true or false'.[199] [200] Importantly, as he went on to add, the episteme is merely 'the 'apparatus' which makes possible the separation, not of the true from the false, but of what may from what may not be characterised as scientific'.[201] Current HE studies, however, spurred by a misconceived positivist spirit, ignore and/or actively suppress all such discussion, something which inevitably impacts the quality of scholarship.

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[199] Like with most of his other concepts, Foucault used the 'episteme' with slightly different senses and connotations at different times. If not explicitly stated otherwise, we shall use it in the sense defined here.
[200] M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York, US: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. 197.
[201] Ibid.

Foucault, to be sure, was not the first to call attention to those problematic aspects of knowledge creation and legitimation. He follows a rich tradition that, in modern times, started with Bachelard and Koyre and their challenges to positivism that were later taken up by many followers such as Feyerabend, Kuhn, and Canguilhem. While diverse, the critiques of all of them shared the following observations and tenets: Science progresses in a fragmentary or non-continuous way; it can have more than one 'direction' (as opposed to the idea that science advances steadily); its former tendencies cannot be explained by the scientific process itself (experiments, cumulative advances in theory, and so on); and finally, and perhaps most importantly, theoretical acquis are no longer to be considered as safe and stable as they hitherto were, for the ensuing paradigms may overturn them.

Of the thinkers who followed and extended this line of thought, Foucault, with his focus on the structural constraints of thought and emphasis on how these are inextricable from all knowledge formations, sought to uncover the logic of the rules that govern them and, therefore, stands out as the most relevant to our project for his level of analysis matches the purposes of this subsection.[202] This is not to say, however, that none of the aforementioned thinkers touched upon those issues but only that they were not as central as they were for Foucault.[203] Thus, whenever in his work, subjects, concepts, and particular theories come under scrutiny (mostly in 'The Order of Things' but elsewhere too), the scrutiny takes such a form that it, on the one hand, marginalises the subject and, on the other, eschews all hermeneutic tendencies. He is neither interested in uncovering the final truth (that the constraints that the epistemes impose allegedly distort), nor does he deem it possible. As for

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[202] In particular, the Foucault of 'The Order of Things' (op. cit.) and of 'The Archaeology of Knowledge' (op. cit.).

[203] Thus, whereas Canguilhem concentrated on specific concepts from the life sciences (e.g. normality, reflex, and similar) or dealt with pervading historical logics in the same fields (such as vitalism), Bachelard focused on the periods of epistemological breaks and more specifically on their effect upon concepts. Kuhn, on his part, had the same focus but was more concerned about the meta level (e.g. that of paradigms and grand theories) and the explicit mechanics of paradigm shifts (for instance by identifying their key actors, as opposed to seeking the conditions of their possibility), and Koyre was preoccupied with the contextualisation of scientific paradigms.

his marginalisation of the subject, it effectively means that he sees the narrativisation of individual actors, deeds, and documents as problematic (for they are external and anachronistic) and is more interested, instead, in what made the emergence of these actors and/or the articulation of those statements possible in the first place. This is so, not because he subscribes to a hard structuralist position which deems the subject irrelevant but because he is more interested in the constitutive constraints that limit what any freely acting subject can and cannot argue.[204] His belief that these constraints are ever-present (albeit always transforming) and inescapable explain, among other things, why he also avoids the intellectual move of assuming a privileged position that would have been the prerequisite for any hermeneutic project.

What is, however, the precise nature of these constraints? As explained above, while they determine the conditions of possibility of concepts and theories and are, therefore, transcendental (in the Kantian sense), they are historical and contingent too, unlike the Kantian a prioris. Naturally, constraints include semantic, grammatical, and linguistic ones (not least those pertaining to identity and meaning that were discussed in the first two sub-sections), but Foucault's focus was on a more abstract level,[205] namely on the discursive field: from its most basic units (statements) to its totality.[206] More specifically, for him, these constraints provide the answer to the question of what it is that renders some statements or theories unthinkable (that is, they are not even considered) for one mode of thinking, while,

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[204] This is not to say, either, that he contends that subjects can act completely independently of the complex structures within which they live and operate but, rather, only that his choice of focus does not entail a negation of freedom. We shall return to that in the following section. Also, see: J. Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[205] This was due to, in part, his belief that causality works mostly in the reverse way (from the general to the specific, so that, for example, the rules of a discursive formation determine what statements can be made and not vice versa). The notion of 'episteme' conveys precisely that. See, indicatively: M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences,* op. cit., p. 183.

[206] It should be underlined that 'totality' here does not imply a system characterised by any kind of phenomenological unity, be it of concepts, of methods, or even of theories, but rather one of dispersion between specific coordinates. This is also reflected in Foucault's concept of a 'discursive field', even if this idea was not always pronounced in his earlier historical studies (wherein the focus was more on unifying elements).

the following one might embrace them as indisputable and necessary truths. One can think of plenty of such examples from the positive sciences (such as in astronomy and biology) apart from those offered in the historical inquiries of Foucault. However, if, as we have argued, it is no longer taken for granted that knowledge is a continuous and cumulative process, then the above question cannot be framed simply as a matter of yet-undiscovered evidence or yet-untested hypotheses. Such an answer, after all, would not be able to explain why epistemic breaks do not only overturn theories but lead whole disciplines to their demise and/or bring about the genesis of new ones (as Foucault has repeatedly shown).

In Foucault's view, there are four types of rules that govern discursive formations which, in turn, delimit what can be considered within the confines of an episteme. First, there are rules for the formation of the objects of study.[207] The second category of rules depends on the enunciative modality of the potential statement maker. These in turn are determined firstly by who has the right to use the relevant mode of speech, secondly by the institutional site where the speech is made (one can easily imagine the differential weight that a statement would have if its origin was respectively: an article of a reputed scientific journal, a private practice, a not so well-respected laboratory, and so on), and, thirdly, the position of the statement maker vis-à-vis the object. Is the statement the conclusion of primary empirical research? Is it the result of abstract theoretical analysis? Is it a combination of the two? Or is it merely a restatement of previous studies that a teacher teaches to her students? Again, one can easily imagine the different weight and impact such statements can have, depending on the subject-object relation. The third category concerns the formation of concepts which, for Foucault, are specified by rules that pertain to how we treat the relations between

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[207] These depend firstly on the social norms whereby objects characterized as deviant or as worthy of attention are transferred from the natural order to the domain of the discursive formation. Secondly, they depend on who the authorities of delimitation are or, in other words, on who has the power to decide on an ad hoc basis if an object requires to be considered by a discursive formation. Finally, certain symptomatic properties may be enough, even if no social norms are broken, for one to be classified as an object of a discursive formation, subject to their position in what Foucault called grids of specification.

statements. The fourth, and final, category of rules regards the formation of what Foucault called strategies (new theories and/or themes that develop within a given discursive formation). It is this category which contrasts with most of the conventional accounts of the history of ideas which generally adopt the logic that theories develop from free chance encounters (of ideas, evidence, influences, and so on). Instead, Foucault holds that these encounters are, in fact, restricted and allowed only in very specific ways.[208]

Foucault did not think that these constitute an exhaustive list of rules such that one could predict or fully account for all produced knowledge if they had knowledge of the specifics of those four categories. For one, he emphasised the importance of the interconnections and the complex interactions between systems of rules of discursive formations.[209] But, more importantly, because a key factor at play in knowledge formation was excluded from his archaeologies (even if they foreshadowed it on many occasions), to wit, power. Indeed, Foucault conceded that his archaeologies intentionally omitted exploring the causality that brought about the transitions from one episteme to the next one, as well as their effects in time; archaeology was very much a synchronic analysis of systems even if it looked at different historical ones.[210] His move on to his genealogical phase was an attempt to supplement archaeology with a method which sought to fill the aforementioned gap and, thus, render his analysis properly diachronic.

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[208] Most importantly at the various points of diffraction, namely points where two or more statements that are both permitted by the rules of a given discursive formation and co-exist on the same level, that are, however, incompatible with one another. They thus represent a juncture of the discursive formation whereby a choice (either for a theoretical turn, or for the negation of all the alternatives (bar one)) is made necessary; one can recall one such example (cited in the Order of Things) in the case of the theory of Darwinian evolution which emerged at a point of diffraction in biology in light of the logical inconsistencies of Cuvier's fixism). But for a point of diffraction to be allowed in the first place, the economy of the discursive constellation must be favourable for the antitheses to come to light since the various discursive formations within a constellation are usually complementary to one another, they may develop relations that lead to the elimination of points of diffraction by way of hiding them or of supplying a working modus vivendi.
[209] For instance in: M. Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, op. cit., p. 66.
[210] M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, op. cit., pp. xii-xv.

While genealogy is not directly apposite to the scope of this project, for HE is a young field that has yet to see any serious epistemic turn,[211] it still is of some relevance here inasmuch as power appears to operate as the driving force behind epistemic change. In particular, if power drives change, it logically follows that it has a critical role to play in the more static phases too. Power, then, emerges as another one of the determinants of what can be articulated and, subsequently, attain the status of knowledge (scientific or not), representing a key factor that further corrupts and destabilises the alleged integrity and independence of discursive formations. Importantly, Foucauldian power refers to networks of relations and not to any one single actor that holds it absolutely (such as the state, a particular class, and so on) and is not only repressive but also, and perhaps more importantly, productive, too.[212] Delineating its precise impact upon discursive formations in a generalised and abstract manner would, therefore, clearly, be a very challenging, if not outright impossible, task and explains why, unlike with his archaeological method, Foucault never put forward, at least not in any expansive way, a general discussion of genealogy and only used it in the examination of specific power/knowledge regimes and practices.[213]

But how coherent, and ultimately useful for HE, is Foucault's archaeological framework as expounded in the Archaeology of Knowledge (henceforth AK)? To begin with, there are a number of ostensible difficulties. Firstly, as mentioned, the list of rules and of categories of rules, despite its rather formal presentation, is neither exhaustive and nor was it intended to

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[211] To the contrary, several alternative theories from the same or different disciplines co-exist and fight for supremacy in spite of the numerous 'points of diffraction'.

[212] Without the capitalist system, for instance, there would not be a need for classical economics (in Foucault's view) and, similarly, criminology would not exist if it were not for specific attitudes that the authorities have towards law and order.

[213] Regrettably, some scholars have taken his 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' essay (M. Foucault, *Language Counter-Memory Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, D. Bouchard (ed.) (Ithaca, US: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 139-164.) to be an outline of his genealogy and, therefore, equate his method with Nietzsche's, however, Foucault is careful not to, at any point, indicate that his essay amounts to anything more than a summary of Nietzsche's genealogy and not a statement of his own views (even though it cannot be denied that he, at least, had a strong sympathy for it). This is evidently the case if one observes that he makes no comments on views we know he disagreed with (such as Nietzsche's overreliance on psychological or even racial factors).

be. After all, Foucault himself did not use all of these categories in his preceding case studies, and he definitely did not rely on merely AK's categories with the onset of his genealogical phase (which almost coincided chronologically with the publication of the AK). Quite tellingly, the only time the archaeology appeared as such was in its most 'official' formulation, in the book dedicated exclusively to that purpose. Secondly, the rules are described in a rather vague manner and often overlap with one another. Consider, for example, the analysis of the rules governing the formation of new concepts. How unique to the formation of concepts (and not, say, of larger discursive units), are the fields of presence, concomitance, and memory? Or, is there not a clear overlap between rules determining authorities of delimitation and rules contingent on the enunciative modality of those who make a statement (discussed separately in the first and second category respectively)? As already mentioned, Foucault acknowledged that there is an overlap and that each rule is often contingent on a series of others and, that therefore, the relation between rules and end-result is not a straightforward one. It was, however, his best available recourse given his goals. What is perhaps the source of confusion is his choice of words, which, along with the formal tone that an exposition of 'rules' inevitably adds, gives the impression of a 'final' and definitive account of the determinants of discursive formations. However, the tone should be attributed more to stylistic vestiges of Foucault's earlier structuralism, than to his actual intentions. This is also evident by the fact that Foucault writes of categories of rules that, in turn, determine other rules (as opposed to them directly determining outcomes), the details of which are never filled in fully.

If the AK is not too specific and exhaustive, however, it opens itself to an obvious critique: that it is intentionally abstract and vague so as to become unfalsifiable and, therefore, is of little practical value, especially in relation to the concrete problems that the largely empirical field of HE is facing. This is a standard critique levelled against much of post-structuralist work, but the AK naturally attracts it even more due to its predictive undertones. Indeed,

given that Foucault never actually claimed for it the status of a definitive account of the rules that govern discursive formations with the capacity to make epistemic predictions, one could be left wondering where its value lies. It is the contention of this project that the AK's importance lies primarily on the novelty of some key ideas (parts of which appeared first in his preceding historical studies) and on its explanatory rather than predictive value, not as an austere set of rules or as a methodology, but, instead, as a radically new perspective. This perspective can be summarised as the emphasis on discontinuities and anomalies in the history of thought, the marginalisation of the role of the subject,[214] and the transition of the analysis of knowledge to the level of its infrastructure which is seen as imposing constraints on what can be thought. Taken together, these precepts lead to the highlighting of the contingency of knowledge, even when it is fortified behind a rhetoric of scientificity. Precisely for those reasons, a final line of critique of Foucault's actual archaeologies, that which focuses closely on and examines the empirical evidence (or lack thereof) he uses, misses the point.[215] Foucault did not seek to make empirical generalisations or to correct previously accepted empirical evidence like traditional historiographers would, but, rather, to put forward a new interpretative paradigm along the abovementioned lines. This is not to say that his historical work is beyond empirical testing. Indeed, his case studies can be discredited, to the extent that these critiques have substance, for they incorporate falsifiable elements.[216] Nonetheless, the core of the archaeological framework would be left intact even in such scenarios for its import does not hinge on the validity of its particular applications. This is why, in the opinion of this study, the archaeological perspective should be judged

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[214] And, similarly, the marginalisation of various aggregations of individual subjects, too, as opposed to thinkers that were considered earlier here (as precursors to the Foucauldian archaeology), who variously upheld some role for congregations of subjects (in the sense of, for example, their individually held beliefs as formative of trends, or as playing a part in the formation of critical masses) even when they rejected the possibility of full subjectivity (at least with regard to the knowing subject).

[215] Consider, for instance, Porter's oft-cited critique that basically doubts the timeline and the extent of confinement in Foucault's account in: R. Porter, 'Foucault's Great Confinement', *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 3, 1990, pp. 47-54. This and similar critical accounts of Foucault's empirical evidence (among other, less related, critical essays) can be found in: B. Smart (ed.), *Michel Foucault I and II: Critical Assessments* (London, UK: Routledge, 1995).

[216] Examining the factuality of such critiques is beyond the scope of this paper, however, Foucault has responded to some, offering additional evidence. See, indicatively, his exchange with a critic of 'Madness and Civilization' in: M. Foucault, and L. Stone, 'An Exchange with Michel Foucault', The *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 30, Issue 5, 1983, pp. 42-44.

mainly on its ability to spur new and valid lines of inquiry along the lines of its theoretical novelty.[217]

What then is its relevance for HE in particular? On a general level, it should serve as a reminder that HE's certainties of the day (as with certainties in any field of study, for that matter) will most likely become the subject of radical scrutiny and ultimately be replaced by new (and often conflicting) ones at a later time. This, however, will not be the effect of the usual scientific learning process with its gradual and incremental changes through the testing of hypotheses, the discovery of new evidence, and so on but will, instead, be due to the shift towards radically new perspectives. It is precisely for this reason, then, that the currently dominant frameworks of analysis should not be treated as final and comprehensive but rather as provisional and imperfect. As a consequence, their provisionality should be openly acknowledged and must inform the lines of inquiry that emerge from within each framework's boundaries.

In more practical terms, this acknowledgment shall not only entail the presence of a strong self-critical spirit (which is a prerequisite for all high quality research anyway) but, more importantly, the incorporation in studies of an openness to alternative epistemic frameworks (not least to those that do not yet exist), as opposed to the currently observed tendency to close such debates down and to stringently delimit the boundaries of acceptable approaches and theses. Consider how, for instance, Rojas, the sitting president of the influential International Society for Quality of Life Studies, is quick to proclaim that 'there is no better

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[217] For a brief overview of critiques claiming that Foucault's archaeology is self-refuting and a compelling response, see: G. Gutting, *Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason: Science and the History of Reason* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 272-287.

way of knowing the well-being of a person than asking her'.[218] Layard and Veenhoven, two of

the most-cited scholars are further indicative examples of HE researchers who (regardless of

how much or little they may engage with the debate on self-reporting) formulate their

verdicts on the same matter with rationales and wordings that foreclose the possibility of any

further debate.[219] [220] Indeed, neither of them seriously considers alternative approaches and

their frameworks are closed to the possibility of them ever emerging. To the extent that these

are some of the most influential scholars and that a vast majority of current HE scholars

operates within the same epistemic contours, it can be hard to think of ways that an

alternative approach could gain a foothold even if it were epistemically superior. In fact, even

if we set aside the power-knowledge dimension, the problem could persist to a considerable

extent due to the obscure relationship of HE and real world outcomes that hinders the ex

post assessment of HE research (at least more so than in other fields with readily visible

outcomes). In any case, it is clear from the preceding Foucauldian premises (and also from

our analysis of the current state of HE in Chapter 2) that achieving significant headway in

that respect may be a very slow and hard process. We shall, however, explore concrete ways

in which this openness we call for can be facilitated and maximised in the following chapter.

On a more specific level, Foucault's archaeological perspective can shed light on the

limitations that the current epistemic infrastructure imposes on HE. As argued in Chapter 2,

it is this project's contention that positivism constitutes the horizon of HE inquiries and,

thus, in accordance with what was discussed in this subsection, it tacitly decides which HE

research questions may be asked, which truth-claim statements can be made, how they will

be judged, how they may interact, and, finally, determines to a large degree the

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[218] M. Rojas, 'Happiness, Research, and Latin America'. In M. Rojas (ed.), *Handbook of Happiness Research in Latin America* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2016), p. 6 (and, more broadly in subsection 1.3.2 'The Epistemology of Happiness. Knowing Happiness').
[219] R. Layard, *Happiness: Lessons From A New Science,* op. cit., e.g. ch1.
[220] Indicatively in: R. Veenhoven, 'Measures of Happiness: Which to Choose?'. In G. Brule, and F. Maggino (eds.), *Metrics of Subjective Well-Being: Limits and Improvements* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017), pp. 65-84.

methodologies that will be employed in the process.[221] [222] We have seen in the review of the literature how, in spite of the vast variety of approaches to HE (which only for reasons of practicality were reduced to three categories), most are premised on the logic that all meaningful parameters in HE are quantifiable (consider the measures used by the vast majority of approaches: self-reporting, composite 'objective' measures, and physiological ones) and, accordingly, seek to channel their quantitative evidence towards correlational and regression analyses that substantiate or refute their hypotheses. These similarities, however, are rarely considered for they are obscured by a cloud of phenomenal diversity: For one, as we have seen, the originating point of such processes may variously be an observed covariance, a regression, or even abstract theory. Similarly, the premises of each HE study can differ significantly, as we have seen, depending on the discipline or on diverse theoretical commitments within the same discipline.[223] Equally, the focuses on particular themes and issues are also characterised by a great breadth. However, the core (epistemological, structural, and methodological) of the immense majority of HE works remains within the contours described above. And the few approaches that lie outside it are doomed to scholarly irrelevance for being incommensurable with the mainstream, when they are not thoroughly dismissed as unscientific.

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[221] 'Positivism' here also includes the strands of post-positivism and even critical realism that, despite conceding that the foundation of knowledge may be conjectural and, ultimately, unstable, insist upon using the positivist epistemic framework or its methodological tools on grounds of pragmatism and/or expediency. Naturally, HE approaches are not always necessarily purely positivist. There are examples of cogent epistemologies (such as empiricist and realist ones) but also a tiny minority of heterodox ones (such as constructivist) that, however, due to their relative position in the epistemic hierarchy fail to play any important role in the issues discussed here (setting the preconditions for knowledge, for what questions can and/or should be asked, and similar). Moreover, rather than striving to counter the hegemony of positivism, they leave it unchallenged and proceed to explore the issues raised by mainstream HE albeit with non-positivist research designs.

[222] For a similar analysis of mainstream HE as being dominated by positivism, see: W. Manzenreiter, and B. Holthus, 'Introduction: Happiness in Japan through the anthropological lens'. In W. Manzenreiter, and B. Holthus (eds.), *Happiness and the Good Life in Japan* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2017), ch. 1.

[223] Consider, for instance, the different understandings of human nature as it pertains to happiness between homeostatic approaches and cognitivist ones or even their very conceptions of happiness (as explored in 2.1).

Furthermore, another key component of the epistemic infrastructure that frames HE is the theoretical reliance upon a fairly centred subject. Importantly, this is also the case even when scholarship is critical of aspects of the model of full and/or centred subjectivity.[224] For, even then, there remains a strong, if oftentimes covert, belief in the centred knowing subject, which is also an interpreting subject, too. Thus, for all their deficiencies, subjects are still expected to make rational use of the new knowledge: individually, in order to increase their happiness and, collectively, so as to advance the goals of HE (e.g. in academia, the broader public sphere, and so forth) or to foster conditions that are conducive to better aggregate happiness outcomes (e.g. in policy making). But, as we saw in 2.1, these assumptions are not warranted and often lack any attempt at justification; they are part of the uninterrogated epistemic apriori that Foucault warned us about. Rather than embracing the possibility of an open-ended, unpinnable, and contingent subject, HE approaches are quick to dismiss it or even to supress it. A final, cogent, tendency that is observed across almost all approaches that can be attributed to constraints imposed by the current epistemic mode is that of treating happiness as ahistoric and, more broadly, as existing in a -non-contingent- cultural vacuum. We have already seen the problems that this stance causes (in 2.1) and we have discussed (in 3.1.1 and 3.1.2) its effects on the micro and meso level, but it is the macro level (of the episteme) that explains its persistence.

Indeed, it is clear that these tendencies are systematic and not accidental. This is so not only because the contrary would have required a series of highly improbable coincidences (especially so in light of the apparent failures of the currently adopted framework), but because their roots in a positivist-inspired epistemic foundation become apparent when one looks beneath the surface. As explained in the previous chapter, the prevailing lines of inquiry that posit full quantifiability of the key parameters and assume an essential subject

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[224] For example, in the case of comparison theorists, people are seen as being unaware of the import of comparisons and, thus, their expectations for happiness gains are rarely met, especially when upward social mobility coincides with transition to 'improved' (materially and socially) environments.

are part and parcel of contemporary HE. What is more, allowing for a non-essentialist subject or acknowledging that some parameters may not be quantifiable (or, in any case, that their quantification is highly contingent and multidimensional and, therefore, requires qualified use, is of limited, if any, aggregability, and so on) would undermine key tenets of positivism and, in turn, the modus operandi of HE that is predicated on such grounds. But HE as a field need not come to a standstill in the face of this realisation; indeed, this is perhaps the main wager of this project. A 'weaker', decentred, and unpinnable subject, the inability to assume a language that would be in a one-to-one correspondence with the truth of the external world, and, for that matter, the fact that that truth (like language) is historical and contingent, are not inconsistent with a burgeoning HE which has as its goals those that were described in Chapter 1. We shall outline the preconditions for such a HE along with its key features in the following chapter but, next, we shall proceed to tackle the problematic HE conceptions of the subject.

3.2: Approaching the Post-structuralist Subject: Denying It or Liberating It?

3.2.1: Introduction

We have already identified HE conceptualisations of the subject as problematic (in the previous subsection but also in Chapter 2) and we established the twofold character of the difficulties that arise: on the one hand, those that relate to the 'happiness experiencing and self-reporting' subject, and, on the other hand, on the level where (re)acting subjects interpret HE conclusions and enact their prescriptions. Here, we shall look into more depth and clarify what, in particular, is wrong with contemporary conceptions in order to clear the

ground for a new way of thinking about the subject that will advance the aims of HE. Inasmuch as HE, bar few exceptions, deals only epidermically with the subject (if at all),[225] the dominant 20th century social-science conceptions of the subject constitute HE's impassable horizon on the issue. For this reason, we shall begin this section with a brief history of the modern subject which informs, even if mostly obliquely, most such accounts.

For the purposes of this project, we can discern two broad categories of theories of the subject. The first, which is currently dominant in HE, comprises approaches that treat the subject in a positive manner and/or as a knowable thing and will, thus, be termed the 'pro-subjectivity' category. The second one, which will be called hereafter the 'post-subjectivity' category, comprises approaches that consider subjectivity to be a theoretical construct and hold that the material basis that corresponds to it defies final explanations and is, therefore, fundamentally unknowable. Naturally, each category consists of approaches that diverge greatly but the common logic that underlies approaches of the former category is what causes the aforementioned problems in HE, whereas the common tenets of the latter category will, in the opinion of this project, be conducive to dealing with those problems effectively. As we shall see, it is often the case that approaches from opposing categories may superficially have more similarities than with approaches of the same category. For instance, the psychoanalytical theorisation of the subject, as well as that of post-structuralism, both reject the (at least partially) autonomous individual of modernist humanism and make very similar points about the fallacies that helped ground it. However, what is important here is not such superficial parallels but, rather, that the former approach seeks to fill in what it understands as scattered knowledge gaps with regard to the subject (even if in a radically different way than earlier attempts) in order to produce an account of it (however

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[225] As discussed towards the end of 3.1.3, some approaches (esp. those rooted in positive psychology) may offer accounts of the subject but these are typically very limited. They focus, for instance, on the cognitive faculties of individuals, or, the purely physiological processes that relate to the experience of happiness.

incomplete), while the latter seeks to achieve the exact opposite; namely, to erase what knowledge claims exist as it deems the project of creating a final account of the subject misleading, self-constraining, and, ultimately, futile. Thus, despite superficial similarities and conflicts, it is clear that, essentially, each category allows for (and leads to) a very specific range of potential HE scholarships that will be distinct and fundamentally different in all of their key aspects: assumptions, goals, and methods. Let us now consider the roots of the pro-subjectivity position and briefly discuss the important approaches it comprises.[226] It should be noted that, because HE treats subjectivity in an obfuscated, when not purely implicit, manner, the tracing of the lineage of the subjectivities in HE (that we discerned in Chapter 2) to the following accounts is not straightforward. It is the contention of this thesis, however, that there is no better alternative explanation of the theoretical basis of such accounts. Where possible, such parallels will be drawn and highlighted.

3.2.2: The essential and/or knowable subject

Beyond all doubt, the first modern formulations of the pro-subjectivity position begin with the individual subject of the Enlightenment. And even though one can trace its intellectual seeds and find formulations that anticipated it before Descartes,[227] it is then and with him

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[226] The terms 'pro-subjectivity' and 'post-subjectivity' were chosen for reasons of practicality and for lack of better alternatives although they can lead to some, justifiable, confusion. This is an adaptation of the terminology used by a similar categorisation of approaches to subjectivity, in: N. Mansfield, *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway* (St. Leonards, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2000), pp. 9-11.

[227] These are, of course, dispersed and heterogeneous. Two such examples would be Aristotle through the eyes of Hegel, with his understanding of the subject as 'what is immediate and at rest, the unmoved which is also self-moving' (In: G. W. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1807/1977), pp. 12-13) and Avicenna (In: S. Afnan, *Avicenna: His Life and Works* (London, UK: Routledge, 1958/2016), ch. 5) with his 'floating man' argument which hailed consciousness as the hypostasis through which God communicates truth to the human mind which is then capable, through the body's senses and the use of reason, to impart intelligibility to the external world. Interestingly, both of these thinkers, as well as Descartes, subscribed to forms of dualism, which was, however, discarded by later advocates of the modern subject.

that this position was first expounded in a systematic way and it is there where its lasting influence can be traced. Even though the Cartesian cogito was not intended as a definition of the subject and did not offer one as such, it had the effect of rendering the subject as the epicentre of knowledge as some -however limited- cognitive ability was recognised and secured for the first time. Moreover, as Matthews notes,[228] Descartes also prioritised the conscious processes of the mind over impulsive and other emotional responses that are merely seen as reflexive and, therefore, as belonging to the (inferior) realm of the body. In other words, with Descartes, not only is the subject brought to the forefront as the sole locus of experience, but, equally importantly, the emphasis is turned specifically on her mind which is seen as reliable (indeed, not without some qualifications) and, therefore, as capable of knowledge. And whereas in Descartes' Meditations the cogito served merely to reinforce his religious beliefs (albeit controversially),[229] later Enlightenment thinkers readily recognised the potential of his account and strived to fulfil it.

Locke's understanding of the subject is a prime example of that. His case for empiricism is based on a model of the subject that understands it not only as the ground of experience but also as being perfectly able to make sense of the world. What is more, Locke, unlike Descartes, did not posit a subjectivity that is somehow reliant upon God-guaranteed innate ideas. Instead, he held that individuals come to the world with a mind that is completely empty (*tabula rasa*) and therefore free from all preconceptions and biases.[230] Life experience, both sensory and intellectual (or 'sensation' and 'reflection', respectively, in Locke's terminology), is the sole determinant of the mind's content. And while this rejection

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[228] E. Matthews, *Body-Subjects and Disordered Minds* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 122-124.

[229] For an elucidation of the controversy see: K. Brandhorst, *Descartes' Meditations on First Philosophy* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 168-173.

[230] That said, the Lockean *tabula rasa* should not be taken to mean a total rejection of the role of the physical faculties of individuals. In fact, Locke's position is a lot more sophisticated than what such a - common yet superficial- reading implies. Rather, Locke's point was that whatever capacities or inherent tendencies individuals may have, these are not necessarily activated or influential irrespective of life circumstances. Therefore, with exposure to the appropriate environment, these could be channelled into beneficial directions.

of Cartesian innatism leaves the subject more vulnerable (for innate ideas were supposedly of divine origin and were, therefore, thought to be impeccable), at the same time, it fully liberates it and gives rise to a spectrum of potentialities. Importantly for this project, these include the possibility of a fairly sensible self that can be receptive to knowledge and, equally, the creator of new knowledge.[231] [232] In many ways, then, he can be seen as a clear precursor to the ideas that accompany the subject that is required by positivism and is often assumed in HE: a subject that may not always be fully rational or centred but, under certain circumstances (that can be secured, for example, by modelling and controlling for various 'distortive' tendencies and variables, respectively), can operate as a rational actor in what is being asked of her in the context of HE studies. Additionally, it can be asserted that self-reporting can produce reliable data, at least if some preconditions are met (e.g. appropriate sampling). By a similar token, HE researchers who filled their 'tabula rasa' with appropriate information and experiences (whatever they are deemed to be by each approach) can make use of such empirical evidence and uncover the mechanics of happiness in a rational, uncontroversial, and fully objective manner; a logic wholly in line with the positivist understanding of science.[233] Thus, for instance, it is reasonable to expect that methodological flaws will be dealt with immanently; HE research will organically weed them out as the scholarly debate progresses. Similarly, policy implementers of HE research will be alert to its potentially adverse effects and its unintended consequences.

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[231] This paragraph has extracted and/or summarised Locke's ideas from: J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London, UK: Penguin, 1689/1997).

[232] It is for this reason that Locke attaches a lot of importance to education. Since he deems that the knowledgeable subject is a possibility, and provided that (according to his theory of the mind) a young person's experiences and learning are formative, these are the theatres of the battle for its creation. See: J. Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, and, *Of the Conduct of the Understanding* (Indianapolis, US: Hackett Publishing, 1996).

[233] It is important to clarify that this, as well as similar deductions that follow in this section, are neither Locke's explicit views and nor essential consequences of Locke's premises but, rather, one of the many potential readings; the one that grounds HE's conceptions of the subject.

Hume, a later empiricist, introduced strong scepticism about the validity of what ends up in our consciousness.[234] For him, it is passion rather than reason that governs most of our decisions. Even when we take a seemingly rational decision or develop a superficially rational analysis, we are not, in fact, working on the basis of primary logic but, instead, we rely merely on custom and past experiences. Despite this verdict, however, he did not abandon hope for the possibility of a subject who is not only able to have sensory experiences of the world but that who can also make sense of it and produce knowledge (even if it will, ultimately, always be impossible to justify it rationally). This can be achieved, he argued, if we develop a naturalistic examination of human nature with particular focus on the psychological factors that shape one's perception of the world and of the relations of ideas about the world (the latter two being the only domains about which knowledge can be considered safe). If we find the inherent limitations of human subjectivity, the argument goes, then we can either work around them or decide what the safeguarded domain of knowledge can consist of. In this sense, then, he can be read as a clear predecessor of the so-called 'bounded rationality' models of subjectivity that are currently very common in the social sciences, and even more so in HE. Consider, for instance, the bounded rationality in comparativist approaches or even in needs-based theories (e.g. the needs that they posit are not always necessarily rational). For them, as for Hume, the subject remains a thing, its nature is knowable (or at least knowable to satisfactory extents), and certain mental faculties of it (that can be identified and fortified) can be said to have the potential to operate under fully rational principles. Thus, in spite of the increased scepticism, as with Locke, HE methodological practices remain fully tenable albeit require an increased degree of caution and qualification.

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[234] Hume was preoccupied with the topic throughout his work but for the most expansive explication of his theorisation of it, see: D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London, UK: Penguin, 1740/1985).

For Kant, all experiences and sensory perceptions presuppose a perceiving, and, crucially, thinking subject, too. In effect, the 'I think' accompanies all of our experiences and the way they are represented by our mental faculties, even if we rarely perceive it thusly.[235] What is more, the subject comes to recognise herself as a unity precisely through this process: since that which does all the thinking mediates and organises all of our experiences it has to correspond to a single experiencing entity (designated, by Kant, as the 'principle of the necessary unity of apperception'). Put another way, the subject, on the one hand, provides the common ground for all experiences and, on the other, constitutes the connective tissue between them, and *through* them, gives to the subject an understanding of self-hood. This realisation of our nature is a prerequisite for knowing and making sense of the world, but, equally, experiencing the world is, ultimately, what gives substance to the subject. In sum, then, for Kant, subjectivity is nothing more than the bedrock of an individual's experience in the world and how she tries to make sense of it through her representations, which, as we saw, are always the outcome of thinking. Thought, therefore, is not just one aspect of subjectivity but is rather the primary one and defining of it. This is not to say, however, that the naïve pro-subjectivity positions that are found in HE are direct descendants of Kant. According to his transcendental idealism, our thoughts and -ultimately- our knowledge depend on, and are positively created by our built-in categories that we impose upon our sensory experiences. And while Kant modified his position between the two editions of the Critique of Pure Reason to dissociate himself from the skepticist positions of the empirical idealists, he maintained that things in themselves will always remain inaccessible. Consequently, our knowledge will always necessarily be partial and contingent upon the integrity of our mental categories.[236] As is evident, then, even though the philosophical seeds of the centred and/or rational subject of today are to be found in the Enlightenment (namely, the acceptance of the subject as having primacy, as being a valid starting point of analysis,

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[235] I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1787/1998), p. 246 (B132).
[236] Therefore, it will be restricted to, for instance, the phenomenal world or to specific domains of apriori knowledge.

and the understanding of its thoughts as an expression of its fullness), it was hardly the case that Kant or any of the previously discussed thinkers put forward an account that could square fully with HE's un/under-interrogated pro-subjectivity stance. Nevertheless, they inspired and engendered essentialist theorisations of the subject which, with their incessant pursuit for a final description of the nature, the strengths, and limitations of the subject, generated the strong pro-subjectivity position that is currently predominant in HE. Indeed, the sheer implicitness of such accounts in HE bears testament to the ubiquitous influence of the pro-subjectivity stance.

The final position from within this camp that retains considerable influence is that of psychoanalysis. While not directly relevant for HE, given the very limited interaction between the psychoanalytical subject (or, indeed, psychoanalysis in general) and HE,[237] we shall very briefly summarise its core aspects as one of the key post-subjectivity positions that will be explored later was developed, at least partly, as a response to it. Psychoanalysis was intended by its founder, Freud, to be the science of human nature. It presents the first systematised break with the two principles of subjectivity that we identified as characteristic of modernist humanism. The subject is no longer either a reliable or self-sufficient starting point for any analysis (including of itself and the world). And it is so because its consciousness and readily accessible memory are just small parts of the entirety of subjectivity. What we are not conscious of consists, in part, of unimportant (for most given situations) data or thoughts (preconscious) but, more importantly, in the other part, of repressed ideas and desires (unconscious). Moreover, that little part that we have direct access to (consciousness) is overdetermined externally, by our environment (particularly that of one's childhood with regards to our gender and family relations), and, internally, by

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[237] In the rare instances where psychoanalysis engages with HE it is typically very critical of it. Indeed, its premises would frustrate most, if not all, current approaches to HE. An example of such a critical engagement, which is telling about the overall incompatibilities of the two, can be found in the following essay: T. Kemple, 'Can't buy me love: Psychiatric capitalism and the economics of happiness'. In T. Dufresne, and C. Saccheti (eds.), *The Economy as Cultural System: Theory, Capitalism, Crisis* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2013), ch. 2.

structures we have no direct control over (the Id, the Ego, and the Superego). Importantly, these structures operate under principles that are fundamentally different to those of conscious/rational life and they cannot be simply mapped onto a model that would allow for straightforward extrapolations.[238] Instead, and given their high complexity and contingency, each subject may, at best, undergo a (usually long) series of sessions with a trained psychoanalyst in order to come to only partial conclusions that would help a specific cause (e.g. the treatment of a neurosis). Deciphering self-hood in its fullness (the true nature of all thoughts, drives, and desires, repressed or not) is not only beside the point for psychoanalysis but it may also be impossible. For all the analysis about our internal structures and the key factors that interact with them, a universal account of subjectivity would require, at a minimum, a blueprint for the explanation of all causalities. But, for Freudian psychoanalysis, and in spite of its model of a bounded and contingent rationality, that is essentially impossible as there are almost infinite contingent factors that determine the irrational desires and ideas that govern us. Nevertheless, how the individual subject is formed and reacts to certain life events remains knowable (to meaningful extents anyway). Thus, for instance, in the case that a subject is affected by a neurosis (which is seen as the effect of knowable causes), the problem can and should be explored through appropriate psychoanalytical guidance and counselling.[239] It should be noted that Freud's position changed over time and his intellectual descendants have taken very diverse paths but the psychodynamic model which, in any case, appeared in his more mature period, has come to be defining of psychoanalytical theory and has influenced -in various degrees, to be sure- later thinkers, and is even used almost 'as is' by some psychoanalysts to this day.[240]

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[238] S. Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (Mineola, US: Dover, 1923/2018), esp. ch. 1-3.
[239] Kirshner explores the common thread of conceptualisations of the subject in psychoanalysis in: L. Kirshner, '
The Concept of the Self in Psychoanalytic Theory and its Philosophical Foundations', *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, Vol. 39, Issue 1, 1991, pp. 157-182.
[240] W. Dryden, and J. Mytton, *Four Approaches to Counselling and Psychotherapy* (London, UK: Routledge, 1999), ch. 2.

3.2.3: Subjectivity without subjects: The post-subjectivity position

The intellectual seeds that led to the emergence of the opposite position were also planted in the period of the Enlightenment (particularly in literature and other arts), especially through the counter-movements that sprang out of it. However, it was not until the second half of the 19th century that they took a comprehensive form and were first articulated in philosophical terms by Nietzsche. Not unlike with the pro-subjectivity position and Descartes, all later approaches that emerged from this camp (including the most significant ones that will be discussed here) are indebted in varying degrees to this single thinker. Moreover, all such approaches uphold a clear and relatively positive position: they deem subjectivity to be an artificial construct, the material basis of which defies final explanations and closure and is, thus, unknowable. This is not to deny the possibility of knowledge of parts of subjectivity, but, rather, to underscore that all relevant knowledge has certain limits and that these limits will always necessarily destabilise its core. As a result, accounts that speak of the truth of subjectivity in toto are erroneous, if not categorically ideological from their outset. In order to appraise the importance of a post-subjectivity intervention to HE, let us now consider its key elements by looking at the work of its most important representatives.

It is the contention of this project that Nietzsche's importance on subjectivity lies, first and foremost, on the fact that he anticipated, and even paved the way for, the linguistic turn that took hold in the 20th century. Perhaps the most defining -and relevant here- moment of this contribution is the famous passage of his Genealogy of Morality, wherein he draws the analogy between subjectivity and lightning.[241] More specifically, he argues that in the same way that, for language, lightnings are separate entities and that flashes are merely one of the possible actions of these entities (their reality, thus, allegedly exceeds this mere action),

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[241] F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Revised student ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1887/2007), pp. 25-27.

language also invents the autonomous existence of acting subjects. But while 'common people' might be justifiably confused by the 'seduction of language', it is quite clear that it makes no sense to talk about lightnings as something separate from their flashes.[242] Indeed, their existence is entirely dependent upon and fully exhausted in them. Consequently, to say that a lightning flashes is indeed tautological even though it is a common expression. In the same way, Nietzsche argues, subjects are 'invented as an afterthought' that is merely added to the deed, an imagined cause of certain effects (human actions) and are, thus, equally illusory.[243] For Nietzsche this is no accident. It is part of an elaborate ruse employed by the 'weak' in order to impose limits and constrain the 'powerful'. Language, along with the subject-centric philosophies of the Enlightenment, work hand in hand to establish the fiction of subjectivity and, in the process, provide the justification for the development of morality. For language, reinforced by the Cartesian cogito, would have us think that it is the acting subject's own choice to act the way it acts. But if it so, and the subject acts as a result of conscious choices, it can, therefore, be held responsible for its actions. And this responsibility provides, in turn, a defensible ground for the proliferation of moral theories who Nietzsche, unsurprisingly, so fervently detests.[244]

Heidegger can be seen as bridging Nietzsche and the later detractors of the pro-subjectivity camp. He, too, shares a severe scepticism about language.[245] Furthermore, he deemed that the subject-centric philosophy of his time was misguided. More specifically, he argued that,

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[242] Ibid.

[243] Ibid., p. 26.

[244] Nevertheless, this is not to say that Nietzsche is a hard determinist either. He specifically rejects free-will in the 'metaphysically superlative sense' but allows for *some* free will albeit an overdetermined and constrained one to such an extent that any talk of subjectivity and/or moral responsibility must be, at best, ill-advised and, at worse, ill-intentioned. See also: F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1886/2001), p. 21. Indeed, his position on the issue is best illuminated in the Gay Science wherein he makes the famous analogy with the stream and the helmsman. See: F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1882/2001), p. 225.

[245] However, his scepticism is nowhere near as total or as devastating as that of later thinkers. Notably, his prioritisation of speech over writing (phonocentrism) came under fire from Derrida in Of Grammatology (op. cit.) and elsewhere.

throughout history, philosophy resorted to a metaphysics of the subject in order to ground its various analyses. However, this metaphysics always chose to arbitrarily prioritise one of the aspects of being (the cogito, spirit, reason, and other) as representative of its essence while discarding or refusing to acknowledge the importance of the others.[246] Indeed, this is not too dissimilar from how many HE approaches treat the subject; consider the case of comparativists, for instance, and how they focus on the effects of comparisons (which they see as primary, at least for happiness) to the detriment of all other functions of the subject.[247]

Heidegger held that at this level of abstraction all such efforts were doomed to be partial and that explains why they ultimately failed. Instead, he argued, we should focus on a lower level of abstraction that systematically goes unstudied: that of being and, in particular, of being understood as our concrete existence in the world or our 'being-there' (Dasein) and its structure.[248] It is there where he challenges the notion that we are not *of* the world, even though we find ourselves *in* the world. Without this separation, of course, it would be difficult to justify how we can assume the position of a neutral observer that is required for the various and far-reaching metaphysical theories of subjectivity that exist. In a nutshell, far from being the naturally occurring thing that dominant Enlightenment models deemed it to be, the subject is a flawed metaphysical construct that distorts the fullness of being by choosing to prioritise some of its aspects while ignoring, or subordinating the remaining ones through an untenable ontological separation.

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[246] M. Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1927/2001), pp. 41-45.

[247] Of course, this is ostensibly empirically justified but in reality that is, at best, controversial. See: 2.1.2.

[248] For him, it is not only that this route offers direct access to the problem of subjectivity, it is also ontologically primary. Moreover, it should be noted that the Dasein is not transcendental. It is *of* the world, and *in* the world. Heidegger, then, decidedly subverts the Cartesian notion (which also mirrors the Christian understanding of the ontological relation of the subject and the world) with its many followers, that deems that there is a kind of metaphysical separation between us and the world.

The potential, however, for the emergence of a fully-fledged account of subjectivity along the lines of Heidegger's observations and Nietzsche's novel approach was largely unfulfilled until at least the mid-1960s. A key reason for that was the advance of structuralism which monopolised the scepticism about subjectivity in the 1950s and 1960s.[249] However, the antihumanism found in the structuralist movement is so thoroughgoing that it ultimately led to the schema of the interpellated subject that is both created by the structures and is also completely subordinate to them.[250] Taken to the extreme, it raises questions about the very utility of all theorising and necessarily results in the familiar dead ends and/or circular argumentations of hard determinism in the context of structuralism. In addition, such accounts suffer from a broader problem of structuralism. Namely, the lack of justification for the meta-linguistic standpoint that its analyses assume.[251] Rather, it is with poststructuralism that the potential of theorising the subject in accordance with Heidegger's and Nietzsche's critical points was realised. All of these sceptical themes are not only present in it but play important roles. Indeed, the limitations of language and the dangers of an over-reliance on its representational claims, the arbitrariness of the metaphysical inquiries about the nature of the subject, the covert power-play that often shapes such debates, the constraining and -ultimately- distortive character of structures, are part and parcel of the post-structuralist analysis of the subject. However, it is also the case that, for post-structuralists, the rejection of pro-subjectivity approaches does not come at the expense of sacrificing agency. Instead, there is room for both contingency and self-creation. Indeed, one can go as far as to argue that that is precisely the point of post-structuralist engagements with subjectivity: to illustrate why the negation of both humanism and, more broadly, of the pro-subjectivity position does not entail a negation of the subject. Next, we shall explore this

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[249] It could also be attributed to the fact that the names of both Nietzsche and Heidegger were tarred by their association with the ideology of Nazism (whether justly or unjustly), which kept them at the fringes of the mainstream for a long period.

[250] L. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York, US: Monthly Review Press, 1971/2001), esp. pp. 85-150.

[251] For an indicative formulation of this critique, see: M. Currie, 'Introduction: Criticism and Conceit'. In J. Wolfreys (ed.), *Literary Theories: A Reader and a Guide* (New York, US: New York University Press, 1999), esp. pp. 324-325.

through the works of Foucault and Deleuze who offer the most pertinent such analyses in order to arrive at a theorisation of subject conducive to better HE research practices.

Foucault's stance towards subjectivity can be divided into three chronological phases. In the 1960s, the subject makes only rare appearances in his works with the exception of the 'History of Madness' wherein, however, it only has a peripheral role. This absence, along with some of his structuralist inclinations, led many to wrongly consider him a complete denier of subjectivity. However, while the subject was -indeed- side-lined during this period, he never, neither implicitly nor explicitly, disputed its existence. Rather, as Kelly explains, that omission represented only a temporary methodological rejection of the concept.[252] His intention, at that time, was to study linguistic formations outside from subjective points of view. Yet, even in the 1970s, when the subject appears more frequently in his works and has a more central role, it remains rather passive. The subject is now seen as being produced by the nexus of power-knowledge or, in other words, it is studied in the dimension of subjection. Finally, in the last, and shorter, phase of the 1980s, Foucault turns his attention to the nature of the subject and to its self-creating potential even though he stops short of offering any explicit account of either. It is the view of this project, nonetheless, that his work throughout these distinct phases is cohesive enough to be considered unitary or, put differently, to be studied as the work of a single Foucault. The existence of the different stages is to be attributed mostly to Foucault's strategy as regard to the economy of his oeuvre and not to any ruptures or significant alterations in his views.[253]

For Foucault, the modern era called for the emergence of new forms of power. Brutal force, overt oppression, and obedience through strict religious dogma and its rigid control

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[252] M. Kelly, 'Foucault, Subjectivity, and Technologies of the Self'. In C. Falzon, T. Leary, and J. Sawicki (eds.), *A Companion to Foucault* (Chichester, UK: Blackwell, 2013), p. 511.
[253] Indeed, to the extent that there can be a single Foucault, or any other single *auteur* for that matter.

mechanisms are no longer effective, and even when they are, they rarely are the most

efficient of the available means for the exertion of power. Rather, power shifts towards more

impersonal forms and is invested, at least in the final (or observable) instance, in institutions

and networks of social control. These new loci of power include schools, whole discourses

(such as HE), universities, hospitals, military barracks, asylums, and, importantly, prisons.

Interestingly, Foucault observes, the physical loci of such power often resemble prisons (and

vice versa) both in terms of function and layout.[254] This is, indeed, no accident or coincidence

for both are the embodiments of precisely the same logic about the exercise of power over

society. Whether the objects of power are criminals, students, individuals with a somehow

deviant behaviour, or otherwise law-abiding and normative citizens under the purview of a

discourse (which could very well be HE) matters very little. The prison logic, and in

particular that of the Panopticon, is seen as the most efficient way of exerting this new fluid

and impersonal power over society and thus it permeates all of its institutions.[255]

Panopticism, then, as a collection of linguistic formations but, also, as physical

infrastructure, becomes the ideal form not only of the carceral system but of all systems of

power and this is what explains the homogeneity of the aforementioned institutions. The

exertion of power, thus, is not so much negative (as in constraining) but is, rather,

productive, in that it, in effect, creates subject positions for us to choose.[256]

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[254] M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York, US: Vintage, 1974/1995), pp. 227-228.

[255] Efficiency here refers both to the resources that it requires, which are minimal, given that panopticism internalises power (consider how the Panopticon could even work without anyone actually being present in the watch tower), and to its outcomes, which is a regime of potentially total surveillance on all aspects of one's life predicated on constant hierarchical observations, normalising judgments, and examination.

[256] The intellectual backbone of the transition towards panopticism is the emergence of discourses (especially those springing out of the then new disciplines of psychology, sociology, and criminology) that make truth claims about the nature of humans and arbitrate what acts and thoughts are normal or abnormal. The people essentially becomes a perpetually open case for study and monitoring by medical, sociological, and other authorities. It is precisely at this stage that, through the division of the population into distinct categories of deviation and normalcy, power creates the modern subject. Atomised, visible, and always entangled in a context of hierarchies, even when they are not readily apparent, the newly born subject is always and everywhere in the chains of discipline.

The subject, then, is neither naturally occurring nor some primitive essence that is determined and/or constrained by society and its power relations. Instead, it is the product of the latter and, at the same time, becomes its vehicle insofar as we take up any of the various subject positions that power contrives for us (the criminal, the good/bad student, the delinquent, the insane, the creditworthy, and so on). By accepting any of these selfhoods, which are, by their conception, conducive to the interests of power, we become ourselves both its articulation and its enforcers.[257] As mentioned earlier, however, this rather negative picture of subjectivity is not tantamount to a complete rejection of the subject. Even if it were not for his ethical work in the 1980s, one has to bear in mind that Foucault did not -at any point- attempt to write an 'ahistorical history' of subjectivity but rather a specific (and, thus, contingent) account of the modern subject. Furthermore, even in the modern constellation of power (and no matter how absolute and total that power may be), it is always the subject that constitutes itself (through 'subjectivation') and not some external party.[258] Unlike in the case of the interpellated subject, then, Foucault deems that there is at least a minimum of control in our self-constitution (even if there is a majority of external overdetermining factors). It is for these reasons that the critiques according to which Foucault lacks consistency and his later works allegedly contradict his earlier ones are unfounded.[259] Indeed, this becomes clearer if we consider Foucault's understanding of the physiology (in a metaphorical sense) of the subject: On the one hand, it is a contingent fiction to the extent that it is constructed or constituted as opposed to being an ahistorical entity and/or of a transcendent origin, but, on the other, this fiction feeds back to the subject and affects it decisively. It is in this sense that Foucault claimed that the subject is a form that 'is not primarily or always identical to itself'.[260] Furthermore, and as a consequence, this means that the subject constitutes itself

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[257] M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge,* op. cit., p. 98.

[258] Including as early as in the -theoretically- most deterministic 'Discipline and Punish'. See, for instance: M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* op. cit., p. 202.

[259] For the most prominent example of a critique along these lines, see: J. Habermas, 'Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present'. In M. Kelly (ed.), *Critique and Power: Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate* (Cambridge, US: MIT Press, 1994).

[260] M. Foucault, *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984*, Vol. I (New York, US: The New Press, 1997), p. 290.

differently when it comes, say, to voting than when it comes to its personal life, its participation in a HE survey, its implementation of HE-informed policies, and so forth. The 'games of truth' and the various practices of power that act upon each individual create different fictions in each domain of life and, in turn, these result in the creation of different subjectivities that co-exist.

In the context of HE, thus, subjects would have to constitute happiness-experiencing instances of their overall subjectivity that could, in fact, clash with their subjectivities in their other capacities. This is important for, insofar as there exists at least an iota of authentic self (either through processes of self-creation, that will be reviewed later or independently of that), the contrived 'happy' subject position produced in the context of a HE discourse could contradict its more authentic counterpart and, therefore, have a net detrimental effect. More broadly, Foucault concedes that each of them may have relationships with the other ones, but insists upon the uniqueness of the historical constitution of each.[261] The constitution of the subject by itself, then, is a function of its role in adopting and/or contesting dominant discourses and practices of power and depends on our individual filters in their internalisation.

It is clear from the above that there is at least *some* room for manoeuver (or agency) in the process of our self-constitution in our various capacities in life. But how are we to actualise this creative potential in the way we relate to ourselves? Foucault's response to this question was that we should seek to develop an aesthetics of existence. In his own words, this refers to 'those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain

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[261] Ibid., pp. 290-291.

stylistic criteria'.[262] However, 'intentional' and 'voluntary' here should not be conflated with any notion of a subject possessing the archetypal free will of the Enlightenment. After all, Foucault emphasises throughout his work the constraining factors that historical regimes of power imposed on individuals even before they had a chance to constitute themselves as subjects. The fact, however, that *we* are the actors who, in the final instance, carry out this task (subjectivation) equips us with some agency and betrays the immanent contingency of subjectivity. The latter is also shown to be the case if we consider the variability of subjectivities: both in a temporal sense (as illustrated, for example, in Foucault's own work) and, concurrently, as evidenced by the adoption of ephemeral subjectivities in our various societal and individual capacities.[263] To be sure, however, alongside the external constraining factors, we are also always limited by the techniques available to us at any given spatio-temporal coordinate that we find ourselves in. Therefore, these 'intentional' and 'voluntary' actions that Foucault calls for refer specifically to whatever room for agency exists in the processes by which we create the fictions that become our subjectivity.

In fact, realising that the subjectivities that we adopt are contrived *for* us and not *by* us as if in a vacuum or *ex nihilo* and that they are neither ahistorical nor static (for example due to some essential nature), is the first step that needs to be taken if we are to actively involve ourselves in our self-creation. Starting with such a critical self-awareness, it should become obvious that the way forward is not to attempt to recover an allegedly originary subjectivity that was supressed along the way (for there is no such originary self) but, rather, to consciously imagine and devise new subjectivities. However, these imagined subjectivities, if they are to resist power, will have to go beyond the limits that power sets for us. As such, they will not conform to current conventions and norms that regulate what subjectivities are

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[262] M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, *vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure* (New York, US: Vintage, 1984/1990), pp. 10-11.
[263] Indeed, Foucault's work is replete with studies of the historicity of subjectivities and, more specifically, of how discourses, and more broadly, the 'Dispositif' produced different categories of subjects.

conducive to happiness, in the context of HE, and, more broadly, acceptable, possible, and, indeed, even imaginable. Such a difficult task, then, can only be carried out through constant creative experimentation that defies subjectivities circumscribed by normative and descriptive accounts (such as in those upheld by HE). To shed some light on how this translates into practical terms, Foucault calls our attention to the ancient ethics of pleasure.[264]

What was so characteristic about the management of pleasure, and in particular of sexual pleasure, in Ancient Greece and Rome was not, Foucault argues, the specific rules governing it or even any finite spectrum of views about it. On the contrary, in that respect one finds a lot of similarities with the Christian world (which Foucault uses as his main comparison). Rather, it is how the Greeks and the Romans arrived at these codes and views that is fundamentally different. Most importantly, the problems relating to sexuality were addressed as ethical ones. They were neither treated as legal (even though some relevant laws existed) nor were they under the purview of abstract ideas about the morally 'right' and/or 'wrong' conduct.[265] In a sense, then, the problematisation of sexual pleasure was free both from material power and the effects of the power-knowledge nexus. Instead, it consisted of practical philosophy that sought to address potential dangers that could arise from sexual pleasure. And while, in many ways, the conclusions of the ancient ethics of pleasure resonate with the later Christian interdictions as both broadly tended towards austerity and abstention (even though the former did not prescribe it as such), this was not due to the general painting of sexuality as 'evil' (as was the case in Christianity) but, rather, due to a practically-derived exaltation of the ascetic ideal.[266] The 'ethical' here is not identical

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[264] M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 2, op. cit.
[265] Rather, the ethical treatment of pleasure was a fragmented (as opposed to centralised and homogenous) process and was certainly non-obligatory. Indeed, this was the case only for a small part of the ancient societies that Foucault cites (free adult males).
[266] This was due to, on the one hand, the fear of overindulgence and, on the other, the belief that sexual pleasure, even if fully natural and not evil, was closer to our animal dimension and thus should not take over our lives if they are to be fulfilling ones.

to the moral (as exemplified, for instance, by given moral codes) but is, instead, produced locally and contingently, without coercion, by an individual and her relation to herself. To be sure, it is not narrowly self-interested, either. Instead, it is predicated upon the Platonic ontological recognition of the self by the self.[267] This basis, after all, is what gives birth to responsibility. However, this responsibility, both to the self and the Other (for instance, so as not to spread gonorrhoea, in the ancient context), necessitates the subordination of pleasure to ethical reason. Thus, in the specific domain of sexuality it should arbitrate what sexual conduct is appropriate for each given ethics and (usually) on the basis of what exclusions it should take place.

It is clear, however, that for Foucault the specific content is not of particular import here. Indeed, and contrary to many misreadings of his work, Foucault himself found the end result of Ancient Greek ethics 'quite disgusting'.[268] It is also telling that, despite his preoccupation with the issue, he -perhaps surprisingly- does not offer any general or normative discussion of the care of the self, neither in the thus-titled volume nor in any of the other two volumes of the History of Sexuality. His emphasis, instead, is on the unique twofold nature of ancient subjectivity. Insofar as the produced subjectivities are akin to a work of art in that they aim at beauty with each being the fruit of creative experimentation and inventive thinking, they have a strong aesthetic dimension. However, and perhaps more importantly, they also have an ethico-political dimension. Its key ingredients are firstly, the ontological, as well as the epistemological, recognition of the self (that, as we have seen, for example, in the modern era, should not be taken for granted); secondly, the acceptance of its ethical responsibilities to itself and the Other; and, lastly, its breaking with the paradigm of acceptable subjectivities (whether it is enforced with coercion or through more complex power-knowledge processes).

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[267] M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 2, op. cit., pp. 87-89.
[268] He cites various reasons for this, not least the inherent dissymmetry of the Ancient Greek ethics with its exclusions and obsessions. In: M. Foucault, 'On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress'. In P. Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (New York, US: Pantheon Books, 1984), p. 346.

In other words, Foucault draws our attention to the ethics of pleasure not as a prototype or as something to emulate, but rather to remind us of long-forgotten potentialities that can prompt us to reinvigorate our now-dormant and passive relationship with our various subjectivities.[269]

Critics of the aesthetics of existence usually misread Foucault or/and misunderstand what he tries to achieve with it. In the former category we have perspectives such as the (already mentioned) one which accuses Foucault of idealising the fragmented and exclusionary society of Ancient Greece.[270] [271] But, as we saw, these readings are erroneous since Foucault at no point condones the inequalities and exclusions of antiquity; to the contrary, he explicitly repudiates them.[272] Similarly, ethically and politically loaded critiques that are levelled against Foucault's aesthetic-ethical subject often see it as an effectively apolitical and narcissistic project, removed from society and its broader hierarchical context and, rightly, point out that the commitment and responsibility to the Other is neither detailed nor adequately justified, when it is not completely absent.[273] [274] However, Foucault never set out to do any of the above, and yet, his project does not boil down to narcissistic verbalism and nor is it conducive to a mindless apolitical introspection. For, as Oksala put it, what he actually wants to achieve is to open up the possibility of self-transformation (a becoming), that will, in the end, enable us to relate to other people in ways that are not currently

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[269] After all, Foucault recognises that those who partook in the ethics of pleasure (free male adults) enjoyed a freedom that was not available in later eras. In a way, then, we can conjecture that Foucault chose ancient Greece as his case study for it offered a socio-political context that was uniquely-conducive to such techniques of subjectivity. That said, they are generalisable (and, therefore, relevant for the disciplined and normalised subject of modernity, too) for there is nothing to restrict these potentialities to that particular sub-group and in that particular juncture.

[270] For instance, Richlin surveys other critiques on such grounds and provides her own (a feminist one) in: A. Richlin, 'Foucault's History of Sexuality'. In D. Larmour, P. Miller, and C. Platter (eds.), *Rethinking Sexuality: Foucault and Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, US: Princeton University Press, 1998), ch. 6.

[271] Huffer offers a brief review of these positions and points to Foucault quotes that negate them. In: L. Huffer, *Mad for Foucault: Rethinking the Foundations of Queer Theory* (New York, US: Columbia University Press, 2013), pp. 261-262 (and pp. 309-310 for the review (footnote 68)).

[272] See, for instance, footnote 268.

[273] R. Wolin, 'Foucault's aesthetic decisionism', *Telos*, Vol. 1986, No. 67, 1986, pp. 71-86.

[274] L. McNay, *Foucault: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1994), ch. 4.

imaginable.[275] After all, as McLaren adds, the care of the self, in fact, already implies certain social relationships (most notably with the *polis* and with a guide/friend) and is, in any case, underpinned by a concern for the Other, just as the Socratic *epimeleia heautou* was.[276] Not too dissimilar are the critiques who charge Foucault for not putting forward any specific ethical framework or ethical arbitrator by which to make normative judgements.[277] However, that was precisely Foucault's intention. He was not only opposed to prescribing a specific ethics (as, for him, this should be initiated as a private project for each individual) but he also rejected the very possibility (and desirability) of any form of universal normative ethics. As Wang points out, his rejection of essentialism led him to the realm of the aesthetics not in order to negate the importance of moral questions entirely but because therein he could develop a non-metaphysical ethics of problematisation rather than offer another universalised and specific solution.[278] That is to say, such critics conflate the specific project of a study of the potentialities of self-creation with a general theory of normative subjectivity that the aesthetics of existence never aspired to be in the first place.

A more promising line of critique, and much more pertinent to our project, would take issue with Foucault's looseness in and -ultimately- avoidance of describing the contours of the domains that can be the object of self-creation (or can participate in it) and of those that are more or less constrained decisively by external and biological factors alike. Understandably, Foucault would be wary of a detailed and fixed account for fear that it would reintroduce essentialism through the back door. Likewise, any such general theorisation of the subject would essentially represent a return to precisely the metaphysical discussion of the subject

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[275] J. Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom*, op. cit., p. 169.

[276] M. McLaren, *Feminism, Foucault, And Embodied Subjectivity* (Albany, US: State University of New York Press, 2002), p. 71.

[277] Habermas is the most prominent critic along these lines. See, for instance: J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1987), esp. ch. 10. Similar critiques can be found in: N. Fraser, *Unruly Practices: power, discourse and gender in contemporary social theory* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1989) and in: C. Taylor, 'Foucault on Freedom and Truth', *Political Theory*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1984, pp. 152-183.

[278] H. Wang, *The Call from the Stranger on a Journey Home: Curriculum in a Third Space* (New York, US: Peter Lang, 2004), p. 40.

that Foucault and his intellectual lineage sought to break away from. However, he offers concrete examples wherein structures have the upper hand (primarily during his archaeological and genealogical phases) and, other ones (most notably in his ethical phase), wherein agency is not only present but has the potential to take precedence over structures. As a consequence, there have been several attempts to extrapolate a 'Foucauldian' theory of the subject that, however, do not do justice to his work for they -almost inevitably- resort to isolations of specific parts of it that paint a partial picture; ranging anywhere between the almost passive subject of his early work,[279] to the supposedly nearly fully free and self-creating subject of his later work.[280] Had he offered a more general discussion of the subject, whereby he could lay some ground rules of the Foucauldian subject, he would not have only precluded the possibility of distortive extrapolations but, more importantly, he would have also contributed more to the debate of decentred, albeit non-passive, subjectivity. Yet, even so, Foucault's negativity about what the subject is not, despite appearances, along with his positivity that points to tentative spectrums of potentiality of what the subject *can* be, mark a break with traditional accounts of subjectivity and constitute, therefore, an invaluable resource for inquiries along these lines.

Deleuze's theorisation of subjectivity is somewhat complementary in that, while it shares Foucault's disdain for essentialist metaphysics, it does not repudiate all metaphysics. Indeed, Deleuze famously declared himself once to be a 'pure metaphysician'.[281] The kind of metaphysics that he meant by that, however, was fundamentally different to that of the foundational metaphysics found in Plato, Kant, existentialism, structuralism, and even in phenomenology. We have already discussed the main thrust of his novelty in metaphysics on an abstract level (in 3.1.1) but its more concrete counterpart is equally intriguing and novel.

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[279] Keller surveys this interpretation in: K. Heller, 'Power, Subjectification and Resistance in Foucault', *Substance*, Vol. 25, Issue 79, 1996, pp. 78-110.

[280] Paras, for instance, argues that Foucault ultimately migrated away from his antihumanism towards an almost fully autonomous subject (although the author is careful not to adopt such terminology). In E. Paras, *Foucault 2.0: Beyond Power and Knowledge* (New York, US: Other Press, 2006).

[281] A. Villani, *La guêpe et l'orchidée: Essai sur Gilles Deleuze* (Paris, France: Belin, 1999), p. 130.

His work on subjectivity, which is at issue here, is no exception to that. Before delving into it, however, we shall first clarify that (unless otherwise cited) we shall be basing our analysis, as well as any other broad references to Deleuze (including the use of his terminology), on his and Guattari's 'Capitalism and Schizophrenia' (and, more often than not, on its second volume 'A Thousand Plateaus').[282] That clarification is necessary because, on the one hand, Deleuze was prolific with shifting roles and meanings for his concepts and, on the other, while these volumes are not a project on subjectivity *qua* subjectivity they offer his most elaborate, coherent, and recent formulation of his views on the issue. Besides, his earlier discussions of subjectivity, if not as elaborate, are remarkably congruent with those presented in Capitalism and Schizophrenia.[283]

The Deleuzian position on subjectivity is often defined by his famous declaration (in more than one circumstance) that there is no subject.[284] However, even a cursory study of his work reveals that this amounts only to a semantic rejection of the term. In reality, he is neither disputing the existence of everything that has ever corresponded to the term 'subjectivity' (for example, Foucault's use of the term), nor is he proposing a subject that lacks all agency (as in structuralism, for instance). Indeed, what he actually means is much closer to the Foucauldian perspective: unlike what most of the then-hitherto theorisations of subjectivity held, there is no specific faculty or 'master of the faculties' that is in control of each individual body (or that expresses it in its fullness, either) and, therefore, there can be no discussion of subjectivity in the sense of identifying it with either a 'doer' or with a set of fixed traits. His and Guattari's accounts of what subjectivity is, and, more importantly, of what it can be, are formulated in 'Capitalism and Schizophrenia' through an immanent

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[282] G. Deleuze, and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, op. cit.

[283] These permeate most of his work but took place most explicitly in his readings of Hume and Bergson that can be found, respectively, in: G. Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity,* op. cit., and in: G. Deleuze, *Bergsonism* (Cambridge, US: MIT Press, 1966/2006).

[284] Indicatively in: G. Deleuze, and C. Parnet, *Dialogues* (New York, US: Columbia University Press, 1977/1987), p. 93, and in: G. Deleuze, 'A Philosophical Concept'. In E. Cadava, P. Connor, and J. Nancy (eds.), *Who Comes After The Subject?* (London, UK: Routledge, 1991), pp. 94-95.

critique of psychoanalysis that is carried out via the somewhat satirical development of a counter-paradigm: schizoanalysis.

For Deleuze and Guattari, traditional Western modes of thinking (scientific, philosophical, political, and other; HE could very well be seen as an example of it), in their search for a secure grounding, rely existentially on a neat 'tripartite division between a field of reality (the world), a field of representation (the book), and a field of subjectivity (the author)'.[285] What is more, that 'field of reality' consists of distinct and stable entities wherein some do the acting (subjects) and some are acted upon (objects). This division of reality into clearly separate and stable entities is a prerequisite, the argument goes, if we are to order the world around us and produce knowledge that has the status of 'truth'. For how else could we ever develop a secure system of representations like those found in science (including in fields such as HE), philosophy, and elsewhere? These do not only presuppose a knowable and metaphysically naturalist world (which requires a leap of faith in its own right), but also, firstly, an observer of it who will passively gather all relevant information, and secondly, people (most commonly expert scientists) who will analyse the observations and make sense of them in a neutral, unconditional, and timeless manner, thus producing secure knowledge. Furthermore, for such a system to be stable, the objects of observation have to have an essential nature, which would guarantee the integrity of its identity, and which is to be explained in terms of their internal structure (so as to be immune to contextual parameters). As creatures of nature, human subjects are no different and, for Deleuze and Guattari, this is precisely where the root of the problem lies.

To put forward their alternative to that paradigm, Deleuze and Guattari use a well-aimed metaphor from Botany: the afore-mentioned way of thinking is designated as the

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[285] G. Deleuze, and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, op.cit., p. 23.

arborescent model, while their own preferred alternative is rhizomatics.[286] The arboreal structure of thought takes its name from the tree-like topography of the systems of inquiry that it engenders. At the top, hierarchically (and at the bottom, topographically), we have the roots of the tree that represent its true essence and therefore determine all of the trees' other parts (its growth, trunk, branches, flowers, and so on). Examples of that include the various Absolutes, transcendental ideas such as Plato's Forms, but, importantly, the Cartesian cogito and other ideas of a centred subject, too. Next, we have the trunk which is unified and static and represents the stable part of the tree's presence in the world. As Mansfield puts it, it can be seen as the tree's intense reality, or, in other words, its being.[287] From the trunk grow out the branches, and from the branches grow out the most useful and aesthetic parts of the tree: its flowers and/or fruit. However, and in spite of their import, the latter are nothing more than the mere expression of the inner reality of the tree that is always to be traced first to the trunk and, ultimately, to the trees' roots. Moreover, progress is always unidirectional: from the bottom to the top, in the case of the trunk, which as we saw, embodies its essence, or on a horizontal axis, in the case of branches. What is more, the growth of branches is always determined in a binary way, under a clear and ever present vertical hierarchy that precludes the possibility of horizontal interrelations and retroactivity. Correspondingly, an arborescent model of thought will always be trapped within the logic of binary identities and divisions that supresses pure difference and (even if inadvertently) helps propagate the hierarchical metaphysics that is at the roots of each system. After all, pure difference is ontologically incompatible with any given arboreal system; the only difference allowed in such a system is merely that between particulars (such as the parts of a tree) of a metaphysical unified whole. HE, then, which was diagnosed with all of the above earlier in this chapter, cannot escape its arborescent failings through immanent critiques and improvements. Indeed, even its flawed conceptions of the subject that are in focus here are merely subcases of a broader difficulty.

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[286] These as well as the following summarise different parts of the introductory chapter of a Thousand Plateaus. See: G. Deleuze, and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, op. cit., ch. 1.
[287] N. Mansfield, *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway,* op. cit., p. 141.

Since working within the constraints of the arboreal system is deemed to be self-defeating by Deleuze and Guattari, they call for its complete abandonment and point to the rhizome as its ideal replacement. In Botany, rhizomes are subterranean stems that expand horizontally and send out roots downwards and shoots upwards from any of their nodes. Their expansion is potentially endless and does not depend on any one central structure for there are no obligatory points of passage. Whereas the growth of a tree is largely predictable and relatively uniform among all trees, the growth of rhizomes is haphazard, opportunistic, and fully contingent upon the relationship of the plant with every peculiarity of its environment. Correspondingly, in our analogy, a rhizomatic logic would lack both the hierarchy (in that there is no node that is in any permanent way superior to the others or more decisive in the plant's growth) and the absolute ontological unity of its arborescent counterpart, given that the plant can develop towards completely different directions at the same time, with no common source or common parts between any two (or more) of its nodes. Importantly, rhizomatics are anti-genealogical, too, in that they frustrate the traditional chronological lines of causality and their associated claims of origins and teleology. Finally, in such a system, ontological difference is built-in rather than being merely a by-product of the inner workings of a metaphysical entity (as is the case in arborescent systems), and is, therefore, pure ('multiplicity').[288]

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[288] To further call into question the alleged unity of entities, Deleuze and Guattari call our attention to one of their favourite cases of a rhizome: the relationship of the wasp with the orchid (reference to this analogy is made at various points throughout the book. Indicatively: G. Deleuze, and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, op.cit., pp. 11-13.). Orchids have evolved a part that closely resembles female wasps. As is natural, male wasps are often tricked by its appearance and in the process of trying to mate with it end up picking up its pollen which is then passed over to other orchids that might trick him later. As a consequence, the wasp is a necessary part of the reproductive cycle of orchids and, thus, the line between different identities becomes blurred. Indeed, it could make sense to conceive of the wasp as a reproductive organ of the orchid. However, the relationship is highly opportunistic and transitory, and as such, it would be false to consider the two as a new final entity or as being in a systematic and/or permanent coordination. They form a rhizome comprising a becoming-wasp (insofar as the orchid takes the form of a female wasp) and a becoming-orchid (insofar as the wasp functions as an organ of the orchid). This rhizome, like its botanical counterpart, and like all rhizomes, is in constant motion, eschews fixed structures (or arborescence), and is always open to new possibilities, including that of the transitory coordination with seemingly completely foreign entities which may even necessitate its own self-transformation in the process. Therefore, a rhizome is never

Deleuze and Guattari discuss psychoanalysis as offering an archetypal arborescent model of subjectivity.[289] But the reasons they cite for that are not exclusive to the psychoanalytical subject. Indeed, one can identify them in all of the conventional models of subjectivity, including, most importantly for us, in the ones found in HE. These typically seek to explain the truth of the subject through a combination of fixed structures and environmental factors wherein each individual's present state can be traced back to the interplay of the two.[290] Furthermore, where agency is allowed, it is again within the constraints of specific models.[291] Ergo, even when 'free', the HE subject is predictable and sterile in its relation with its environment (and, therefore, with its alleged overdetermining factors, too). What is more, the fullness of the identity of each subject and its distinguishability is never challenged. Both its continuity and separateness (as well as its epistemic separability, which grounds, as we saw, positivism) are taken for granted. All in all, then, despite their superficial diversity, hitherto HE accounts of subjectivity are of a distinctly arborescent logic.

By contrast, the rhizomatic subject is an unfixable assemblage of heterogeneous and uncoordinated tendencies, elements, and interrelations. Thus, instead of treating the

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identical to something final, there is always an excess (or deficit) of identity and meaning. Instead, it is always entwined in one or more processes of becoming.

[289] Indeed, in many ways it comprises the par excellence arborescent understanding of the subject. First, it seeks to understand the present of the subject by turning to its internal (and to some extent predictable) structures and to its contingent (but final) early past that is seen as formative. Second, that critical period of the past is separated by later periods of the past constituting, thus, the distinct part of the roots in the tree analogy. However, difference (or, at least, the only difference relevant for psychoanalysis), at this stage, is not to be understood as a free and contingent play of individuals with their environment with countless possibilities. Rather, there is a finite number of relevant and critical possibilities: those pertaining to the development of each individual's variation of the oedipal configuration. Third, such difference is always of a binary logic, resembling the way branches grow out of the trunk (and, in turn, smaller branches from main branch, and so on) of a tree. Variation in present appearances, then, like that of the upper/final part of trees (such as their flowers and fruits), is viewed as being of little import (other than serving as symptoms that a psychoanalyst will use to trace their causal relations in the past. The truth of the subject, instead, is always traceable to the past, always dependent upon known and/or knowable internal structures, and always contained within the finite possibilities allowed by the conceptual framework of psychoanalysis.

[290] Naturally, each account puts varying degrees of emphasis on either. For instance, the former is prioritised by set point theorists, while the latter takes the centre stage in comparison theory accounts.

[291] Consider, for instance, the adaptations of the *homo economicus* model by mainstream economists, the models of bounded rationality (used by a majority of behavioural economists), or the irrationalities that affect the happiness of individuals as per the cognitivist HE approach.

(immutable) past as the source of current unconscious and conscious effects (such as desires, fears, and preferences), the subject of schizoanalysis is not eternally constrained by its past, but, rather, projects into future possibilities and should be seen itself as merely an independent starting point of an endless series of becomings. However, the reversal of focus is not only a temporal one but also one of viewing angle. Internal structures are no longer seen as secure, sufficient, or all-defining. Instead, the surface of the subject and its outside are now prioritised: its mobile nature, its interconnections and assemblages, and, more broadly, its outward looking disposition. This liberation of the subject from its past in tandem with the emphasis on its exteriority are best captured in the Deleuzian concept of a body without organs (henceforth BwO). Like with most of his concepts, this too has taken different meanings over time (and used to describe a variety of themes), but the core of the idea is congruent with the rhizomatic subject. On the one hand, as a body, it implies a plane of consistency which allows for the heterogeneous assemblages (that constitute the subject) to interact and articulate themselves in order to pursue their desires. On the other hand, the lack of organs, conveys that the consistency is not guaranteed by any unifying organisational principle (as is typical of arborescent subjectivity). The body without organs 'is already under way the moment the body has had enough of organs and wants to slough them off, or loses them', Deleuze and Guattari explain.[292] And while this makes clear that the BwO is at once a process and a destination, they later go on to specify that we have to maintain enough of the organism to reform each day, as well as sufficient supplies of significance and subjectification (in order to turn them against their own devices), and, finally, a degree of subjectivity to enable us to respond to dominant realities.[293] In a sense, then, the metaphoric scheme of a BwO is both descriptive, as regards to the reality of the subject's potentialities, and normative, in that it is a call for the fulfilment of these potentialities by trying to imagine a subject without immutable roots and trunk (to return to the tree analogy).

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[292] G. Deleuze, and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, op.cit., p. 150.
[293] Ibid., p. 160.

While the Deleuzian metaphorical imagery sets forth a convincing, liberated, and open-ended theorisation of the subject, it also exposes itself to an obvious criticism: that it amounts to an indiscriminate rejection of all structures seeking to describe the reality of the subject. This line of critique has been pursued by different quarters, each of which frames it in terms of the account of subjectivity it subscribes to (psychoanalytical, biological, and so on).[294] But to argue this is to completely misunderstand the scope and context of Deleuze's approach. Indeed, unlike with conventional (and arborescent) accounts of subjectivity, Deleuze and Guattari do not seek to provide an exhaustive account of features and/or structures of subjectivity. However, this is not due to a negation of their existence. At no point do they claim, or even imply, anything close to that. Further, the use of the concept of a BwO is -unambiguously- metaphorical. Rather, their emphasis on the exteriority of the subject, on the possibilities rather than the constraints, on the interconnections rather than an alleged pure identity, serves to challenge the epistemic logic of an ontology of separate and distinct things, the reality of which is to be understood in terms of conveniently conclusive internal structures. These neat distinctions along with the professed scientific precision of final accounts of internal structures amount to little more than wishful thinking, Deleuze and Guattari think. In other words, subjects do have a reality but it is unknowable (at least to any meaningful extent) and, in any case, is much more fluid and contingent than

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[294] Hitchock, for instance, while recognising that Deleuze does not treat the subject *qua* (the material) subject, argues that he lacks a sound explanation of the causality that is at play in the processes of becoming (In: P. Hitchcock, 'The Impossibly Intersubjective and the Logic of Both'. In S. Horstkotte, and E. Peeren (eds.), *The Shock of the Other: Situating Alterities* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 25-38.). Similarly, Zizek, being critical of Deleuze's radical anti-essentialism (which clashes with his own Lacanian commitments), counters the BwO with his own 'organs without bodies', whereby the organs themselves are the carriers of subjectivity. With this, he wants to show that the notion of assemblages of becoming as subjects is logically inconsistent (both by itself, insofar as it reduces subjectivity to yet another substance, and with earlier Deleuze) and implies that it enables a mindless philosophical 'anything goes' as regards to the debate about subjectivity. (In: S. Zizek, *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2004/2012)). Hallward, on the other hand, deems that Deleuze's subject snubs its material dimensions and therefore renders it passive vis-à-vis its context of never-ending natural processes of self-creation. (In: P. Hallward, *Out Of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation* (London, UK: Verso, 2006)). Sherman, finally, in his defence of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, ends up with a similar rejection of the Deleuzian subject by claiming that the ontology of difference upon which it is grounded is untenable (and, ultimately, inimical to difference) for it has a problematic relationship with the world and the (corporeal) causalities it entails for the subject. (In: D. Sherman, 'Gilles Deleuze'. In L. Rauch, and D. Sherman (eds.), *Hegel's Phenomenology of Self-Consciousness* (Albany, US: State University of New York Press, 1999), ch. 13.).

we think. Moreover, as with Foucault's approach, the instability at the limits of knowledge impacts directly its core.

A more fundamental issue is that of the purpose and nature of Deleuze's projects. Is he not trying to reintroduce the kind of traditional metaphysics that he so vehemently dreaded through the back door? After all, what are concepts like the 'rhizome' and 'becoming' and the discussion of their nature, if not purely metaphysical? Equally, since he provides no grounding for these concepts, his metaphysics must be foundationless and therefore no less arbitrary than what he condemned elsewhere. Clearly, if that is the case, he is not only inconsistent but also guilty of the very charges he (like all poststructuralists) levelled against the then hitherto Western philosophical tradition. Moreover, having done away with external points of reference, how are we to decide whether the metaphysical subject he posits is superior to historical ones (such as the ones considered earlier in this chapter)?[295]

It is the view of this project that these questions, while superficially logical, cannot withstand serious scrutiny. The metaphysics of pure difference does not produce transcendent and ahistoric claims. Arguably, its scope is even narrower than that of transcendental (in the Kantian sense) claims. His metaphysics is an attempt to describe things or state of affairs immanently and not according to any external (to given planes of immanence) criteria. Deleuze, thus, makes no attempt to provide a supposedly objective representation of reality and nor does he seek to describe the ahistorical conditions of possibility of the existence and/or experience of reality. Instead, he takes one step back from Kantian transcendentalism and ponders about whether it is our intellectual categories that must always have the

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[295] Such lines of critique have been developed in too many places to name. Indicatively, see: A. Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being* (Minneapolis, US: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) and M. Penner, 'Normativity in Deleuze and Guattari's concept of philosophy', *Continental Philosophy Review*, Vol. 36, Issue 1, 2003, pp. 45-49. For a review of such critiques and a compelling defence of Deleuze, see: C. Crockett, *Deleuze beyond Badiou: Ontology, Multiplicity, and Event* (New York, US: Columbia University Press, 2013), esp. part I.

determining role in how we make sense of reality. His transcendental empiricism, which is a common theme throughout his scholarship, consists of both his negative response to that question and of the reversal of Kant's claim. Pure difference in experience (in the sense of radical novelty) is always a possibility and our categories of understanding have to be constantly revolutionised in order to cope.[296] Therefore, inventing metaphysical concepts is but one of the ways to organise the metaphysical flux. Importantly, this effort must take place in ways that always have a use value (as opposed to science-like attempts for the representation of reality that are often an end in themselves).[297] The shifting meaning of his concepts throughout his oeuvre, then, can be seen as symptomatic of this approach and as an acknowledgment of their immanent and contingent character. Evidently, thus, standard criticisms of metaphysics do not apply here for the speculative ethos of Deleuzian metaphysics renders it antithetical to all that traditional metaphysics represent.[298]

Therefore, the rhizomatic subject should be judged on its practical utility. The verdict, in the opinion of this project, is strongly affirmative. It introduces a way of thinking about subjectivity that is at once free from both the idealising tendencies of modernist humanism and arbitrary foundational metaphysics. In effect, while it does not offer a detailed and ultimate theory of the subject, it brings to the fore a series of contingent attributes and potentialities that were suppressed by previous accounts of subjectivity and have profound implications for social science fields like HE. In addition, the Deleuzian theorisation of the subject complements the Foucauldian one perfectly. Even though each approach uses different techniques (speculative metaphysics and genealogy, respectively) and focuses on different aspects (the inadequacy of simplistic structures and their inferiority to

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[296] That is to say that, unlike with what Kant claimed, we cannot use transcendental inquiry in order to arrive at stable, universal, and timeless conditions of experience.

[297] G. Deleuze, *Negotiations: 1972-1990* (New York, US: Columbia University Press, 1990/1995), pp. 21-22.

[298] For a more elaborate discussion of the peculiarity of Deleuzian metaphysics and their congruence with post-structuralist and Rortian critique, see: P. Patton, *Deleuzian Concepts: Philosophy, Colonization, Politics* (Stanford, US: Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 61-65.

multiplicities, and the effects of power, respectively), they concur in a view of the subject as too complex and contingent for it to be knowable in its fullness. Further, they would also agree that this unknowability should bar us from making claims of certain knowledge even about seemingly secure parts of subjectivity for they are always part of, and intertwined with, a broader system of relations that defy modelling; even these ostensibly secure parts are always subject to a multitude of threats to their stability. Finally, they both hold that it should be our duty (ethical and/or to ourselves) to test, and, where possible, overcome the limits set by dominant accounts of subjectivity; the latter are not only arbitrary and false but they serve to maintain the epistemic (and broader) status quo of power by producing a finite number of possible subject positions to choose from.

Interestingly, advancements in the life sciences seem to lend empirical support to both theorists. The notion of a co-ordinated and continuous selfhood has been shown to be an illusion;[299] the consensus accepts that consciousness is replete with biases that all individuals share in varying degrees;[300] and the simplistic models that fix certain attributes of subjectivity continuously fall short, as we have seen. The open-ended theorisation of the subject, as expounded by Deleuze and Foucault, addresses these difficulties and can provide a framework for HE that minimises both systematic and fortuitous distortion. Naturally, its adoption will have profound consequences for HE, given the centrality of accounts of subjectivity in the methodologies of the field. After all, we have elucidated the multifarious and profound impact of flawed accounts of subjectivity upon HE in the previous chapter. We shall consider the concrete implications for HE, if it is to adopt the here-advocated account, in the following chapter.

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[299] See, for instance, the classic: D. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (London, UK: Penguin, 1993), the more recent: B. Hood, *The Self Illusion: How the Social Brain Creates Identity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), and T. Metzinger, *The Ego Tunnel: The Science of the Mind and the Myth of the Self* (New York, US: Basic Books, 2009).
[300] We have gone through some of the most common illusions and biases in 2.1. See also: R. Pohl (ed.), *Cognitive Illusions: A Handbook on Fallacies and Biases in Thinking, Judgement and Memory* (Hove, UK: Psychology Press, 2012).

CHAPTER 4: Towards a Neo-Pragmatic Framework for Happiness Economics

4.1: A Neo-pragmatic Treatment of Happiness and the Subject

Chapter 2 reviewed the state of art of HE scholarship and identified its main categories of systemic problems. Chapter 3, in turn, traced the deeper roots of those categories of problems with the help of post-structuralist theory and insights and pointed towards possible solutions. However, despite that, it could appear at this point that the broader HE project is beyond salvage and, especially considering the hazards that come with it (as discussed in 1.2), that we should abandon it. For if neither identity nor meaning can be fixed or pinned down conclusively so as to enable robust conceptualisations (most notably of happiness) and corresponding operationalisations, and if the subject is neither centred and nor can its 'irrationalities' and other irregularities be modelled accurately or even to a workable extent, is it not illusory to believe in the feasibility of an epistemic project that seeks to study happiness with a view to maximising it? As was argued earlier, this gloomy view of HE does not necessarily follow from the preceding points of critique. The purpose of this chapter is to explain why this is the case by pointing to concrete ways of addressing the criticisms and critique raised earlier without negating HE's driving spirit and abandoning its main aims.

We have already seen at various points (indicatively in 2.2 and 3.1) how post-structuralist critiques are often misinterpreted as propagating epistemological and ethical nihilism. Particularly, in the HE context, wherein all the constituent elements are deemed to be unknowable and unfixable, one may be tempted to repeat the same mistake, albeit, superficially, with an even more credible line of reasoning. But if we are to take the logical premises of such an approach to the extreme, we would reach absurd conclusions. Thus, if the non-fixability and instability of identity and meaning are reasons enough to abandon an epistemic project that depends upon them, they would also be prohibitive for all kinds of epistemic endeavours since they all effectively rely on both. The same must also apply to all social and most life sciences if we consider the contingency of the subject alone. However, for all its anti-scientism, post-structuralism has never been anti-science and especially not in the blanket fashion that the above charge implies. Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to find any published post-structuralist work that argues along such lines. Equally, the claim that such a position logically follows from the post-structuralist premises cannot withstand serious scrutiny. Indeed, for instance, no post-structuralist ever doubted the validity of the aeronautics of the airplane they were going to fly on, or questioned the stability of the biochemistry and pharmacology knowledge behind the action of a painkiller. Detractors of post-structuralism that make the above flawed equation simply fail to understand post-structuralism's strategic aim, which is not to deny the possibility or meaning of all knowledge but to challenge unjustifiably settled assumptions and claims and the infrastructure that supports them. In fact, post-structuralists themselves have explored potential avenues of epistemological and ethical inquiry that attempt to eschew the pitfalls of both structuralist, positivist, and any other form of dogmatic thought and nihilistic relativism. For instance, Foucault and,[301] to a lesser extent, Deleuze opted for a power-interpretive approach,[302]

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[301] Mostly in his works from the 1970s onwards, for instance, in: M. Foucault, M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish, op. cit.*

[302] Deleuze did not carry it out as explicitly as Foucault, however, he theorised about it almost throughout his career. Indeed, his concept of a 'transcendental field of force relations', inspired the later Foucault's power-interpretative projects. For an elaborate exposition of Deleuze's treatment of power, see: P. Patton, *Deleuze and the Political* (London, UK: Routledge, 2000), ch. 5.

whereas others like Derrida,[303] and, to a lesser extent, Nancy used a non-ontological responsibility in the encounters with the Other qua foundation for their always-provisional inquiries (ethical and other).[304] These approaches have since inspired numerous followers and, incidentally, have gained a renewed interest in recent times.[305]

Following our analysis of the problems of HE, this study deems neo-pragmatism to offer the most appropriate framework for both the grounding and the assessment of any approach to HE. This is so because, on the one hand, neo-pragmatism acknowledges and adopts all the criticisms that post-structuralism levels at the foundationalism and essentialism that characterises HE approaches, and, on the other, because it offers a comprehensive alternative to both. Importantly, this alternative does not comprise a specific method (in the concrete and formal sense, which is implicit, for instance, in positivism) that would, in turn, be subject to the standard epistemological criticisms of post-structuralism. On the contrary, it constitutes a complement, if not a radical extension of the post-structuralist project. As such it steers clear of positing a specific method that would have to be grounded on certain metaphysical assumptions. We shall move on to consider what the neo-pragmatist alternative amounts to but, first, we shall explain in some more detail why this step is the most apposite at this stage and how it is compatible with the critique that has preceded.

The compatibility of the two traditions is not a new observation. In point of fact, neopragmatists were not only aware of the work of post-structuralists from early on but, in

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[303] This refers mostly to the later Derrida's ethical turn and in works such as, for instance: J. Derrida, 'Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority', op. cit., and: J. Derrida, *Politics of Friendship,* op. cit.
[304] As early as in: J. Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis, US: University of Minnesota Press, 1986/1991), but in later works, too, such as: J. Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* (Stanford, US: Stanford University Press, 2000).
[305] For an overview of such approaches and a discussion of relevant literature see: B. Somekh, and C. Lewin (eds.), *Research Methods in the Social Sciences* (London, UK: Sage, 2005), part viii (esp. ch. 34, 35, 36, and 39). For an example of a social science epistemology project along these lines, see: J. Glynos, and D. Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2007).

many cases, they fully endorsed certain of its key aspects. For instance, Rorty, the most prominent among neo-pragmatist scholars, has found many affinities between his work and Derridean deconstruction.[306] Could such an example be, however, a single case of nominal endorsement, perhaps on the basis of superficial similarities? After all, neo-pragmatists have done favourable readings of, and draw on, a very wide variety of intellectual traditions which include figures from such diverse sources as the analytical camp, Wittgenstein, and phenomenology and, surely, such an intellectual horizon most comprise many mutually exclusive concepts and theories. While that may be the case for a number of issues,[307] the two approaches, as we shall see, have a very large degree of compatibility on the matter of language and, in particular, on the asserted ability of linguistic formations to represent, or at least describe, reality (or, in other words, on the possibility of acquiring knowledge about the world). Most fundamentally, they concur that language is, in the final analysis, incapable of representing the external reality conclusively. Granted, neopragmatists may not be as preoccupied with negative engagements with identity and meaning like post-structuralists are (which is the reason, after all, that we used exclusively post-structuralist insights and theories in Chapter 3) but they arrive at similar, and fully compatible, positions and, perhaps surprisingly, through fairly comparable intellectual routes. Namely, via the use of the ontology of Quine which, as we shall see, is not too dissimilar from the post-structuralist rationale.

In particular, Quine postulated that the way we perceive the world (both rationally and empirically) relies, ultimately, upon the translation of it into a kind of private mental language.[308] This language, then, is essential in determining our ontological understanding

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[306] See, for instance, in: R. Rorty, 'Derrida on Language, Being, and Abnormal Philosophy', *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 74, No. 11, Nov. 1977, pp. 673-681, or in: R. Rorty, 'Philosophy as a Kind of Writing: An Essay on Derrida', *New Literary History*, Vol. 10, Issue 1, 1978, pp. 141-160.
[307] For example consider Rorty's objections to the politics of Foucault and Lyotard, which he deems to be nihilistic, as argued in: R. Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, US: Harvard University Press, 1998); or the *ad hoc* intellectual conflicts that took place in: C. Mouffe (ed.), *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, op. cit.
[308] W. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, US: MIT Press, 1960), esp. ch. 1-2.

of the world. But as each mental language is *de facto* private and no perfect translation between them is possible (we cannot couple every term of either language with a term of the other), each person has a different (and non-sharable) ontology. What is more, even when we agree on a certain visual stimulus we cannot be certain that the terms used to describe it by each mental language are synonymous for they play a different role in the conceptual scheme of each individual. If we then assume, like Quine does, that there is precisely one object-language that can describe the world 'as it really is', a problem becomes apparent.[309] To wit, no private mental language can be either identical with, or fully translatable to, that object-language for the same reasons that the former are not translatable with one another. Consequently, we can have an infinitude of ontologies that claim to represent reality accurately with no formal or 'objective' way of either comparing them or assessing them. In effect, and as it pertains to language, the upshot is that it is not (and cannot ever be) in a one-to-one relation with the world but, rather, that it emerged as an evolutionary tool that individuals (living in communities) create and use to adapt to their environments with varying degrees of success.[310]

Complementary to that is Rorty's critique of the mind-body problem which provides a further nail in the coffin of representationalism. Rorty's goal is not so much to either solve the problem or to deal a blow to dualists with his critique, after all modern dualism has already made a lot of concessions,[311] as to dissolve the problem and to show how the epistemological turn (or rebirth, as he understands it) of philosophy rests upon it. For, for dualists and non-dualists alike, the Cartesian revolution introduced the idea of the existence

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[309] Importantly, this assumption is commonly made (even if only implicitly) in most scientific disciplines and, with regard to the social sciences, this is especially -but not exclusively- the case with positivist methodologies.

[310] One could draw parallels between this position and the later Wittgenstein's understanding of meaning as use in the context of language games (as opposed to the understanding of meaning as representation in the context of a language). See: L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th ed. (Chichester, UK: Blackwell, 1953/2009).

[311] It is, for example, acceptable by most modern dualists that most (if not all) mental phenomena are to be considered as having a material essence (brain states).

of a metaphysical centre which grounds all experience while belonging to a completely separate realm. The separability of the two ontological realms is simultaneously a prerequisite for, and the guarantor of, knowledge. Moreover, it is instrumental in creating the image of what Rorty calls the mind as the mirror of nature. Namely, the idea that the mind's internal structure is such that it is capable of interpreting sensory input into representations that -under appropriate circumstances- will fully mirror the external world. If, on the contrary, that metaphysical centre is not hypothesised, our mind would be *of* nature and therefore unable to mirror it passively (and therefore 'objectively').[312] And even though the influence of dualism has waned steadily ever since, the epistemological consequences of the posited metaphysical centre were left uninterrogated (both in analytical philosophy and in science) and, therefore, survive to this day. Rorty's strategy in undermining the problem is to question the criteria of the mental (most notably its spatiality and intentionality) each of which is found to be lacking.[313] Ultimately, the problem is shown to be nothing but a pseudo-problem; a relatively uncontroversial position in contemporary discussions of dualism.

Interestingly, however, Rorty places a lot of emphasis on the genealogy of this so-called problem because he sees it as constitutive of modern philosophy. For him, its legitimacy as an actual problem, as well as the Cartesian response to it, inaugurated a new period for philosophy during which epistemology became both its foundation and its main interest. That step, for Rorty, is precisely where the roots of philosophy's problems lie. With it, in short, philosophy set itself an impossible task. For, inasmuch as we consider the two

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[312] It is important to note, however, that this does not amount to a denial of some physical coordination of the subject (which is determined and constrained by specific causal laws). Rather, his point is that since we are very far from producing an accurate (in the limited Rortian sense of truth as useful) one-to-one causal account of all the processes that take place in our brains and minds, it would be misleading to hypothesise a centre which will be seen as the theatre of the interplay and/or the end product of the aforementioned processes due to our very limited and highly uncertain knowledge of the matter.

[313] This is carried out in: R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, US: Princeton University Press, 1979), ch. 1. Nowadays, his arguments are fairly common in the literature of detractors of dualism.

aforementioned moves in tandem, not only are our representations of the world private and non-formalisable, but also, even if were to somehow find a way to create a shareable object-language, our sensations and the subsequent representations that we would produce would not be adequate for the task of accurately representing the world; the potential guarantors of knowledge are all gone. Thus, the model of our mind as the mirror of nature and, with it, the associated assumptions and practices are no longer tenable. Inevitably, it follows that the collapse of the model has consequences that extend far beyond the disciplinary contours of philosophy and affect all epistemic projects. In the context of HE, this amounts to a destabilisation of the field's core assumptions and corresponding practices on a par with that effected by the post-structuralist critique.

We have seen, so far, how neopragmatism rejects both the correspondence theory of truth and the representational theory of perception. Remarkably, this is done in a way that is complementary or, at the very least, fully compatible with the post-structuralist critique. Consider, for example, the striking similarities of the critique of the alleged ontological separability of the observer-observed pair (or of the observer and "the given") with the Deleuzian critique of the tripartite division of reality, representation, and subjectivity (as discussed in 3.2.3). Furthermore, the parallels between post-structuralist subjectivity (again, as presented in 3.2.3) and the Rortian subject that emerges as centreless, contingent, and historical are also clear.[314] Finally, the Quinean treatment of language as being private and incommensurable and of the relation between signified and signifier as being, ultimately, arbitrary (as judged by any internally-consistent criteria) echoes the post-structuralist critique of both structuralist linguistics and the positivist treatment of language. It is then beyond doubt that the use of the two in conjunction for our purposes poses no critical

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[314] Rorty's case for the contingency of subjectivity and the various discontinuities inherent to it is made, among other places, in an essay dedicated to selfhood, found in: R. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), ch. 2.

conflicts. But, aside from the negative comments and critiques on the concepts of language and truth that neopragmatism offers, what positive does it counterpose?

In order to address that obvious question, Rorty turns to a radical version of naturalism, which, interestingly, he sees as the fulfilment of a long-forgotten promise of the Enlightenment. More specifically, while, for him, the Enlightenment project successfully undermined both the dogmatism and the speculative metaphysics of the various Absolutes that characterised the Middle Ages, it sought to replace them with something that -in like manner- remained outside praxis and contingency. Namely, the idea of the possibility for secure (stable, independent, and objective) foundations for knowledge which, in turn, was based on what Sellars termed 'the myth of the given'.[315] A move that was underwritten, as we saw, by the replacement of the old Absolutes with the Cartesian metaphysical centre. However, a real commitment to naturalism, Rorty insists, should call upon us to instead return to the Kantian distinction between the logics of justification (or warrant) and causality.[316] A distinction that has regrettably been dissolved completely under foundationalism. And while the latter should be put aside for, as established, Rorty considers that establishing epistemic causality is a priori impossible, there is no reason why the same needs to apply to the former.[317]

In point of fact, it is there where our efforts should be refocused, neopragmatists argue. Warrants, of course, are immanent to the world. As such, they are not characterised by the wide-ranging and seemingly steadfast nature of the various stronger claims of causality. They are created socially, and are judged, exist, and, ultimately, take (or lose) their value

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[315] W. Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge, US: Harvard University Press, 1956/1997).

[316] Naturally, however, Rorty's preference for the logic of warrants refers to a limited (in that he does not share Kant's confidence on the validity of empirical justifications) and somewhat relativised (in that it is seen a social phenomenon) sense.

[317] R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,* op. cit., esp. 'Introduction' and ch. 3.

exclusively in the social world. As such, all forms of contemporary scientific inquiry (including HE), can be fully embraced from a neopragmatist perspective, so long as they serve a social goal (as defined by a given community). Clearly, within such a framework, HE can be, at least prima facie, considered a par excellence example of a practical and socially useful discipline (in the sense of an internally-consistent structured set of justifications). That is, naturally, to the extent that its aims are, at least partially, feasible. It is scientism that is no longer tenable and with it the ill-conceived positivist ethos that characterises so much of the literature in HE, as was discussed in Chapter 2.

Neopragmatism shares, thus, post-structuralism's broad critical insights (not least on matters of language, knowledge, and subjectivity) and offers, on the basis of those, a broad framework that allows for any number of positive undertakings (such as HE). Unlike with post-structuralism, this framework encompasses an arbitrator, utility, for both epistemic and ethical thinking that does not rely on either a speculation about metaphysics (as in the case of Deleuze) or on an ethics (e.g. of Otherness, in the case of Derrida, or of the care of the self, as with Foucault), even though Rorty's advocacy of social function could be -plausibly-formulated in terms similar to the above. However, the neopragmatist framework is open enough to both allow a multitude of approaches (such as the above) and neither to require, nor to reject specific metaphysical or ethical commitments.[318] Naturally, such an ambitious move as the transposition of truth from the realm of metaphysics to that of society is not without some difficulties. And quite understandably, such a radical critique of large parts of epistemology has attracted a wealth of criticism on various counts. Due to length limitations, however, we shall not deal exhaustively with all such critical engagements here, but merely with the major ones and those that pertain to the specifics of our project that have not been reviewed earlier in this work (as many of the critiques levelled against Rorty comprise

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[318] Neopragmatism would, for instance, not be dismissive of an epistemic project that is based on certain metaphysical foundations and serves a social goal. It would, however, take issue with these foundations if they actively precluded other approaches on an epistemological basis.

arguments akin to those of the detractors of post-structuralism that we considered in Chapters 2 and 3).[319] [320]

The two most obvious of these critiques are corollary and can be summarised as follows: Rorty overemphasises the problems with any epistemological project but instead of addressing them, conveniently opts for the replacement of any such endeavour with the apotheosis of utility. However, this implicitly means that he treats utility as non-metaphysical (if it is to be immune to the neopragmatist objections to any metaphysics) and, therefore, prioritises it which is, however, unwarranted by his own logic. Moreover, and as a result of this move, neopragmatism eschews any meaningful debate concerning the concept of utility, such as the attempt to answer questions of the kind: utility for whom, for what goal, as measured by what? The charge, therefore, is that, on the one hand, neopragmatism is inconsistent with its commitment to challenge all metaphysics and, on the other, that its fuzziness invites an intellectual free-for-all wherein every argument can be seen as valid depending on the answer one gives to the above questions (or a wealth of potential similar ones). Variations of these arguments or of parts of these arguments have been commonly made against the neopragmatist perspective including by thinkers such as Malone-France,[321] Putnam,[322] and Haack.[323]

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[319] These revolve around the idea that neopragmatism, along with post-structuralism, amount to little more than nihilistic or relativistic skepticist projects. For somewhat sympathetic critiques along those lines see: J. McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, US: Harvard University Press, 1994) and D. Dennett, 'Postmodernism and Truth', *The Proceedings of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy*, Vol. 8, 2000, pp. 93-103.

[320] For the aforementioned critiques along with the other main critical lines of argument against the neopragmatist paradigm (and Rorty) that will not be considered here see the following two collections of essays: R. Brandom, *Rorty and His Critics* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2000) and H. Saatkamp (ed.), *Rorty and Pragmatism: The Philosopher Responds to His Critics* (Nashville, US: Vanderbilt University Press, 1995).

[321] D. Malone-France, *Deep Empiricism: Kant, Whitehead and the Necessity of Philosophical Theism* (Lanham, US: Lexington Books, 2006), esp. ch. 1.

[322] For instance in: H. Putnam, 'Richard Rorty on Reality and Justification'. In R. Brandom (ed.), op. cit., ch. 4.

[323] S. Haack, 'Vulgar Pragmatism: An Unedifying Prospect'. In H. Saatkamp (ed.), op. cit., ch. 7.

Considering that for Rorty language consists of a multitude of culturally created and laden linguistic games, with no way of prioritising one game over another, both facets of the critique merit some attention. However, as we shall see, they are based on problematic premises. To elucidate why this is the case we shall turn again to Rorty's naturalism. More specifically, we shall underline that his relativisation of language is neither immanent (and, therefore, cannot be resolved by internal adjustments) nor transcendental (and thusly, he does not call for its abandonment/replacement) but is, rather, based on his peculiar understanding of its role. As argued, he sees it, following Darwin, as merely an evolutionary tool that humans create and use solely for the purpose of successfully adapting to their environments. It is, therefore, in such a broad naturalist sense that he uses the term 'utility' (or similar). Not only, then, is he opposed to the narrow sense of utility as used in the most notable case of standard utilitarianism (even though he obviously agreed with it on a number of fronts), but he also does not counter it with any other specific meanings for it, either. In fact, he would advise against any such attempt for, ultimately, it is for the individuals and their communities to decide how best to adapt to their particular and historical environments, and what means to use to that end. Accordingly, if the maximisation of eudaimonic happiness is deemed useful by a community, a HE project would be fully compatible with Rorty's 'utilitarianism' even if it ended up shunning, for instance, traditional utility. Veritably, the only real assumption that is implicit in the neopragmatist position is that natural selection actually occurs. Rorty is well-aware of how this opens him to an obvious critique: namely, that he negates his overarching anti-representationalism but, having had anticipated that, he framed his adoption of Darwinism as a contingent utilitarian decision.[324] Nevertheless, while this explanation satisfies the concerns about the former part of the critique, it renders the ones about the latter part even more pressing.[325]

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[324] The first elaborate exposition of this argument was carried out in: R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, op. cit., esp. ch. 6 & 8.

[325] Similar to that is the usual critique that Rorty's relativism (although Rorty never acknowledged the label) is self-defeating that has been answered in many places. For a comprehensive review of the literature and a compelling defence of the Rortian position, see: J. Tartaglia, 'Does Rorty's

If we are to, at once, uphold such a broad conception of utility which eschews any final

meaning and put utility at the centre of any epistemic and/or ethical project (such as HE),

we leave ourselves open to two inverse but equally problematic scenarios. On the one hand, a

case where a non-productive pluralism of views (an intellectual free-for-all) prevails and, on

the other, a case wherein all views (or certain views) are systematically suppressed or

excluded due to tradition, hegemony or any of the many kinds of hierarchical relationships

that are present in any given society (or affect any individual, if we are talking about the

atomic level). Indeed, as we saw in Chapter 3, the Foucauldian project (and to a lesser extent

the Deleuzian one) is preoccupied with precisely that. Rorty's solution is his political

advocacy of liberalism with particular emphasis on liberty, equality, democracy, rights,

solidarity, and tolerance. In theory, at least, this would provide the appropriate ground for

open and democratic debate that would help individuals and their communities to freely test

and adopt an understanding of utility (and corresponding practices) that furthers their

interests.[326] Since, however, Rorty is too careful not to contradict his broader epistemic

outlook, he acknowledges that there is no way of universalising his politics or of, even,

making a formal case for any sort of politics.[327] Therefore, the possibility remains that not all

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Pragmatism Undermine Itself?', *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, Vol. 4, Issue 1, 2012. Available at: http://ejpap.revues.org/801 [Last accessed: 19 March 2017].

[326] Naturally, this too, has attracted intellectual fire from various quarters but most notably from the political left. See: N. Geras, *Solidarity in the Conversation of Humanity* (London, UK: Verso, 1995) and N. Fraser, 'From Irony to Prophecy to Politics: A Response to Richard Rorty', *Michigan Quarterly Review*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 1991, pp. 259-266 and also Rorty's exchanges in: C. Mouffe (ed.), *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, op. cit. While these publications address different areas of Rorty's thought (e.g. the problems with attempting to maintain a distinction between the private and the public sphere, which is seen as prerequisite for Rorty's well-functioning liberalism, or that doing away with any concept of objectivity impedes having informed individuals in the first place, which in turn would hinder the well-functioning of Rorty's expected evolutionary processes, or the pitfalls of ignoring the status quo of power relations in favour of an allegedly neutral neo-Darwinian outlook and so on), they all deem his liberalism untenable. These issues are not directly relevant here but some will be discussed again in the following section, in our discussion of the practical implications of our approach to HE.

[327] Indeed, Geras, based on exactly that case, argues that a politics of human rights without a universal human nature will fail, or, at best, resort to a patchwork of idiosyncratic and, at times, self-contradicting views (In N. Geras, op. cit.). For a similar critique, see also: J. Habermas, 'Richard Rorty's Pragmatic Turn'. In D. Wood, and J. Medina (eds.), *Truth: Engagements Across Philosophical Traditions* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2005), ch. 8. However, Rorty would counter that a liberal society can make the case for its superiority by using its own example. More specifically, by simply having more efficient and optimal outcomes (for individuals and society alike; no matter how they choose to appraise it) than alternative arrangements. Therefore, his liberalism and the entailed espousal of human rights can result as a consequence of Darwinian selection among socio-political arrangements.

the conditions for an open and productive (and, ultimately, conducive to the successful adaptation to the environment) debate exist and, thus, the advocacy of utility might end up being grossly misused.

A final, cognate charge is that even if we assume the perfect environment for open and pluralist debate to thrive, making warranted beliefs a matter of the sentiments of a majority can be a slippery slope. In particular, this is problematic because, not only are majorities often wrong (by any reasonable sense of the word, including the neopragmatic-utilitarian one) but also because this risks undermining structurally and decidedly the realm of knowledge and intellectual/scientific debate. Putnam claims that Rorty, acknowledging that, indeed, majority sentiments can often be wrong, attempts to avoid the difficulties that logically ensue from this by introducing a 'reforming/progressive' dimension into his project —a reference to Rorty's Darwinian aspects.[328] However, the schema of a society that progresses through reforms must either come in stark contrast with the neopragmatist rejection of external standards (by which we are to judge what counts as reform and/or progress) or entails an attempt to reintroduce them in an intellectually dishonest and logically flawed manner. Things are further complicated when Rorty elaborates explicitly on his criterion for (what counts as) a reform and defines it as something that comes to 'seem to us clearly better than their predecessors', wherein 'us' refers to 'language users whom we can recognize as better versions of ourselves'.[329] Not only does this add an extra layer of relativity (namely, the question of what does 'better' mean here) but it also renders the criterion strange and impractical.[330]

(See also: M. Fuller, 'Solidarity in the Conversation of Humankind: The Ungroundable Liberalism of Richard Rorty by Norman Geras', *Philosophy Now*, Vol. 20, Spring 1998, pp. 40-42.)

[328] H. Putnam, 'Richard Rorty on Reality and Justification', op. cit.

[329] R. Rorty, 'Putnam and the Relativist Menace', *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 90, No. 9, 1993, pp. 443-461.

[330] Putnam questions, for instance, whether current construals of the American Constitution could have been anticipated by the American Founding Fathers as being the product of 'better versions of themselves'. This is not just impractical but a strong case could be made that it is also meaningless (in H. Putnam, 'Richard Rorty on Reality and Justification', op. cit).

Notwithstanding the difficulty with that last argument, it is the position of this project that Rorty's broader standpoint remains tenable. That is so because the difficulties with the justification of his understanding of the 'us' are not central to his broader argument. Rather, in his attempt to defend the internal consistency of his argument (and of his private vocabulary) he entrapped himself in a language that make his claims appear to have a metaphysical scope. Inevitably, then, it appeared that he had set himself an impossible task and, naturally, the solution he offered seemed dubious, if not self-contradictory. Instead, it would have sufficed for him to describe what his own, contingent, account of the 'us' is and to reiterate his commitment to the openness of this (and any other, for that matter) concept. Indeed, Putnam and similar detractors misconstrue Rorty's position on language and warrants as being at once a descriptive and a normative account. While it has elements of both it is neither, at least not in any strict sense of the words. It is descriptive in the limited sense that it is his own -openly contingent- story (or 'grand narrative') about the world and normative only to the extent that he prefers it to the alternatives. To claim that he espouses all the directions that individuals and groups of individuals may choose to follow in order to adapt to their environment (including choices that have proven to be suboptimal, if not non-viable) is a clear distortion of his position that cannot stand the test of logic and is largely owed to a gross misunderstanding of his scope.

Before delving into the consideration of the practical implications of the combined post-structuralist and neopragmatist approach for HE, let us sketch out their main points of convergence on areas that are critical for HE and briefly elucidate their analytical strengths. The fundamental point of convergence, in that all other such points emanate from (in various degrees) and/or can be explained in terms of it, is the critical stance of the two vis-à-vis language. For both, this was manifested as part of their negative strategy; namely, as part of their assault against the various groundings of language that have preceded (e.g. by positivism, neo-positivism, and structuralism). The understanding of language that both

approaches counter-propose, sees it as being contingent, in an arbitrary relation with what is outside of it (be it the 'real world', something unknown, or even nothingness) and must, therefore, be an unstable sociological creation.[331] As such, it is riddled with, and shaped by, power relations that pervade even its internal logic and, thus, all claims for stability, timelessness, and neutrality must be dismissed as untenable. Accordingly, the search for a final, or at least partially stable meaning, in some key terms of HE that was identified as one of its key problems in Chapter 2 is shown to be futile. Instead, this new-found plasticity of language that is underwritten by both, opens up new opportunities. More specifically, both for the contestation of meanings and, given the neopragmatist insights, for a self-conscious use of language as a limited instrument.

As a logical consequence of that, they both prescribe a very cautious, if not sceptical, approach to all epistemic projects. If language lacks the clarity, neutrality, and stability that most epistemic projects take for granted and gain legitimacy from, then their conclusions, too, are doomed to be characterised by the same precariousness. What is more, the sociological nature of language entails that the field of possible epistemic articulations (roughly what Foucault dubbed 'episteme') is determined on the level of society, as opposed to some imaginary scientific vacuum, and is, therefore, subject to all the critiques that post-structuralists have addressed to discursive practices.[332] As we have established, HE is clearly liable to these difficulties for a series of reasons. A further, and similar, objection that both share (we briefly discussed it in our case for the compatibility of the two approaches) with regard to epistemic endeavours is the non-separability of the subject from the object. In the case of post-structuralism this was fleshed out in the problematisation of metaphysics whereas in the case of neo-pragmatism this was perhaps the main driving force behind the

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[331] Arbitrariness here does not, necessarily, imply randomness but rather the lack of (what Derrida termed) points of presence.

[332] This refers in particular to the post-structuralist emphasis on the networks of power and how they shape the episteme, invent discursive formations, and so on (See 3.1). Neopragmatism, on its part, relativises epistemic knowledge on a more abstract level without precluding the insights from post-structuralism; they can be seen, therefore, as fully compatible on that account.

rejection of all metaphysical discussions. While, as a result of both arguments, they both advise epistemic modesty and caution, importantly, they do not propose (or even hint at) the rejection of all epistemic projects. Neo-pragmatism, in particular, offers a comprehensive framework for their treatment as instruments (akin to its handling of language) with utility as its sole measure of success. In sum, they both take heed to the limitations of HE discussed in Chapter 2 and pose a fully complementary theoretical alternative in order to address them.

Finally, in part owing to the two previous points, post-structuralism and neo-pragmatism do away with the certainties regarding the nature of the subject and, as a result, the fiction of the centred subject as well as the other, prevalent in HE, modelisations of the subject are no longer tenable, either. They arrive at this position through significantly different avenues: in the case of post-structuralism this consists more of a negative discussion of already-existing models of subjectivity, tracing the origin of the flaws through a combination of a critique of metaphysics and power-interpretative techniques, whereas in the case of neo-pragmatism selfhood is dissolved through the deconstruction of the mind-body problem; ultimately, it denies the existence of any metaphysical centre that is typically identified with the subject. However, and perhaps surprisingly given their unique pathways, both perspectives stop short of claiming that individuals lack agency or that, by contrast, their agency is not constrained by certain physiological determinants. Their points, instead, are that we should not overplay either the former or our capacity to map exhaustively the latter. The subject may not be either centred or fully knowable but this uncertainty should not stand in the way of our attempts to better understand them. Any such undertaking, however, should be open-ended, aware of its provisional and contingent status, and proceed on the basis of an explicitly speculative-utilitarian (in the sense given above) project (rather than as a metaphysical or an epistemic one). Importantly, this is not incompatible with scientific discussions of subjectivity. Ergo, for instance, in the unlikely scenario that we might, at one

point in the far future, develop a comprehensive and exhaustive map of the networks of neurons and synapses in the brain and a precise understanding of how they function, neither a post-structuralist and nor a neo-pragmatist would object to the adoption of a corresponding discursive formation with its own vocabulary that would help us address specific problems; so long that its solutions are effective. But until then, doing so poses serious risks and, thus, the temptation must be resisted.

4.2: Whither Happiness Economics?

4.2.1 Introduction

We have already located the sources of systemic flaws in HE literature and identified the most appropriate analytical tools in order to expose and tackle them. However, it could be difficult to visualise how this intervention could take place in practical terms and what effects it will have for HE and beyond. This section aims to address those issues by outlining the consequences of the combined post-structuralist and neo-pragmatist outlook for HE on three different levels. Firstly, we will look at the methodological implications of the understanding of identity, meaning, and of the subject proposed by these perspectives. Then, in turn, we will consider what this new methodological framework implies for the scope of HE. As a supplement to that, we will also discuss about whether, and to what extent, we can find use for the extensive already-existing HE literature (that uses the here-critiqued conventional methodological frameworks). Finally, we shall explore problems that emerge for HE-informed policy prescriptions in light of the here-advocated perspective and, in a preliminary manner, we will sketch out some policy implications that stem directly from the conclusions that we have come to in the course of this project.

We have seen in 2.1 how HE treats the concept of happiness (and homologous ones) as being stable. This is variously manifested in conceptualisations whereby it is seen as being timeless, linguistically stable, fully intersubjective in meaning, or, more commonly, a combination of the above. Let us briefly consider the indicative case of intergenerational studies that epitomise this practice. Studies like that of Hadjar and Samuel, which is typical of the theme, not only take survey SWB data to be valid and reliable without justification (a ubiquitous practice in HE) but also rely on long-term longitudinal panel data (from the British Household Panel Survey and the Swiss Household Panel, in their case) without any qualifications or concerns about the temporality of the concept (and its effect upon survey responses) and about the subjectivity at play and its effect on the comparability of panel data.[333] Such practices may be more readily apparent in papers such as the preceding one for the study of the effect of a long-term phenomenon (such as social mobility) upon happiness would, perhaps, not be feasible otherwise and, therefore, the ostensibly stable status of the concept on all the relevant fronts mentioned above cannot be jeopardised and is, thus, assumed axiomatically, however, they are not exclusive to them. Other mainstream approaches, such as those that make use of various proxies for happiness (e.g. objective-list theories wherein happiness is seen as a function of a selection of variables such as GDP/capita, infant mortality rate, and similar) and physiological ones, also rely existentially on similar assumptions and practices. As underlined in 2.1, even when there is some acknowledgment of potential sources of instability, the core concept is invariably found to be stable to a satisfactory extent so as to, at the very least, justify the adoption of the given approach. Were that not so, the almost ubiquitous heavy statistical processing methods (e.g. elaborate factor analysis) which rely on processes of, indicatively, aggregation and averaging of the collected empirical data would be put under several apparent challenges. It is, therefore, reasonable that since contemporary HE studies rely heavily on both (usually in the form of longitudinal correlational studies or comparative cross-sectional ones, as we have

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[333] A. Hadjar, and R. Samuel, 'Does upward social mobility increase life satisfaction? A longitudinal analysis using British and Swiss panel data', *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, Vol. 39, March 2015, pp. 48-58.

seen), any serious attempt to destabilise the concept is perceived as posing an existential threat to them. Consequently, the post-structuralist and neo-pragmatist amalgam posited in this work constitutes, at least superficially, precisely that.

We have also seen how HE posits understandings of the subject that see it as centred or rational or universal or stable or, more frequently, a combination of the above. Furthermore, whenever one approach acknowledges that one or more of these attributes may not be fully present or, even, that it is missing entirely, it typically seeks to account for that and to counter-propose some equally finite and predictable model of the subject in its place. Indeed, certain scholarly sub-fields of HE are almost exclusively preoccupied with that task.[334] Nonetheless, even when there are no explicit strong assumptions about the nature of the subject, these still exist implicitly, as evidenced by the reliance of so much of HE scholarship upon self-reported happiness metrics. As we have seen in Chapter 2, this implies a model of subjectivity that, inevitably, has most of the above attributes. If that was not the case, such empirical data would be inadmissible inputs for any of the ambitious HE methodologies; they could, perhaps, be useful only for local studies of a very narrow and specific scope. However, in Chapter 3 we summarised the flaws of these aforementioned assumptions and towards the end of the previous section we have summarised the main elements of the here-proposed combined post-structuralist and neo-pragmatist alternative to mainstream models of subjectivity. Considering the intense antithesis of the two approaches with prevalent practices in HE, how is it that these radical interventions are not necessarily at odds with the feasibility of the goals of HE? It is the wager of this project that, if we rethink the scope and methodology of HE research with an eye to addressing the aforementioned tensions, it can be reconciled with the here-raised points of critique. We shall detail what is meant by that in practice in the sections that follow.

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[334] Consider, for instance, the models of bounded rationality, studied by behavioural economics and other economics perspectives to HE (as discussed in 3.2.2).

4.2.2 Methodological implications

Starting with identity and meaning, and after having shown that instead of them being universal, atemporal, and stable they are, instead, local, historical, and unstable respectively, let us explore the practical implications of this new understanding of it for HE. The most obvious way by which HE is impacted pertains specifically to a majority of methodologies that rely on the explicit self-assessment of happiness. That is because all such research designs (whether they use surveys or structured interviews) require subjects to construe happiness more uniformly than is expected of them in the context of a multiple-item measure or open-ended (or, more broadly, unstructured) interviews wherein the interviewer or the designer of the study typically leave the assessment to themselves (via a process of interpretation, structured or not). If that were not the case, the validity of such studies (primarily the internal one) would be jeopardised for apparent reasons. Therefore, in the former case, the instability of meaning is dispersed equally throughout each study (and is, thus, ever-present) leaving scope for distortions of significant -and uncontrollable- magnitude. The latter case is, naturally, not without problems, either, but we shall look at it separately later in this subsection.

Naturally, self-reporting is riddled with other, meaning-related problems, which, in many cases, do not depend upon the adoption of a post-structuralist perspective to become apparent. We have reviewed the most important of these in Chapter 2: the sheer numbers of explicit or implicit theories of happiness and of their corresponding concepts and/or instruments, problems related to the quantification of happiness (e.g. the productive effects of the selection of scales), the various biases that can creep in (e.g. response bias; single-item studies with such clear questions as 'How happy are you?' are particularly susceptible to them, but also a number of other biases, too, such as so-called cultural measurement bias), and, finally, owing partly to the above, the problems that emerge when the interoperability of concepts and data is assumed, despite the well-established contingency of both.

To make matters worse, the post-structuralist critique of the notions of subjectivity that are being used in HE (as summarised in 4.2.1) casts further doubt on the legitimacy of the use of self-reporting on at least two fundamental levels. First, as it concerns the very validity of data: If the model of rationality and other models of formalised bounded rationality are no longer defensible, it follows that self-reporting of happiness may not, actually, give us an accurate picture of the subjects' happiness levels. Further, given the heterogeneity of subjects and their inherent resistance to fixed models of subjectivity, simple statistical treatments of aggregations of data that seek to, for example, account for deviations from expected/hypothesised values and biases are not tenable. The example of the very well-cited meta-study of Clark, Frijters, and Shields showcases this phenomenon.[335] The authors make the case for the incorporation of happiness in typical utility functions, citing the importance of adaptation effects (mainly due to comparison and habituation) upon SWB (especially as it pertains to relative income) and even arrive at a happiness function that takes them into account. Even though, however, they recognise that the datasets they base their analysis on are of relatively low quality for they lack important ex ante information (relating to the kind of comparisons at play) and are particularly susceptible to endogeneity effects for a number of critical variables are not controlled for, they proceed with them anyway. Worse still, they use aggregations of such data (SWB and income) in order to substantiate their claims. Thus, the positive slope in happiness-income curves is attributed to increased consumption but, due to comparisons, and since status is treated as a zero-sum game, only the consumption benefit of income remains at the aggregate level. Since the happiness benefit of marginal consumption approaches zero as income rises, this explains, for the authors, why happiness profiles in high-income countries are consistent with Easterlin's 'paradox'. But to expect that aggregate incomes and aggregate responses of single-item SWB measures (or, perhaps more troublingly, of aggregated multiple-item ones) can tell us meaningful things about the individuals and their comparisons (since the authors posit a zero-sum status game as

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[335] A. Clark, P. Frijters, and M. Shields, 'Relative Income, Happiness, and Utility: An Explanation for the Easterlin Paradox and Other Puzzles', *Journal of Economic Literature*, Vol. 46, No. 1, March 2008, pp. 95-144.

defining of them) is to make huge assumptions about subjectivity, assumptions that are more wishful thinking than realistic, as we saw. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to argue that, ideally, if we are to take into account the theorisation of subjectivity developed earlier, each data point of such a study would require separate treatment. But precisely because of the unpinnable nature of subjectivity any such attempt would prove to be a very tough, if not impossible, task, even if we set aside the apparently immense logistical challenges. Overall, however, whatever pragmatic discounts we are forced to make, relapsing into such methodological avenues must be precluded.

Second, it further problematises the comparability of data and that would remain the case even if we could magically circumvent the aforementioned validity problems somehow. That is so because the never-ending and -seemingly- stochastic variances in terms of the cultural load and attributes of subjects entails that even comparisons (and, therefore, aggregations and similar statistical uses of the data, too) among the values reported by the same individual over time will be problematic. By extension, when the comparisons are attempted across a variety of subjects and for data points collected over a considerable breadth of spatiotemporal coordinates (as is typically the case in current HE) they are destined to fail.[336]

It is worth mentioning that a number of scholars have acknowledged such concerns and sought to address them. Interestingly, it first cropped up as a contentious issue in economics where Robbins ignited the debate by arguing against both the measurability of utility, and, more importantly for us, against its interpersonal comparability.[337] Sen, mostly famous for

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[336] It could be argued that this is not a distinct problematisation of the comparability of self-reporting in HE, but rather a reiteration of the case for the contingency and locality of meaning albeit with having subject as the starting point of the analysis. In other words, the two critiques are the two sides of the same coin.
[337] His view was itself a response to assumptions of full comparability held by Marshall and other marginalists. See: L. Robbins, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (London, UK: Macmillan, 1935).

his contributions in welfare economics, challenged that view even though he stopped short of advocating the full comparability of utility; in his view, partial comparability (of either levels or units) can be good enough in order to extract useful conclusions.[338] It follows that for Sen (explicitly) and for the others (implicitly) this is not merely about comparability but also about aggregability and similar statistical treatments of data; inasmuch as two data-points are deemed to be comparable, most (if not all) objections to their aggregability vanish. Similar arguments for both qualified (or partial) and full comparability have been made since by various HE scholars, including Kristoffersen,[339] Veenhoven,[340] Ng,[341] and Pugno.[342] The two main ways by which they attempt to substantiate their theses are as follows: i) they show that -for the most part- there is an intuitive correlation between living conditions and happiness (better living conditions as measured, for instance, by wealth, freedom, peace, and similar, make for higher self-reported happiness) and ii) they argue that the sheer size of the available data is reason enough to assume that any potential cultural measurement biases and/or similar sources of heterogeneity are statistically negligible, if at all existent. However, both ways of reasoning are hardly defensible.

Most fundamentally, they are both guilty of the fallacy of begging the question. More specifically, in the former line of reasoning, they take specific and, necessarily, arbitrary (as illustrated previously) sets of material conditions to be de facto predictor variables of well-

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[338] While HE was in its embryonic phase at that time, Sen's contributions in welfare economics have a surprisingly large number of shared themes with those studied by HE. Indeed, he later contributed directly to several HE publications. For Sen's view on interpersonal comparability see indicatively: A. Sen, 'Interpersonal Aggregation and Partial Comparability', *Econometrica*, Vol. 38, No. 3, 1970, pp. 393-409 and also: A. Sen, *Choice, Welfare and Measurement* (Cambridge, US: Harvard University Press, 1997), esp. part 3.
[339] I. Kristoffersen, 'The Metrics of Subjective Wellbeing Data: An Empirical Evaluation of the Ordinal and Cardinal Comparability of Life Satisfaction Scores', *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 130, Issue 2, 2017, pp. 845-865.
[340] R. Veenhoven, 'Comparability of happiness across nations', *School of Sociology and Social Work Journal*, Vol. 104, 2008, pp. 211-234.
[341] Y. Ng, 'A case for happiness, cardinalism, and interpersonal comparability', *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 107, Issue 445, 1997, pp. 1848-1858.
[342] M. Pugno, *On the Foundations of Happiness in Economics: Reinterpreting Tibor Scitovsky* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2016).

being. However, this is clearly circular in that it assumes a priori knowledge of the determinants of well-being. Indeed, any such effort is bound to fail for, as we have seen, there exists no external and/or objective measure to judge HE findings against or to have recourse to in order to justify a methodological choice, as is the case here. Granted, the associations that are made (e.g. the most frequently used one, that between wealth and well-being) are scarcely counter-intuitive but we shall not neglect the fact that HE emerged, in the first place, precisely in order to respond to ostensible paradoxes and to uncover counter-intuitive correlations and tendencies and this is where its strength and most serious potential lies. As for the latter line of reasoning, it begs the question to the extent that it assumes that more data (albeit of the same statistical quality) will somehow solve the inherent difficulties that diminish the quality of the data in the first place. While it is reasonable to expect that having larger amounts of data will ameliorate the effects of so-called statistical noise, the problem here is different in nature; not to merely account for some curious cases of outliers or for unexplained variances due to statistical errors and residuals. Instead, it is the very quality of the data (and most importantly their validity) that is at issue and, therefore, larger amounts will -at best- do nothing to improve it and –at worse- may even magnify errors. Indeed, the various contradictions of HE research that were highlighted in Chapter 2 exist in the face of an ever-increasing amount of available HE-related data and ever-increasing sizes for HE-related datasets.

In any case, post-structuralism helped us deepen the scepticism further and confront the reality that meaning can never have stable and atemporal foundations and that the subject can neither be known in its fullness and nor can we treat it as static. Thus, even if the aforementioned problems of HE could be solved somehow, deeper destabilising forces will always be present. The post-structuralist critique may have brought to light more profound problems but, in tandem with neo-pragmatism, it also offers a constructive way out of this predicament and can help us address both classes of problems. As regards the former, the

solution is readily apparent: HE scholars should do completely away with certain gravely problematic elements (such as the liberal and unqualified interpersonal comparisons of the international and intertemporal kinds) and to work towards mitigating the impact of less serious (or, in any case, non-fatal) problems; the scope for that is ample in several areas, such as dealing with the various biases that creep in. While, as explained previously, post-structuralism is not essential in order to identify these problems, it accentuates their significance, gives us a better understanding of their nature, and precludes easy or quick fixes that, either wittingly or unwittingly, ignore the magnitude and the persistence of the difficulties.

This becomes apparent when one considers the multiplicity of self-report measures and of the underlying theorisations of happiness. One study that reviewed a selection of 99 self-report happiness measures found that they used at least 196 different dimensions of well-being based around 6 broad themes.[343] [344] However, increasing the comparability of these data is not simply a case of identifying the 'best' measure or even of somehow merging a number of measures into families of measures or hybridising them.[345] Indeed, that would be superficially easy. After all, the same study found that out of those 99 measures most relied upon two basic theorisations of happiness: the one offered in Diener's model of SWB and the

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[343] While this is, to the author's knowledge, the most extensive review of self-report measures, it is important to note that it remains a review of merely a selection of self-reporting instruments and not an exhaustive one as plenty of historical ones have not been considered and new ones continuously spring up.

[344] M. Linton, P. Dieppe, and A. Medina-Lara, 'Review of 99 self-report measures for assessing well-being in adults: exploring dimensions of well-being and developments over time', *BMJ Open*, Vol. 6, Issue 7, 2016. Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2015-010641 [Last accessed: 22 April 2017].

[345] For a prominent example of such an attempt see: A. Brief, A. Butcher, J. George, and K. Link, 'Integrating bottom-up and top-down theories of subjective well-being: the case of health', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 64, Issue 4, 1993, pp. 646-653.

one that follows from WHO's definition of health.[346] [347] [348] The former comprises 5 items ('In most ways my life close to my ideal', 'The conditions of my life are excellent', 'I am satisfied with my life', 'So far I have gotten the important things I want in life', 'If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing') wherein subjects are called to respond for each on a seven-level Likert scale. The latter, as is explained in more detail in the last footnote, understands well-being as the outcome of a productive realisation of one's potential, unimpeded by the normal stresses of life. While both theorisations are fuzzy and present numerous problems, their simplicity along with the wide consensus that has been built around each provide fertile ground for intellectually lazy attempts at operationalising well-being.

Nevertheless, both fall short of their aim: namely, to fully capture happiness and nor can it be said that they are good enough proxies. That is not only due to them being overly simplistic and vague but, more importantly, because they are not exempt from the various critiques levelled against theorisations of happiness in Chapter 2 (esp. in subsections 2.1.2-2.1.4). Most obviously, Diener's theory is susceptible to the criticism of nominal subjectivism while the theory that results from WHO's definition of health is too broad and, therefore, invites spurious conflations.[349] Evidently, it could sustain vastly different operationalisations

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[346] M. Linton, P. Dieppe, and A. Medina-Lara, op. cit.

[347] For the paper that set the basis for his renowned Satisfaction With Life Scale (henceforth SWLS) see: E. Diener, 'Subjective Well-Being', *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 95, No. 3, 1984, pp. 542-575, and for the first elaborate formulation of the SWLS see: E. Diener, R. Emmons, R. Larsen, and S. Griffin, 'The Satisfaction with Life Scale', *Journal of Personality Assessment*, Vol. 49, 1985, pp. 71-75.

[348] The definition of health that the Linton et al. paper refers to is the following: 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity' (See: World Health Organisation, *Constitution of the World Health Organization*, 2006. Available at: http://www.who.int/governance/eb/who_constitution_en.pdf [Last accessed: 24 April 2017]. However, since it can be too broad and blurs the lines between overall health and well-being, it would be fair to argue that the definition that underlies a substantial number of self-report instruments is even closer to the one that WHO offers specifically for mental health. Namely, the 'state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community' (see: World Health Organisation, *Strengthening mental health promotion* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization, 2001), p. 1.

[349] 'Nominal subjectivism' here designates the unhelpful kind of subjectivism and implies that the collected data are so heterogeneous that it is impossible to statistically process them even on a basic level (in other words, a situation wherein one has to compare 'apples and oranges'). Diener's

such as those deriving from Sen's capabilities approach and a number of approaches from the QoL paradigm, affect theory, and other needs-based theories. After all, merely the fact that these two simple understandings of happiness have spawned more than 150 different dimensions of well-being goes to show the extent of the difficulty to standardise *a happiness* on such theoretical grounds. In turn, the lack of standardisation, despite the fact that the field is now several decades old, proves the inherent complexity of the concept. Further, the post-structuralist critique that has preceded has helped us appreciate that this is not due to a cluster of individual errors but rather due to the elusiveness of meaning which impacts all concepts.

With all these problems apparently lacking satisfactory resolutions, it could appear that HE approaches that employ self-assessment are beyond salvaging. One obvious response to this predicament would be to reject its use altogether. Indeed, as Thin notes, some researchers opt for just that; they reject such instruments on the basis of them being too distortive.[350] However, considering that there is no SWB instrument without flaws (as discussed at length in Chapter 2) and, also, that there appears to be some minimal consensus on certain findings (as discussed in Chapter 2), the optimal strategy, in the view of this project, is to, instead, make qualified use of SWB self-assessment and to work towards mitigating the effects of the identified sources of distortion. The first step towards that direction would be for the studies that make use of such devices to be self-conscious; to treat the collected data as tentative, to acknowledge the inherent difficulties of this methodology, and to take specific steps (including ad hoc ones that cannot be prescribed here, independently of context) to address them.

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methodology, and more specifically the fact that he employs a five-item instrument, is a conscious attempt on his part to bypass that difficulty. However, and despite the fact that he cites the high internal consistency of his scale and its satisfactory correlations with happiness-related personality attributes as proof of its validity, the problem remains. The use of multiple items, at best, reduces the vagueness of the response for each individual participant but does little, if anything, to make the responses commensurable as the source of the above-described contingency remains fully in effect.
[350] N. Thin, *Social Happiness: Theory into Policy and Practice,* op. cit., p. 100.

Furthermore, studies should seek to corroborate their findings with the use of other approaches as much as practically possible. As we have seen in Chapter 2, this is seldom the case and even when it happens it serves secondary tasks and is only superficial and/or cursory. An example of an alternative to traditional self-reporting is that of the various diary methods such as experience sampling.[351] These may still rely on self-reporting but they do address the difficulty that subjects may have in appraising their average state of well-being and may also attenuate problems of memory. Furthermore, due to the larger number of data points, it makes intrapersonal comparisons easier which can be a good substitute for the use of interpersonal comparisons the unqualified use of which was shown to be particularly problematic. The reason for that is that, while the meaning of happiness remains contingent and perhaps unknowable (at least in its fullness) even to the subject, the variance of it alone for a given subject can help us derive some safer conclusions. In other words, even if the concept of happiness remains elusive, studying the differential of intrapersonal happiness can be a good means of bypassing this elusiveness without resorting to interpersonal comparisons and/or aggregations of incommensurable metrics, which is standard practice in studies that make use of traditional self-assessment data. To be sure, these methods do not represent a panacea for, as we have seen in Chapter 3, there is no reason to assume neither the visibility of one's emotional state to oneself and nor the continuity of the subject (which would underpin their required consistency). However, they are effective in removing flawed elements that definitely reduce the quality of data. It should, however, be mentioned that they also introduce a new risk, too. Namely, that the responses that subjects give may refer to different things: happiness in the sense of satisfaction with life in the former case and

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[351] For a brief overview of such methodologies (including the so-called 'Experience Sampling Method' (ESM) and 'Day Reconstruction Method' (DRM)) see: G. MacKerron, 'Happiness Economics from 35,000 Feet', *Journal of Economic Surveys*, Vol. 26, Issue 4, September 2012, pp. 705-735 (esp. 2.1.2). As the author notes, the logistics and other practical difficulties (size, invasiveness of equipment and relevant material, and the burden of always carrying them, to name the most important ones) rendered such studies more difficult and problematic in the past but technological advancements have solved or ameliorated some of them.

hedonic happiness (or happiness as pleasure and/or positive affect) in the latter.[352] It is for this reason, along with the inherent difficulties of self-reporting that were mentioned earlier, that studies should seek to complement self-assessment methods with one or more research devices that do not incorporate such elements. Examples of that include, as we have seen, qualitative studies based on un/semi-structured interviews, objective-list measures, and physiological indicators. These may be also imperfect but if they corroborate the findings of the former in observing a pattern or a phenomenon, this shall merit closer attention and further research.

A further point that happiness economists should consider is the use of instruments that are designed ad hoc for the study of specific phenomena or for the examination of specific determinants of well-being. Thus, rather than asking about the overall state of the subject vis-à-vis wellbeing, or even about their well-being with regard to specific, but broad, domains of their lives, surveys should, instead, seek to gather data about specific life-events or, at least, about sub-domains as close to the atomic level as possible. This will represent a kind of principle of subsidiarity for HE and will ensure that subjects will not have to either condense their evaluations of how they are doing in different domains of life (as in the case of single-unit measures of happiness) or all the aspects and life-events of a specific domain (as in the case of domain-based questions), into a single measure. Further, in the former case, it relieves the subject from having to choose how much weight to give to each domain of life, as well as from the entailed calculations that produce, as we have seen, further distortions and render data even less commensurable. It should be mentioned that there already exist instruments along the lines mentioned here but they represent a small and peculiar minority of the total measures. Typically, they are deployed by scholars who seek to study correlations of wellbeing that are relevant to their disciplines, particularly so in the life

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[352] This is evidenced, for instance, by the fact that traditional self-assessment and experience sampling tend to produce different outcomes, even if there is often some broad trend similarity between the two.

sciences (e.g. developmental psychology, gerontology, and public health), however, there is nothing barring scholars from adopting such an approach for interests that span across different disciplines. Certainly, this methodology allows for studies of a narrower scope, and the collected data will have little nominal and actual commensurability with already-existing data (something which can be seen as explanatory of its limited adoption). However, in a field grounded on such shaky foundations, removing as many elements or layers of distortion and uncertainty as possible is imperative.

Lastly, and on a more fundamental level, self-report instruments should be receptive to the insights of neopragmatism that were explicated earlier. That is because since the problem of defining happiness is both insoluble and all-permeating, the neo-pragmatist understanding of language lends a concrete way forward. For neo-pragmatism, the concept of happiness does not need to have a stable meaning or be atemporal. Since, as we have seen, language is merely an adaptive toolbox with no one-to-one correspondence to the physical world, the concept of happiness should be treated as merely one of the many tools of that toolbox. However, neopragmatism also calls our attention to the fact that language is tied to communities. As such, no one 'happiness' can be treated as being identical to the 'happiness' of some other community (even if the language they use belongs superficially to the same linguistic family/branch/dialect). Therefore, it is of essence to establish that survey participants belong to the same community if we are to draw any comparisons and/or proceed to aggregations as is common practice in HE. It is important to note that 'communities' here does not refer to the traditional spatio-temporal notion of the word. That is, even when groups are differentiated on the basis that they reside in a specific region at a given time in history, or belong to roughly the same age group, they do not necessarily form a community in the abovementioned sense. Thus, the criteria are not exhausted to these two; indeed, they are neither necessary nor sufficient. Instead, whether a subject participates (or not) in a given community should hinge on whether the individual in question employs the

same vocabularies and in similar fashions to the predominant ones in a group of other people (an already established linguistic community). Controlling and/or adjusting for that (e.g. by an in-depth cluster analysis), as well as carrying out appropriate sampling, can be resource-intensive tasks which, quite understandably, might appear too high a barrier in today's research climate. However, it is a barrier worth passing. Not only would such a study produce data of better quality, but, at the same time, it can potentially yield satisfactory comparability levels among data sets that were previously thought to be incomparable, especially with respect to the points we drew attention to earlier in this subsection.[353] For instance, it could conceivably enable a wealth of comparative studies along the framework of a most similar systems design with a small-N. It would, of course, be paramount that case selection, which, in such designs, typically looks for common variables (so as to neutralise non-explanatory variables and unveil the actual determinants), will place particular focus on identifying commonalities in the linguistic-meaning domain. But to the extent that it does so, a host of potentially very fruitful research possibilities will be opened up.

While the above approach helps us circumvent difficulties that result from the inherent instability of meaning, they are also neither a panacea nor without problems of their own. They are not the former because no perfect linguistic community can exist (in the sense of having an absolute equivalence in the use of vocabularies among members of that community), at best we can only have approximations of it, and therefore this only mitigates meaning-related problems rather than eradicating them completely; scholars should, thus,

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[353] A middle way out of the tug of war between considerations of material expediency and considerations pertaining to the quality of our data could perhaps be the use of a restricted focus on happiness-related vocabularies. However, since each object of a linguistic set is ultimately hetero-determined, caution should be exercised to ensure that superficial similarities in the use of a vocabulary are backed by a considerable similarity in the chains of signification that each subject uses (so as to ensure that this is what led to those similarities of the end-product). In addition, instead of looking for full equivalence, scholars should make use of the Wittgensteinian concept of 'family resemblance' which could prove to be more robust than superficial nominal equivalence (See: L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, op. cit.). That is because it does not assume that signification is stable or an act of full representation but, rather, respects the hetero-determinacy of meaning. Otherwise, scholars will risk falling victims to the meaning-related flaws that were highlighted in earlier chapters.

never fail to acknowledge this status for they would risk a relapse into false positivism. As for the latter, and as was explored in some depth in 4.1, the crux of the problems stem from the fact that the neopragmatic approach is predicated on utility. In our case this would have to apply on two levels: language and HE. It therefore calls upon us to answer the questions: 'utility for whom?', 'for what goal?', and 'as measured by what'? As we have seen, Rorty, being wary not to contradict his broader outlook, responds to each question with answers that he deems non-universalisable. However, it is precisely that status of his answers that renders their unqualified use highly problematic. In essence, doing that would have represented a surreptitious return to the metaphysical way of thinking. Indeed, as we have seen earlier, Rorty acknowledges that the use of his framework is not contingent upon adopting his own ethics upon which one can trace his responses to the above-mentioned questions. For it is only communities that can agree, always provisionally, to a specific ethics for as long as they consider that it best serves its adaptive function. As a consequence, one cannot give final answers. But would it be possible to ground a HE methodology on a theoretical framework that leaves such questions wide open?

It would not be an exaggeration to claim that, instead of the above being a barrier to the development of HE, it can actually engender and facilitate a potentially infinite number of different HE. Indeed, it could even be argued that many of the problems that were reviewed earlier, such as those of flawed comparisons (or of reduced comparability and/or data interoperability), are owed, at least in some part, to such logics. Those issues aside, and if we are to be consistent with both the post-structuralist and the neopragmatist way of reasoning, the above represents no complication per se. All the same, if we leave the issue at that without offering any qualifications, we provide a springboard for scholarly chaos that would be open even to approaches that cannot be said to serve the goals of HE in any meaningful sense. Consider, for instance, a case wherein a scholar postulates a HE that maximises utility as measured by their own private metric that no other party is able to comprehend, let alone

willing to adopt. Such research cannot possibly have value (or utility) for anyone other than, perhaps, the scholar who put it forward originally. It is clear that such private endeavours do not and cannot constitute a legitimate or beneficial form of study of any phenomenon. Therefore, there needs to be certain stipulations by way of safeguards, protecting against the materialisation of such scenarios.

In the context of HE specifically, the first concern would be to ascertain the utility of a project. Thereupon, of course, lie all the utility-related questions mentioned above. Nevertheless, in the broadest sense, it makes no sense to talk of a HE that does not, in some way, attempt to study the well-being of individuals or of groups of people with the intention to understand the mechanisms underlying happiness and how they are affected by political, social, economic, and other circumstances with the ultimate goal of uncovering ways to improve happiness outcomes. In many ways, however, as we have seen, since the above very broad descriptive construct remains, ultimately, reliant upon language and can be interpreted manifoldly and, considering, in addition, that we have opted for a utility-based understanding of language, it is incumbent upon any HE scholar to be both open and receptive to the various meanings and connotations that the above terms may take in a given (studied) community. This implies, on the one hand, a duty on the part of the scholar to be as exhaustive as possible in their attempt to collect all possible conceptions of well-being and, on the other hand, a prerequisite that the community facilitates a sort of Darwinian pluralism of views that take shape and compete in an open and lively dialogue among its constituents so that the opinions of all individuals feed in into the meaning that signifiers ultimately take. To be sure, the very notion of a linguistic community implies a language that is common for all. This may be largely a fiction, for reasons explained before, but as long as, firstly, the meaning attributed to a word enjoys the status of being predominant (shared by the vast majority of the community) and, secondly, its predominance is the end-result of free and open communicative acts, it would make sense to derive conclusions that would apply -

at the very least- to a significant majority of that specific community.[354] In addition, scholars should attend to the inherent instability of language by introducing into their methodologies both ways of continuously updating the content attached to each term as necessary and provisions for the replacement of the concepts used if more appropriate/relevant ones emerge organically.

Nonetheless, if either or both of the aforementioned conditions are not met, the linguistic devices used will not be representative of any significant section of the community and, therefore, a HE based on them will be destined to fail. Furthermore, considering that neo-pragmatism deems all meaning and truth statements (or justifications) to be of a sociological nature, it should also relativise the conditions themselves, too, and, therefore, call for a deeper interrogation of them. What are the precise conditions for a free and open exchange of ideas that will organically lead to predominant uses for any given term? While there can be some consensus on the basics: the ability to express oneself freely, freedom of association, and similar, there is scope for a lot of disagreement on less obvious scenarios. If, for instance, the parties to a dialogue are not of equal social power, can it be said that the exchange is equal? If not, should they be equalised somehow? And if so, is the equality of rights sufficient or should we maybe opt for equality of opportunity or, even, for equality of outcome to consider the conditions to be met? This debate is, certainly, not new and due to space limitations it is cannot possibly fit within the scope of this project. After all, there need not be a universally acceptable response to such questions for this approach to bear fruits. Our intention here, rather, is to highlight this as a potential point of contention. If one were to construct a HE approach along the lines described here, they would have to address the

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[354] Ostensibly, the idea of a 'linguistic community' (as opposed to a territorial/ethnic/or similar one) presupposes a common language but we have seen how this is practically impossible in its fullness and instead the term should be taken to only refer to an approximation. Further, even when two subjects define and conceptualise a term identically there can still exist differences in the given signification process that result in non-evident deviations. This may be natural as no private language can be fully translatable into another (as discussed in 4.1), however, it renders ascertaining the fulfilment of the first condition a complex task that does not lend itself to superficial approaches.

above questions not with an eye to giving definitive answers but, rather, in order to acknowledge and be explicit about their adopted ethics and/or metaphysics. Indeed, as a minimum, they would have to either have recourse to an existing theory of communicative acts or construct one themselves.

Moreover, the framework sketched out above does not only address meaning-related difficulties but does the same with those resulting from the inherent instability and non-fixability of the subject which are particularly critical in self-reporting methods. Not only is neopragmatism subscribing to a similar theorisation of the subject (as we have seen in 4.1), but also, inasmuch as the above-described methodologies do not rely on any one theory of the subject and do not posit a stable or necessary relation between subject and language, it clears the ground for a post-subjectivity (as discussed in Chapter 3) study of happiness. On the one hand, it does not negate the subject by subjugating it completely to forces beyond its control that would render it completely passive and that would, in turn, give grounds for the denouncement of the self-assessment process as moot. On the other, it does not hinge upon the subject being capable of accurate representation, either.[355]

In other words, the subject emerges as being at once contingent in its character but also reliable enough to be entrusted with the main two tasks that form the basis of HE: firstly, the arbitration of what goals and means HE should have, and, secondly, the selection of and partaking in the moulding of language -a defining tool for HE- that will be used. Thus, while the subject may not be fully rational and we may lack the means to create a full and accurate account of its irrationalities/irregularities (akin to those posited by models of bounded rationality), that is not at issue and, therefore, not a prohibitive problem here. To the extent

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[355] Neo-pragmatism's perspective on language may be a sufficient condition for that position, however, as we have seen in 4.1, its separate perspective on the subject accords well with the post-structuralist theorisation of it and both are clearly supportive of the position expressed here.

that individual subjects can and do associate freely and engage in the differential use of a language so that they can be said to belong to a linguistic community, they are capable of performing the abovementioned functions. To be sure, this distancing from models of subjectivity comes at a cost: potential conclusions from HE research carried out with such methodologies may not be easily universalisable. Furthermore, such research may not lend itself for wide-ranging conclusions inasmuch as it does not begin from a necessary human nature and, accordingly, does not seek to extrapolate one, either. After all, given that i) language is seen as an adaptive tool and ii) there exists a vast linguistic wealth and diversity even in congenital milieus (that may, or may not, belong to similar spatio-temporal coordinates), it is already implied from our premises that communities will adapt differently (by using a different language and practices, including HE). Indeed, some will adapt better than others (in terms of well-being, for instance) and there is nothing barring those in the least better off community from trying to adopt the HE-related practices that led to better outcomes (to the extent that it is possible or relevant). However, it is clear that this cannot be done either with universalisations about human nature or blanketly and 'from above' as that would impinge on several of the key steps of the neopragmatist methodology that is hereby advocated.

Instead, the emphasis is placed on the local and the contingent. Thus, by way of illustration, the working definition of happiness that will be used (explicitly or implicitly) each time that a subject is called to assess their happiness will be one that has gone through a double filter. Firstly, that of the linguistic community in which one belongs and, secondly, that of each individual. The latter is an inescapable consequence of the understanding of language and subjectivity that is being advocated here for, even if linguistic communities consist of individuals, there is no reason to assume that the interpretation of each term and concept is uniform and universal (if anything, this non-uniformity is the guarantor of the evolution of language). What is more, HE itself lies epistemically upon contingent foundations. Both of

these aspects suggest a degree of contingency that, while present in most typical self-report-based approaches, is seldom acknowledged. Here, however, contingency is openly acknowledged, encompassed, and fully accounted for. The implication, naturally, is yet further reinforcement of the cautions against intercommunal comparisons and aggregations for apparent reasons. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily preclude all such statistical analyses, though. For instance, it is absolutely conceivable that in a scenario such as the one hypothesised in the previous paragraph, wherein two communities end up adopting very similar practices (linguistic and those pertaining to the study of well-being), the collected data will have a high enough comparability and perhaps even some of the HE conclusions will apply across both communities in question. However, these should be cautious (e.g. could require limited pretesting locally, appropriate pre-sampling, and other) and always qualified (i.e. valid only so far as they are in compliance with the conditions set out here).

Methodological implications, of course, are not exhausted in approaches based on these forms of self-assessment. If we move on to consider the, increasingly popular, case of multiple-item measures (both subjective, such as in questionnaires, and non-subjective such as in multi-dimensional measures and indices) it is clear that some of the above-mentioned implications also apply here. Importantly, however, there are some that are specific to these methodologies.[356] Concerning the former, it is apparent, for instance, that multiple-item self-assessment still relies heavily on language and, in effect, that everything that applies to single-item measures that ask directly about happiness must also apply to them equally. That is because in spite of the fact that the term 'happiness' (or its equivalents) may not be used as much, or may not be used directly at all in some cases, it still is the case that, ultimately, the designer of the study aims at the self-assessment of the very same happiness, albeit via less

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[356] Admittedly, the methodologies lumped together here are quite heterogeneous but what is important here is their methodological affinity in that they both seek indirect proxies of happiness, rather than relying on set definitions or on the subjects to define it themselves. Thus, it could appear that they are exempt from the vulnerabilities of studies based on single-item self-report measures.

direct avenues. However, this indirect approach is not immune to the factors that render HE unstable and nor does it bypass the linguistic challenges raised earlier. Further, these methodologies are equally vulnerable with regard to the unstable and unpinnable nature of the subject. As such, the neopragmatist desiderata expounded in the previous paragraphs are equally relevant here.

With regard to issues specific to multiple-item measures, one in particular stands out: the arbitrariness of the selection of items both in surveys and indices. As was explained during our discussion of needs-based approaches, such projects seek to circumvent meaning-related problems by conceptualising happiness as that which results to the extent that a subject fulfils certain (usually universal) needs. However, as we have seen, there is no satisfactory evidence that these sets of needs are either exhaustive or that their import (if not validity) is universal or as straightforward as their methodology implies. Similarly, in the case of multiple-item measures in surveys, the assumption is that the use of a multiplicity of questions will help dissolve any meaning-related uncertainty. Yet, we have seen how this essentially downplays meaning-related problems and mistakenly relegates them to the sphere of ambiguity/misunderstanding rather than acknowledging the inherent nature of the radical instability that language imparts to the key terms in HE. The question then becomes: is there anything worth salvaging from methodologies like these and, if so, how?

In the case of multiple-item measures that rely on some form of self-assessment, the answer is pretty straightforward. Whatever applies to single-item self-report measures should also apply to them. Namely, there should be: receptiveness by the study to the existence of different meanings among different linguistic communities; the satisfaction of the conditions for an open Darwinian pluralism of meaning in each community along with the possibility that one can freely move to a different one; and, lastly, comparisons, aggregations, and similar statistical treatment should only be carried out to the extent that the data was

collected from homogenous linguistic cohorts. If all of these conditions are met, and considering that all means of measuring happiness are imperfect, the qualified use of such data is fully warranted under the same rationale that we applied in the case of self-reported single-item measures. It is, however, important to stress that the less direct character of such approaches does not reduce the liability of such methodologies to the issues of self-reporting. Therefore, it shall not be accompanied (as is often the case in literature) with an over-confidence that would justify any relaxation of the requirements. If anything, this indirectness usually necessitates a reliance upon a variety of more complex linguistic devices and items (e.g. questions about how one appraises their own SWB as compared to that of their peers) which, in turn, renders the complexity of the survey higher and therefore calls for extra attention rather than less.[357]

If we now turn to multiple-item 'objective' metrics, the issue becomes a more complicated one. For one thing, these are often designated as 'quality of life' measures. As such, in some cases they are clearly demarcated from happiness, SWB, and, more broadly, the HE paradigm and, therefore, whatever their problems, they are beyond the scope of this project.[358] However, this is not always the case. Although not as commonly anymore, scholars do sometimes conflate the two concepts but, more frequently, it is parties external to the studies that want, however, to make use of them somehow (e.g. scholars in other fields, think tanks, policy-makers, and similar) that equate the two concepts, typically

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[357] In several cases, especially with regard to specialised studies that do not have the general public as their frame of reference, such elaborate alternatives might appear more reasonable, relevant, or conducive to achieving high degrees of internal validity. However, it is not within the scope of this project to pass judgment on the specifics of each or on whether the one is preferable over the other; that would have been practically impossible Instead, we are merely reviewing them in terms of their liability to the difficulties we identify in the field.

[358] Indeed, many such projects will study the relationship between QoL measures and SWB which is an as-clear-as-possible acknowledgment of the non-identity of the two. See, for instance: A. Balducci, and D. Checchi, 'Happiness and Quality of City Life: The Case of Milan, the Richest Italian City', *International Planning Studies*, Vol. 14, Issue 1, 2009, pp. 25-64, A. Spiers, and G. Walker, 'The Effects of Ethnicity and Leisure Satisfaction on Happiness, Peacefulness, and Quality of Life', *Leisure Sciences*, Vol. 31, Issue 1, 2008, pp. 84-99, and A. Musschenga, 'The Relation Between Concepts of Quality-of-Life, Health and Happiness', *The Journal of Medicine & Philosophy*, Vol. 22, Issue 1, 1997, pp. 11-28.

without any justification. But can it be argued that it is justified? This is a tricky question for, as we have already demonstrated, our approach implies that there can be no external/objective criterion against which one could judge such things. However, if we take typical SWB constructs as reliable standards, it appears that most QoL indices are not identical or equivalent. Typically, SWB studies concur with some of the QoL determinants but never with all and not to the presumed (equal or almost equal) degree.[359] [360] [361] Nevertheless, the selection of SWB as the arbitrator is no more justified than the exact opposite (having QoL as the arbitrator of subjective happiness). Indeed, if we are to be consistent with the theory of subjectivity posited here (whereby the subject is neither ever fully centred nor rational), there is good reason to assume that a study of variables external to the subject (or at least independent from its subjective appraisals) might have more strengths than its purely subjective counterpart. At the same time, though, the QoL/index-based approach (as was illustrated in Chapter 2) tends to assume uniformity of goals and of responses to the various environmental variables (health, income, pollution, and so forth) which stands at odds with our theorisation of the subject; it would require a necessary human nature, and a quite elaborate one at that, for such approaches do not merely postulate a small number of fairly basic needs that one could, perhaps, agree to on account of them being very intuitive (e.g. freedom from conflict, illness, and similar) and shared responses but, rather, a wide variety of complex needs and, equally, a wide spectrum of common responses to the various determinants. Is there then any scope for the use of QoL measures that would be consistent with our overarching approach here?

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[359] Veenhoven shows, for instance, how there is no significant link between a number of units of QoL and SWB. In: R. Veenhoven, 'Quality-of-life and Happiness: Not Quite the Same'. In G. DeGirolamo et al. (eds.), *Salute e qualità dell vida* (Torino, Italy: Centro Scientifico Editore, 2001), pp. 67-95. Available at: https://personal.eur.nl/veenhoven/Pub2000s/2001e-full.pdf [Last accessed: 20 May 2017].

[360] For further discussion of the differences between and, ultimately, of the incomplete correlation of the two concepts also see: D. Susniene, and A. Jurkauskas, 'The Concepts of Quality of Life and Happiness-Correlations and Differences', *Engineering Economics*, Vol. 63, No. 4, 2009, pp. 58-66.

[361] On top of other difficulties, such objective composite indicators face issues of aggregability. See: M. Fleurbaey, and D. Blanchet, *Beyond GDP: Measuring Welfare and Assessing Sustainability* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), esp. chapter 1.3.

As is evident, if we were able to devise a therapeutic strategy for QoL's measures inherent logic of universality (of some essential human nature), QoL measures could be useful in their own right, but, more importantly, they can also complement subjective measures as part of an integrated approach to HE via the use of a variety of imperfect (but with different strengths and weaknesses) tools. Nonetheless, this can be a hard task if we are to avoid cancelling out the benefits of the QoL approach. Indeed, there is only one apparent way out of the conundrum: employing a two-stage study wherein the first stage comprises a survey (or interview) and the latter the standard statistical processing and analysis employed by all QoL studies. The first stage would play the role of a kind of a cluster analysis wherein subjects will be divided up to (as small as necessary; even groups where n=1 should be acceptable) groups according to i) their own understanding of the determinants of well-being and ii) to their own use of language (as determined by the 'linguistic community' they belong to).[362] The second stage, in turn, will deal with each cluster separately and proceed with standard QoL statistical processing and analysis albeit the index (comprising the multi-unit measure) will have to be constructed *de novo* and fully tailored to the variables/determinants that the subjects themselves have put forward as important. Moreover, it is clear from the above that the comparability (and aggregability) of data from different groups will be typically low (or, in any case, below acceptable standards) and therefore extensive statistical treatment should be avoided. In consequence, the HE data output produced via the aforementioned manner, will introduce a strong element of objectivity (given that these variables are usually fully measurable and outside of an individual's own subjective appraisals) without reverting us back to the logic of a homogenous and essential human nature. Naturally, however, this proposed method is not without problems, either.

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[362] This should be carried out with equal respect to both variables. Thus, subjects will be categorised under the same group only when both of these variables coincide. It would, therefore, be more efficient to carry out appropriate pre-sampling just as was recommended in the case of self-reporting. For a discussion of appropriate strata and population sizes in pre-sampling see: C. J. Adcock, 'Pre-sampling procedures', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, The Statistician*, Vol. 38, No. 2, 1989, pp. 107-115.

The most apparent one is the overreliance on the individual (in determining the relevant variables) which can, justifiably, appear to contradict our earlier positions on whether the subjects can be deemed reliable enough to undertake such and similar duties. However, we shall keep in mind that our task here is not to construct the perfect measure but, rather, to improve the quality of a problematic measure in order to make it more useful for HE; always as part of an integrated approach. Thus, rather than imposing externally-determined and - largely- arbitrary (as we have seen) criteria as the de facto and a priori determinants of the well-being of subjects, we propose that we entrust the task of identifying the independent variables of the equation (as well as deciding about their importance) to the subjects themselves, with all the language-related provisos applying. Furthermore, there is good reason to assume that such a move will mitigate the effect of several biases that creep in in the purely subjective alternative (that of self-reporting) without having to fall back to relying on a 'human nature' theory. For instance, if we employ a short-term longitudinal study on individuals (or panel study, if n>1 in appropriate groups) whereby we ask participants to evaluate potential determinants of happiness (or suggest their own), it is safe to assume that merely the duration and the repetitiveness of the survey will reduce the risk of (if not eliminate completely) biases such as 'current moment bias', the anchoring effect, and memory-related ones (such as consistency bias, mood congruence bias, and similar) -all key for the task in hand- as outliers and responses sensitive to extreme circumstances will even out over the long term. Besides, the adoption of a longitudinal perspective is crucial here for sample sizes will typically be quite small and, therefore, a study so heavily reliant on these responses cannot afford to use data that may have been distorted by, say, a random event that caused severe mood fluctuations and such.[363]

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[363] For some of the benefits of the longitudinal approach see (please note that this essay reviews traditional HE longitudinal studies and therefore not all of the comments are applicable here): S. Yap, I. Anusic, and R. Lucas, 'Does Happiness Change? Evidence from Longitudinal Studies'. In K. Sheldon, and R. Lucas (eds.), *Stability of Happiness: Theories and Evidence on Whether Happiness Can Change* (London, UK: Elsevier, 2014), ch. 4 (esp. pp. 127-139).

If we move on to consider the implications on qualitative approaches the picture is less clear. That is in part because there is no clear research trend; qualitative research in HE is very heterogeneous and, in any case, relatively scarcer and, therefore, there are no prevailing tendencies, yet.[364] But also because it is the most flexible methodological approach and, thus, the one with the fewest systematic flaws to be addressed in the context of a broad review such as ours here. Very broadly, the format of such studies is the following: the researcher makes use of structured, semi-structured, or completely unstructured interviews to collect the assessment of their subjects' happiness and explore whether any trends emerge (both with happiness as a dependent and independent variable): correlations of a cultural dimension, or ones relating to personality traits, economic, geographical, and similar. Typically (but not necessarily), when not looking for a specific correlation,[365] the main theme will revolve around the identification, comparison, and contrast of different conceptions of happiness in different areas.[366] Moreover, adopters of qualitative methodologies are usually sceptical about the stability of meaning of happiness (at the very least they see it as culturally laden) and therefore initially seek to uncover the underlying cultural parameters upon which happiness (the concept) is contingent and only then, on a second stage, they proceed to study the variation of its various measurements.

In principle, then, our critique regarding the use of meaning in HE should be the least relevant for these methodologies. However, the availability of such ameliorative means does not signify that qualitative approaches represent a panacea, either. Indeed, for example, the more structured interviews are hardly any less susceptible to difficulties of meaning than

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[364] A. Jugureanu, 'A short introduction to happiness in social sciences', *Belvedere Meridionale*, Vol. 28, Issue 1, 2016, pp. 55-70.

[365] It is usually either scepticism towards simple SWB measures or the intention to provide a more in-depth analysis that drives such methodological choices. For a typical example, see: T. Grahame, and G. Marston, 'Welfare-to-work Policies and the Experience of Employed Single Mothers on Income Support in Australia: Where are the Benefits?', *Australian Social Work*, Vol. 65, Issue 1, 2012, pp. 73-86.

[366] For an example of that see: L. Lu, and J. Bin Shih, 'Sources of Happiness: A Qualitative Approach', *The Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 137, Issue 2, 1997, pp. 181-187.

their more quantitative counterparts. Consider, for instance, the case of closed-ended

questions of the type 'How often do you realise that you are in many respects better off as

compared to other persons'.[367] Clearly, they are not too dissimilar from the ones employed in

multi-items surveys that are categorised as quantitative. To be sure, such questions are

usually accompanied by other ones that seek to either verify or qualify the original response

(unlike in the case of most surveys) and, therefore, the line drawn between quantitative and

qualitative is usually adequately visible. However, to the extent that such devices are used in

both, it would be wrong to dismiss the concerns that we raised earlier apropos of surveys.

Furthermore, if anything, interviews are even more reliant upon language and, importantly,

in a more unpredictable manner, especially the more they stray further away from structured

and close-ended designs. As such, it is incumbent upon any qualitative researcher to ensure

that the subjects make use of language in a similar way as their interviewer. For apparent

reasons this is a lot easier to happen in the case of immersion studies wherein concept

formation is typically expected to occur organically, and correlations that may be of interest

are identified or induced, in the field and on the spot.[368] Alternatively, when membership of

the same linguistic community is not feasible or wanted (e.g. in a study that draws

comparisons that span across the borders of linguistic communities), at the very least, both

interviewer and interviewee should have compatible uses of language and that of the latter

should be 'translatable' into that of the former. While, again, this can be resource-intensive it

is compensated by the fact that qualitative studies typically require significantly smaller

sample sizes.[369]

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[367] This is an indicative example of questions asked in that context but also an actual question from a
social comparison study. See: J. Wood, and K. Vanderzee, 'Social comparisons among cancer patients:
Under what conditions are comparisons upward and downward?'. In B. Buunk, and R. Gibbons (eds.),
Health, coping, and well-being: Perspectives from social comparison theory, op. cit., ch. 10 (esp. pp.
309-310).

[368] Kleining and Witt offer a cogent blueprint along those lines for the phase of discovery in qualitative
and heuristic approaches. In: G. Kleining, and H. Witt, 'The Qualitative Heuristic Approach: A
Methodology for Discovery in Psychology and the Social Sciences. Rediscovering the Method of
Introspection as an Example', *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2000. Available at:
http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-1.1.1123[Last accessed: 2 August 2017].

[369] See: O. Robinson, 'Sampling in Interview-Based Qualitative Research: A Theoretical and Practical
Guide',

And while the above-mentioned risks are maximised in the case of unstructured interviews with a majority of open-ended questions, this is the type of design that is, in theory, more resistant to the implicit homogenised treatment of subjects and, therefore, to the positing of a universal human nature. On the contrary, rigid designs with a lot of structured elements (such as formalised questions and standardised wordings) implicitly -and unwarrantedly- expect their subjects to have at least a minimum of a common core, wasting thus a significant amount of the potential that was enabled by the adoption of a qualitative approach in the first place. For, as explained earlier, if the same question is used with the same aim (as it should be, in the context of a single study) with a range of different subjects then both linguistic and subjective equivalence among them must be automatically assumed if the responses are to be taken as valid.[370] Such practices should, therefore, be kept to a minimum and, if we suppose that they are unavoidable under some conditions (e.g. if there are only one or two such questions that are necessary to protect the integrity of a complex measure consisting of a large number of further questions and variables), they should always be carried out in tandem with appropriate sampling practices of the kind prescribed for surveys. Finally, as noted in our review of some qualitative methods in Chapter 2, one should not underestimate the immense potential that these approaches have for the introduction of observer biases (observer-expectancy effect, cultural bias, and a variety of other cognitive ones). This is natural and unavoidable to some extent, given that the role of the interviewer (and of the researcher, if they are different persons) becomes larger in shaping and interpreting the responses the further a study moves away from the structured and rigid logic of surveys. Other than the provisos mentioned above, ways to reduce such risks and minimise their effects include: acknowledgement of the contingencies of the task in hand,

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Qualitative Research in Psychology, Vol.11, Issue 1, 2014, pp. 25-41. And for an example of an argument in favour of richer but smaller sample sizes in HE, see: J. Morduch, 'Chapter 4'. In T. Ogden (ed.), *Experimental Conversations: Perspectives on Randomized Trials in Economic Development* (Cambridge, US: MIT Press, 2017), ch. 4.

[370] In fields other than HE that may, for instance, want to study the individual in question (rather than just one of their emotional states; well-being), that would not necessarily represent a prohibitory impediment because the differential of responses to the same question could prove to be useful and have explanatory value with recourse to the attributes of the subjects (behavioural, cognitive, and so on).

clarity, openness, and explanation for every step taken (both in the interview and in the analysis of the responses), and a focus that should be as narrow as possible (e.g. on the local level, on the current period (or on not more than one specific periods of the past), and so on) in order to minimise the potential for linguistic misunderstandings and distortions.[371] [372]

Lastly, physiological methodologies, which are still in their infancy present more than a few challenges. If we recall from our review of the literature in Chapter 2, the main difficulties were the following: firstly, the fact that there is little and conflicting evidence to substantiate the claim that what is being measured actually amounts to any meaningful conception of happiness and, to the extent that it does, the fact that it has a strong hedonic bias (revealing very little about other dimensions of happiness that are more relevant and fruitful for HE); secondly, that the responses that are typically observed (facial and bodily expressions, frontal activity as measured by EEGs, and similar) are culturally determined to such a degree as to put the value of the whole project in question; thirdly, that, while observer-related biases are minimal (a characteristic that affords them, for its advocates, the status of an 'objective' methodology), they are particularly susceptible to observer effects since the subjects are always aware of how they are monitored and there is little room for privacy and/or anonymity; and, fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, the fact that, ultimately, the scientific understanding of the brain is not only incomplete but fairly problematic and, in no way can we posit one-to-one relationships between specific brain activity and happiness, at best we can only have informed conjectures.

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[371] Such problems are, of course, not unique to HE and have, therefore, been addressed elsewhere. For a review of typical strategies for the reduction of such biases that are relevant for HE, see: K. Adams, and E. Lawrence, *Research Methods, Statistics, and Applications* (London, UK: Sage, 2014), esp. ch. 4.

[372] Also see: L. Camfield, G. Crivello, and M. Woodhead, 'Wellbeing Research in Developing Countries: Reviewing the Role of Qualitative Methods', *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 90, Issue 1, 2009, pp. 5-31. This paper is focused on wellbeing studies in developing countries, however, its conclusions can be just as relevant for developed ones. The paper mirrors our emphasis on language and adds that establishing rapport can have a significant positive impact on the quality of happiness data.

Such difficulties seem insurmountable and it may be nearly impossible to mitigate them, let alone eliminate them, perhaps with the exception of the possibility of technological advancements that would render subject observation less obtrusive and therefore may reduce observer effects. However, our broader approach here is not suited to address any of the internal issues that physiological approaches present. Equally, nevertheless, physiological studies themselves will rarely address any of these issues and when they do they only show limited advancements; none of the problems raised here has come anywhere near to being solved. For instance, there has been some headway with regard to illustrating that well-being correlates with physiological responses that are distinct for hedonic and eudemonic constructs respectively.[373] But, in effect, such studies only further elucidate the problem. For one thing, they illustrate something that is more or less a commonplace in HE anyway, namely that hedonic conceptions of happiness are structurally distinct from so-called eudemonic dimensions of it. Furthermore, the identification of relevant biological markers for each spectrum of happiness is neither precise nor formalisable and, therefore, its value is questionable. What is more, the whole argument rests again on the correlation of the markers with data collected from either standard SWB surveys and/or interviews. Overall, then, rather than delivering on the promise for the development of an objective measurement of happiness, they fail on both counts: neither do they offer a meaningful measurement and nor are they properly objective for they involve (even if only to substantiate their claims) methodologies that rely heavily on the subject and/or observers and interviewers and are, therefore, subject to the biases and distortions that we reviewed previously.

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[373] N. Begley, 'The Psychological Adoption and Adaptation of Eudaimonia', *Positive Psychology*, Available at: http://positivepsychology.org.uk/psychological-adoption-eudaimonia/ [Last accessed: 22 June 2017]. For an example of such a study, see: H. Urry et al., 'Making a Life Worth Living, Neural Correlates of Well-Being', *Psychological Science*, Vol. 15, Issue 6, 2004, pp. 367-372.

More importantly, the lack of a complete and well-founded mapping of the brain structures and processes relating to happiness leaves little room for optimism and problematises the physiological project at its root.[374] This is notwithstanding the fact that there has been some progress vis-à-vis that goal (examples of which were given above). That is because acquiring a partial picture of complex biological processes which is, usually, based on ephemeral and problematic (as explained in the previous paragraph) observations is of no practical use in the present for reasons explained in our discussion of subjectivity in Chapter 3: Complex systems cannot be treated as simply being equal to the sum of simple and observable parts, especially when these parts interact with one another in an unknown number of ways. To be sure, such projects are certainly not meaningless for HE but their value lies solely in their future potential and only to the extent that they partake in the creation of an analysis of the system regulating happiness in its entirety. Interestingly, as was explained in 4.1, Rorty does not prioritise (or find utility in) physical accounts of subjectivity immanently (that is, not as part of his epistemological critique) on very similar grounds: since we lack (for the moment, at least) a one-to-one causal understanding of all the processes that take place in our brains and, instead, we only have sporadic and partial understanding of some processes, we cannot claim to have any meaningful knowledge about the nature of the subject in its totality (or about a hypothesised centre of the subject) at all. Similarly, Foucault, as explained in 3.2.3, would reject any project that relies on an incomplete and problematic understanding of the biology of the subject not only as unworthy but as potentially very dangerous. It is for similar reasons, after all, that Deleuze and Guattari prioritise, as we saw (again in 3.2.3), the imagery of the BwO rather than a static counterpart that comprises a biological whole that consists of knowable parts with known modes of interaction. That said, there may still be some scope for the qualified use of physiological approaches but mainly with the aim to reach, in the future, to a significantly better understanding of the functioning of the brain but if/until that is possible such methodologies should be limited to experimental uses that, other than their

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[374] B. Grinde, *The Biology of Happiness,* op. cit., p. 14.

own improvement, could perhaps serve as the least important constituent of the here-proposed integrated approach (e.g. for tentative verification purposes).[375]

In summary, we have highlighted the strengths and weakness of the main methodological approaches: self-reporting surveys, multiple-item indices, and physiological ones. We have seen how, while no single one of them is perfect, they can all play some part in an integrated approach to HE provided that the here-proposed methodological changes are adopted and the concerns raised are addressed. Granted, both of the above entail, to an extent, a curtailment of the scope of HE as well as added practical difficulties, including a drag on resources. However, such interventions are the bare minimum if we are to collect meaningful HE data. Indeed, the status of the quality of happiness data, given the imperfections and contingencies mentioned, should be downgraded. This shall not impede the use of them but, however, should emphasise the necessity for openness and acknowledgment that the responses received or measures used in HE are not qualitatively equivalent to those of the natural sciences or to some of the objectively measurable variables in other social sciences (e.g. income in economics or the various ratio data in, for example, psychology, criminology, or demography studies).[376] The implication is, therefore, that they cannot be subjected to the

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[375] Ignoring the bottom place of physiological approaches in the hierarchy of approaches can become very problematic. Consider the case of the Tanaka et al. paper that concludes that self-reporting of SWB with an ordinal and bounded scale suffers from strong overstatement bias (In: S. Tanaka et al., 'Overstatement in happiness reporting with ordinal, bounded scale', *Scientific Reports*, Issue 6, 2016. Available at: https://www.nature.com/articles/srep21321 [Last accessed: 30 June 2017]). Researchers use magnetic resonance imaging to measure differential activation in specific parts of the brain when subjects appraised their happiness responses to monetary gain and visual stimuli through ordinal and cardinal scales. Increased activation in the former case is provided as proof of a tendency of subjects to overestimate their happiness levels when using that methodology. However, since there exists no known one-to-one relationship between specific kinds of neural activity and happiness (especially in non-hedonic senses), their conclusions are at least dubious: Which of the two responses is closer to the hypothetically real one? Could it not be that cardinal scales simply understate happiness? Further, since we have only incomplete knowledge of the topography and function of the reward centres, why should increased activation translate into overestimation and if so, by how much? Until these questions receive satisfactory answers, the use of physiological approaches is clearly problematic.
[376] Of course, HE is not a unique social science field in its use of soft and/or fuzzy data. But it is among a limited number of fields wherein the importance of such data is paramount. Economics, for example, use 'consumer confidence' surveys that are clearly soft while some of the items of business surveys are arguably also very subjective and ambiguous in nature. But economists have also a host of more 'objective' and hard data to work with in order to test hypotheses and/or corroborate evidence, whereas current HE is largely based on a singular metric. Indeed, as a result, a given outcome of a

same extensive statistical analyses and processing. Were it not so, after all, HE data could be used in predictive machine learning (such as in artificial neural networks), which is making inroads in fields like those mentioned above, and obviate, thus, large parts of current scholarship. And while we have already discussed, at some length, the degree of the comparability of data given that comparisons are central in HE, limitations are not exhausted in it.[377]

More broadly, HE researchers should narrow the focus of their studies down as much as possible to the local and the contingent (in terms of time, culture, and any other factors that could be affecting our data) by using richer data points whenever possible. In cases where that may not be possible at all (e.g. due to practical constraints such as, for instance, in the case of an analysis of covariance that requires large samples), researchers should not be tempted to extrapolate conclusions from heterogeneous data. Other methodological avenues, such as a cluster analysis, would be a lot more in place, instead. Secondly, and even if a study abides by the above, it should place particular care on the use of language (both of the researcher and of the one of the subjects): on the one hand, it should adopt the neo-pragmatist understanding of it as an ever-changing tool that is laden with cultural values; as such, it cannot be simply assumed that terms have neutral and timeless existence and meaning and that each subject attributes to them the same content. We have put forward (earlier in this section) some more detailed methodological strategies to that end but the crux is that we should make sure that all relevant parties are members of the same linguistic community and that said linguistic communities allow free and open linguistic competition such that terms (and concepts) emerge and evolve freely. On the other hand, there should be explicit and wide recognition of the incompleteness of language which follows logically from

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consumer confidence survey need not (and does not, in most cases) drive immediate policy changes (or even market reactions) given its relative importance and the multitude of interpretations. By contrast, SWB measures are so central in HE that if they were to be removed from its methodological arsenal, hardly any HE-inspired policy papers would survive.

[377] Other obvious examples include the cognate case of the aggregability of data and difficulties with regression analyses with a single predictor variable.

both neo-pragmatism and Deleuzian transcendental empiricism; experience has the potential of radical novelty which cannot be captured by already existing language (and therefore concepts). This can be particularly crucial for qualitative studies and should, in fact, encourage them to replace a priori concept construction with concept formation in the field whenever that is practicable. Lastly, and as a result of the above, HE should reconsider its framework for the determination of the extent to which HE data are treated as fully commensurable and adopt stricter rules to preclude the possibility of 'apples and oranges' comparisons and, other, more elaborate forms of statistical processing which are currently rampant. Again, a preliminary discussion of potential strategies to that effect has been discussed earlier in this subsection but the thrust of the argument was to basically discourage comparisons and aggregations unless the data was collected by subjects who are members of the same linguistic community in the broadest possible sense.[378]

In turn, satisfying the above will inevitably have some broader implications. It will impel researchers to turn to more flexible forms of statistical processing and analysis. For instance, instead of the more rigid regression analyses that seek to translate big data into a regression equation that hypothesises a concrete and stable relation between happiness (or mean happiness) and specific independent variables, they could use Bayesian analysis that is both more sensitive to change and adopts a probabilistic outlook (either for the variation of happiness and/or secondarily for the probability that a happiness model will be effective, e.g. as measured by low R-squared values). After all, probabilistic approaches are more compatible with the data in HE not only because their assumed validity and reliability are a priori relatively lower but also because these problems are relatively tempered with the use of ordinal measures which are best analysed via probabilistic (rather than deterministic)

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[378] As explained, this means that a linguistic community exists only insofar as the same language is used with the same meaning and for similar use values. Therefore, a 'linguistic' community in its expansive sense will often also be a geographical and sociological one, too (although, as noted, modern technology and globalisation are counterbalancing forces).

avenues. To be sure, ordinal regressions are also a possibility but the research foci that they can bear useful fruit for are limited in HE (e.g. for very broad aims such as determining the ideal bundle of variables that correlates with happiness) and introduce the risk of downplaying, or even ignoring, the complexity of the various inter-bundle trade-offs. In addition, the elusiveness and instability of meaning along with the need for more local and richer data will cause a shift towards the increased adoption of qualitative approaches.[379] Richer data, as we have seen, does not merely imply the use of a larger number of variables - that is already happening in many studies, after all- but, rather, the incorporation of cultural and other sensitive variables that are often non-formalisable/standardisable. This, however, entails that many large-N studies will no longer be possible due to practical limitations such as the additional burden on resources and a much longer duration. Nonetheless, that is not necessarily a problem for, as we have explained, there exists a trade-off between the required quality of data and the required size of the sample: smaller-N studies are adequate when richer data is collected. Similarly, the loss of the statistical processing that big data enables will be countered by the adoption of other, more efficient approaches to data processing and interpretation and, therefore, it should not represent a big problem, either. Lastly, the increased use of qualitative data will also have the effect of addressing methodological concerns relating to quantitative data that were discussed in Chapter 2 (such as response biases, the problem of an upper bound of happiness, and similar).

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[379] As it stands, qualitative approaches are, in any case, more likely to be sensitive to issues raised in this project and adopt corresponding epistemological frameworks (interpretivist and/or constructivist); for an argument along these lines see: S. White, 'Introduction: The Many Faces of Wellbeing'. In S. White, and C. Blackmore (eds.), *Cultures of Wellbeing: Method, Place, Policy* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), esp. pp. 25-29. However, this should not be translated into a call for the complete abandonment of quantitative techniques. Rather, those could benefit from qualitative enrichment but we shall return to that later.

4.3: Current Research, Implications for Policy Studies, and Implied Policies

4.3.1 A new status for HE knowledge and current research

We have shown that the postulates upon which the dominant positivist tendencies in HE are grounded cannot be sustained and that this has twofold implications. Firstly, on methodologies: the call for the modification and/or abandonment of certain ones that are currently employed and the adoption of new practices. Secondly, and partly in consequence, on the status of the quality of HE data: an acknowledgment that it is lower than previously assumed. Both these, in turn, have an effect on the status of the produced conclusions and knowledge: it is more precarious and should, therefore, be less ambitious on what it can achieve; significant parts of its scope may have to be abandoned. Indeed, not only does this set HE apart from the knowledge produced in the physical sciences but, in light of the profound HE-specific contingencies, their ubiquity, and their wide-spread effects, it should be considered to fall towards the less secure end of the spectrum of the social sciences, too. This does not, of course, mean that it is not a project worth pursuing; to the extent that communities may find utility in it (and, as we have argued, there is a good chance that they will and with good reason), HE research is worthwhile whatever the degree of certainty of the produced knowledge is, so long as it remains above some minimal threshold.[380] However, as is the case with methodology, there should also be ample openness and acknowledgement of the status of the end-product, too. This will, on the one hand, highlight difficulties and facilitate the on-going self-improvement processes immanent to the field and, on the other, help those making use of HE studies (externally) to avoid misapplications and

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[380] This threshold can be determined either immanently (by each study) or by later studies that will focus on that matter (however, they should be cautious and open to the contingencies of the task).

misunderstandings that can potentially have grave consequences (as was discussed in Chapter 1).

In broader terms, the spirit of fallibilism that is already present -if only implicitly, usually- in most research projects of all disciplines should be particularly encouraged and cultivated in HE. For, like neopragmatism, it offers a productive outlet for epistemic projects in face of the inherent uncertainty of knowledge without having to either dispute it or conceal it. To the contrary, acknowledging it is conducive to better HE practices and, correspondingly, to an epistemic output of improved quality. One way by which the above could materialise is by the use of a kind of sophisticated falsificationism.[381] If it is to be meaningful, however, such falsificationism should not restrict itself to immanent tests of the hypothesis (as is commonly the case) but should also be able to challenge the theoretical assumptions and preconditions of the hypothesis in question (including the underlying theory of meaning and of subjectivity that is being used or implied). It is for this reason that clarity and openness at every step taken is key. Otherwise, implicit assumptions and obscured postulates may be easily ignored and, ultimately, go unchallenged. A final upshot is that, HE conclusions that open themselves to and, ultimately, withstand falsification (e.g. identified happiness tendencies, determinants, and correlations) should be treated only as heuristic devices. In other words, we should acknowledge that, when it comes to happiness, we only have imperfect models of reality to work with rather than a perfectly detailed and accurate understanding of it. And, while we should strive towards that ideal, we have to concede that, by its very nature, it is an impossible task.

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[381] In literature, 'sophisticated falsificationism' often refers to statistical and other formalised ways of evaluating hypotheses. Here, however, it is used to distinguish it from simplistic ways of falsification (both so-called 'naïve falsificationism' and other immanent ways of testing the veracity of hypotheses; after all, many studies in HE already incorporate such forms of falsificationism, e.g. immanent tests of reliability and validity).

Thus, while the observed (via the use of those models) relationships, tendencies, and other phenomena may have significant practical value (and therefore satisfy the main criterion set by neopragmatism), they have neither the degree of certainty of full knowledge and, nor the reliability of (some of) their counterparts in the physical sciences. Therefore, for example, while it is generally the case that -within specific bounds and with the caveat of ceteris paribus- well-being tends to grow with income, we have not uncovered the precise mechanics of the processes that drive such effects; to the contrary, it appears that there is not one as such. Indeed, literature shows that determining what marginal effect income may have on well-being without studying individual cases is practically impossible as the effect is patently different for different subjects (some may even present an inverse or no correlation at all). The same applies to observed effects within specific income boundaries; while clear patterns may be identified, their outliers are not negligible in number and, in any case, not everyone is affected uniformly. In other words, we cannot extrapolate an equation (not even a non-linear one) of well-being that would be valid for all subjects, unlike, for instance, in the case of the physics of aeronautics wherein all the interrelations of the relevant variables and constants are known with admirable accuracy and can be used to determine the value of a variable in any given scenario (provided, of course, that the independent variables and constants are known) through equations. Therefore, and given that the sources of HE's inability to produce knowledge of such status are inherent to HE and cannot be overcome (e.g. with a formalisation of the infinitude of relevant parameters), HE should abandon all attempts to claim a deterministic status for its research output and, instead, it should fully embrace the more appropriate heuristic status.

The implication is not, of course, that we should proceed to an uncritical and outright rejection of scholarship that is carried out under non-heuristic assumptions. Indeed, studies need not have either explicit or implicit acknowledgment of any of the above-mentioned points in order to be suited for the heuristic role and/or heuristically useful. Further, despite

it being a common occurrence in literature, there should be no conflation between strongly

quantitative methods, however complex they may be, and attempts at deterministic

knowledge. The one does not automatically imply the other. After all, even if it did, that

would not be reason enough for its dismissal. Indeed, so long as HE scholarship addresses

the caveats mentioned earlier in the chapter and helps to highlight tendencies or trends (or

the lack thereof, e.g. in order to dispel an intuitive claim or a hypothesis) it can be immensely

useful (as determined by the neopragmatic criteria) in a heuristic manner even if it lacks the

accuracy and rigidity that deterministic knowledge requires. That said, however, studies that

fail to show a clear trend or studies whereby a policy A is advocated on the basis of it having

a slightly more positive effect on well-being as compared to other policies, are no longer

defensible. Since, as was established, the data in HE should not be regarded as having great

validity and numerical accuracy, it naturally follows that we should ignore slight variations

or weak correlations (however reliable and statistically sound they may appear to be). After

all, the lack of a clear trend or of a clear relationship may be a useful enough finding on its

own.[382]

Other than that, and at best, if the original data led to the conclusion that a statistically and

heuristically significant relationship might exist despite the non-fulfilment of the

abovementioned criteria, such studies could trigger follow-up ones that could use a different

angle, be more in-depth, or with a narrower focus. At worst, however, they may have to be

completely abandoned. Determining exactly what amounts to a 'clear' trend or a 'substantial'

effect can be a highly contentious issue of its own that exceeds the scope of this project and

should become the subject matter of separate ones. However, it should be clarified that a

simple reliance upon a standard analysis of the margin of error, even if strict, would not

suffice as the problems in hand, as explained, are much more fundamental than mere

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[382] If not for anything else, to dispel a spurious correlation or to reject a hypothesis (especially one arrived at through intuition, which is the source of many HE-related claims).

sampling errors, to give an example. Moreover, such dubious results should not be used for further processing (say in comparative projects, or as the input for one or more variables in an equation) as this will only magnify the problems already-present in the original ones and lead to ever-worse distortions. Admittedly, the heuristic outlook that we advocate for here does not lend itself for ample meta-studies or, more broadly, for the use of the conclusions of one primary study in another one or in meta-analyses.[383] Nonetheless, if we consider our conclusions in the previous subsections of this chapter regarding the interoperability, comparability, and commensurability of data in HE, we shall find that (and to the extent that one abides by the conditions set here) the potential for such studies is already significantly limited and, therefore, this will not represent a profound new problem.

We have seen how the heuristic treatment of knowledge can be possible and, in many cases, remain completely unaffected by whether the scholars who are carrying out the research acknowledge that status or not and that, even when, to the contrary, they are explicitly framing their projects as deterministic ones this does not abrogate the utility of their research projects (at least not necessarily). Nevertheless, when it comes to the other herewith proposed requirements for HE scholarship and data collection (summarised in the previous section), it is apparent that already existing research is not compliant with most, if not all, provisos. However, we shall argue that this must not automatically disqualify them from being added as useful contributions to the corpus of HE knowledge. But, due to the wide range and diversity of these provisos, it would be hard to apply a set of general rules to the entirety of HE scholarship and, simultaneously, it would be extremely space-consuming to touch upon each of them separately here; it therefore cannot lie within the scope of this

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[383] That is because if, for instance, all we can say about the relationship of income and well-being (in a group A and within specific income bounds) is that there might be a trend of a positive correlation but without predictive capacity of exactly how much for each subject (or, at least, on average) we may not be able to compare it to other groups or with the same group A in the context of a longitudinal study, unless of course there is a significant shift. It is important to note, however, that in a heuristic framework, such shifts will be captured by terms (weak/strong/very strong correlation and similar) and not precise figures and therefore our scope for extrapolations will be limited to qualitative assessments.

project for practical reasons. After all, if we are to be consistent with the here-proposed methodology, we shall decide the specifics on a case by case basis and in accordance with the neo-pragmatic criterion of utility. We can, nonetheless, identify a number of general practices that could help us deal with ostensibly problematic data.

They broadly consist of some form of ex-post data enrichment. In general, any combination of data from multiple sources (one or more, other than the original) is considered to be 'data enrichment'.[384] In the context of HE, however, such data enrichment is encouraged anyway.[385] Rather, it is in a more narrow sense that data enrichment can prove to be particularly pertinent here: that of reversing the root causes of specific deficiencies of the data. For example, in the case of a qualitative study with known subjects (like, for instance, in most follow-up studies), a researcher can return to the sample with additional questions on relevant, and previously ignored, parameters. One such example could be follow-up questions in order to establish the linguistic congruence among subjects. In case that that does not exist, which is more likely than not given current sampling practices, the follow-ups could facilitate the division of subjects into different clusters as necessary and according to the methodology described in 4.2.2. For large scale studies (e.g. with national cohorts), where data enrichment (especially in the case of qualitative attributes) would be so resource-intensive so as to render it unfeasible, researchers could resort to sample enrichments and, to the extent that a clear pattern is identified, extrapolate from those with an eye to modifying the broader picture or even calling it into question as necessary. More broadly, such efforts should concentrate on addressing the contingencies that standard HE data ignore as was established previously (cultural, linguistic, temporal, and other). While the method of additional questions described above is an obvious way to go about it, it might not

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[384] L. Fabbris, 'Questionnaire Design'. In C. Davino, and L. Fabbris (eds.), *Survey Data Collection and Integration* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2013), p. 40.
[385] In fact, in 4.2.2 we have argued for the adoption of such a methodological stance as a way to corroborate evidence collected from problematic/insecure methods.

always be feasible (e.g. anonymous surveys or historical data where the subjects are no longer accessible or relevant for the study in question) and, therefore, other ways of obtaining additional internal or external information may be more practical or appropriate.[386]

Following our review of methodological difficulties, and since it was made clear that certain methodological tools and practices cannot be rectified or improved and, therefore, need to be abandoned, the conclusions resulting from them are also invalidated. Granted, this affects a considerable number of studies spanning whole areas of interest for HE. We have seen, for instance, that HE literature relies heavily on unwarranted intercontextual comparisons (e.g. international or intergenerational ones). These studies typically make use of large scale historical samples and, therefore, improving the quality of the data (with an eye to improving their comparability, too) is impractical, if not completely impossible. Thus, even if such comparisons appear to indicate a specific trend or a pattern they cannot be said to have any heuristic (let alone deterministic) value. In contrast to heuristically useful data, where it is their precise accuracy or the completeness of the posited relationship that may be in question, here, on top of those issues, we know in advance that our data-sets are not commensurable (for the collected responses refer to something different) and, therefore, any statistical processing is doomed to be guilty of the fallacy of comparing apples and oranges. Consequently, if there is no way to bypass such problematic practices (e.g. by substituting the data-sets in question with other of satisfactory comparability), their conclusions must be deemed inadmissible to the body of HE knowledge. Similarly, it goes without saying that the end-product of the various erroneous and irreparable practices that were highlighted earlier (e.g. the conflation between cardinal and ordinal measures) must also be discarded before proceeding to an examination of its heuristic value.

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[386] For a brief overview of such techniques see: E. McLellan-Lemal, 'Qualitative Data Management'. In G. Guest, and K. MacQueen (eds.), *Handbook for Team-based Qualitative Research* (Plymouth, UK: Altamira Press, 2008), ch. 8.

4.3.2 Implications for policy studies

The set of interventions proposed here has unavoidable consequences for HE-informed policy studies. Most apparently, since it detracts from HE's arsenal of acceptable data and research tools (statistical and other) it, inevitably, makes constructing and testing hypotheses a lot harder and in some cases impossible. However, the most important implication is not one of practicality or quantity but, rather, of quality. More specifically, our interventions should gear HE research and policy recommendations towards a renewed scope, narrower than the currently dominant one and more reconciled with what HE can and cannot achieve. Moreover, the status of whatever knowledge ends up being admitted to the corpus of HE will not be that of the full certainty of an exact science but, rather, that of an always-provisional and, oftentimes, merely heuristic understanding of tendencies, trends, and outlines of relationships. In turn, this will entail the adoption of a new role for HE. Rather than aiming at large scale and general conclusions that lend themselves for wide-ranging policy prescriptions (e.g. of the logic 'since inequality has been shown to correlate inversely with happiness, we should introduce a policy which has as its sole goal the minimisation of inequality'), as is currently the case, it should turn its attention to the local, the particular and, ultimately, the contingent (in all possible ways). This will be compatible with the acknowledgement of the inherent limitations of HE and should, therefore, engender perhaps less ambitious but more focused and effective policy recommendations. Lastly, it can be said that the here-proposed interventions already entail by themselves a set of broad policy recommendations but we shall return to that in the next subsection.

One need not, in fact, fully subscribe to our critique to see the benefits that HE will reap if it transforms itself along the above-explicated lines. Indeed, the narrower and more focused scope will help the field concentrate its efforts on where it is already clear that it can be most productive. As a case in point, let us return to the very popular theme of HE research on inequality. A host of publications have so far attempted to come to a broad and stable

conclusion about the effect of inequality on individuals, especially with an eye to identifying the optimal (for the maximisation of well-being) degree of inequality and make corresponding policy prescriptions. However, they have failed systematically to come to a consensus; views range between the call for extreme equality of outcome and the thesis that inequality has no significant impact upon well-being outcomes.[387] The most apparent culprits for this failure include problems of conceptualisation (of both happiness and inequality) and those pertaining to the inherent instability and inaccuracy of the posited functions between these two variables (for reasons explained in previous sections).[388] While both are always present in HE projects, at least to some extent, their ramifications here are magnified for such studies necessitate the use of large-scale samples, usually from a number of different countries (for comparison) and often across different historical points, too. But, as was explained, samples of that size and kind not only lack the required depth and quality but are also resistant to most, if not all, data enrichment techniques (particularly the case with older data sets). In addition, as we saw, they render comparisons of that kind especially problematic and, therefore, few -if any- conclusions can be drawn with any safety from them. Given that the task itself requires the use of such samples and data sets (for a comparison between countries with the particular aim of exploring the impact of inequality cannot rely upon small samples and/or heavily qualitative data), it may be best to abandon it completely.

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[387] For an overview of studies that favour the thesis of a negative correlation between inequality and happiness see: C. Grenholm, 'Happiness, welfare and capabilities'. In J. Atherton, E. Graham, and I. Steedman (eds.), *The Practices of Happiness: Political economy, religion and wellbeing* (London, UK: Routledge, 2011), Ch. 2. For the latter thesis, namely that no robust relationship exists between the two variables, see indicatively: M. Berg, and R. Veenhoven, 'Income Inequality and Happiness in 119 Nations: In Search for an Optimum that Does Not Appear to Exist'. In B. Greve, *Happiness and Social Policy in Europe* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2010), Ch. 11, and S. Oishi, S. Kesebir, and E. Diener, 'Income Inequality and Happiness', *Psychological Science*, Vol. 22, Issue 9, 2011, pp. 1095-1100. While the latter maintains that an inverse relationship between income inequality and happiness ostensibly appears to exist, it is explained -almost in full- by perceived fairness and general trust. If these two are satisfied, inequality has no significant effect upon happiness. For a brief overview, see also: C. Snowdon, 'Are More Equal Countries Happier?'. In P. Booth (ed.), *...and the Pursuit of Happiness: Wellbeing and the Role of Government* (London, UK: The Institute of Economic Affairs, 2012), ch. 4.
[388] Conceptualising inequality remains surprisingly contentious and there still exists a wide variety of competing theoretical approaches and corresponding measures (e.g. the Gini coefficient was particularly popular during the second half of the 20th century but has attracted a lot of criticism recently). For an overview of some of the conceptualisations and the shifting views on it, see: M. Fanzini, and M. Pianta, *Explaining Inequality* (London, UK: Routledge, 2016), esp. ch. 1.

Instead, researchers could focus on smaller scale projects with regard to inequality (e.g. on the level of an individual and her peers) that would not require such samples and that could, therefore, be more fruitful. Admittedly, however, such studies cannot possibly constitute the raw material for the wide-ranging policy prescriptions of the past.

On top of that, the sheer length of the time span on focus in projects like the aforementioned, renders the task problematic on a somewhat different front, too. Happiness is usually conceptualised as static. Even when this is not explicitly the case, studies make use of data that rely on momentary snapshot-like pictures of one's wellbeing. At best, research that relies on big data will make use of a collection of such snapshots (e.g. via the diary method or with follow-ups across a relatively short period of time) but even that does very little in the way of ameliorating the problems that the static understanding of happiness engenders. That is because measured happiness and especially its (co)variations have more of the attributes of a flow, rather than those of a stock. Therefore, its observation and statistical processing outside time is of little, if any, value. For one, people naturally have different time preferences with regard to happiness. An elderly person may value happiness in the now more than someone in their twenties who might reasonably forego happiness in the now for the hope of more happiness (or, at least, of comparable, albeit sustainable levels of happiness) in the future. But it need not vary only with age. For instance, it might be accurate that a medical student with a study routine of 15 hours/day and a taxing part-time job might report lower levels of happiness compared to someone of their age and of similar circumstances who, however, lives carelessly and consumes their last savings on recreational activities. This is not purely theoretical, HEPI's yearly survey of UK students shows that they are generally more likely to report lower levels of well-being compared to comparable age groups in the general population.[389] Nevertheless, it would be hard to argue that the

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[389] See, for instance: J. Neves, and N. Hillman, *2018 Student Academic Experience Survey* (York, UK: Advance HE, 2018), ch. 12.

wellbeing trends in the above scenario will not be reversed at one point on a long enough timeline (of course, with the ceteris paribus clause in place). In fact, both individuals are likely aware of that and, yet, opt for their chosen paths willingly precisely because of their different preferences.[390] Indeed, following the post-structuralist theorisation of subjectivity, it would be irrational to expect any significant uniformity of preferences (even among ostensibly homogeneous cohorts): both the Deleuzian BwO imagery and the self-constituting subjectivities of Foucault do not merely allow for radical diversity of subjectivities but predict it and even prescribe it.

A corollary critique that can be made with regard to such policy papers and their distortion of the temporal nature of happiness is that they end up neglecting the importance of incentives. Indeed, they -usually implicitly- hypothesise that individuals act in a complete vacuum of incentives. Importantly, this line of critique is wholly independent from the previous argument (the diversity of preferences) and should, therefore, problematise even those who subscribe to theories that postulate, at a minimum, a meaningful modicum of a known and stable common human nature and, therefore, a common set of preferences and responses to stimuli, too. More specifically, once well-being is correlated with a variable (or set of variables) X, scholars will often automatically posit a relationship (with X as the independent variable(s)). However, we have illustrated that the complexity of the matter is usually such that even controlling for additional factors is not enough, even if we set conceptualisation and operationalisation problems aside; the direction of the lines of causality remains uncertain. For instance, consider the case of inequality and well-being. In the case of studies, such as the abovementioned, where a negative relationship between

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[390] It must be noted that these problems are specific to the type of studies in question here (that rely on the use of low quality large-sample data). Indeed, specialised studies (such as, for instance, those focusing on the effect of different levels of education upon long-term well-being. Indicatively: M. Easterbrook, T. Kuupens, and A. Manstead, 'The Education Effect: Higher Educational Qualifications are Robustly Associated with Beneficial Personal and Socio-political Outcomes', *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 126, Issue 3, pp. 1261–1298) typically take stock of the problems cited here and attempt to eschew them by having designs that are a lot more longitudinal (in some cases with follow-ups that can span across a number of decades).

inequality and happiness is posited and wherein wellbeing is a fully dependent variable, the logically entailed policy prescription is the minimisation (if not complete eradication) of inequality. Indeed, papers of that logic might even control for other factors such as health and the environmental conditions in the subjects' locale in order to solidify their claims. At the same time, however, other studies indicate that it is also the case that happiness grows with GDP.[391] What is troubling, nevertheless, is that there also exists a very robust correlation between economic freedom and economic growth that is universal and almost completely independent from socio-political and cultural contexts.[392] Thus, while HE policy studies might call for maximal redistribution with the ultimate goal being full equality of outcome, this is clearly at odds with what is implied by the positive economic growth-happiness and economic freedom-economic growth relationships.

There have been attempts to reconcile those conflicting conclusions. Oishi and Kesebir, for instance, claim that while economic growth may have a generally positive impact upon happiness, in cases where it coincides with growing income inequality the relationship collapses or is even reversed.[393] Others seek to explore responses to inequality in more subtle

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[391] Indeed, such measurements are not without problems (not least those pertaining to the aggregations of happiness), as was established earlier. However, this is the same range of problems that affect the data used to substantiate the here-critiqued hypotheses. As such, we shall not take issue with them again here, wittingly, in order to problematise specifically the logic of these arguments even for someone who accepts prima facie all the methodological steps that are taken here. For the relationship of happiness and economic growth see, for instance: B. Stevenson, and J. Wolfers, 'Economic Growth and Subjective Well-Being: Reassessing the Easterlin Paradox', *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity*, Spring 2008, pp. 1-87. Available at: http://users.nber.org/~jwolfers/papers/EasterlinParadox.pdf [Last accessed: 24 August 2017], A. Deaton, 'Income, Health and Wellbeing Around the World: Evidence from the Gallup World Poll', *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 53-72, and M. Hagerty, and R. Veenhoven, 'Wealth and Happiness Revisited: Growing wealth of nations does go with greater happiness', *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 64, Issue 1, 2003, pp. 1-27.

[392] The following paper, for instance, reviews that correlation via the use of different indicators for economic freedom and finds a clearly positive relationship: J. Haan, and J. Sturm, 'On the relationship between economic freedom and economic growth', *European Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 16, Issue 2, June 2000, pp. 215-241. Also see this meta-analysis of a number of studies conducted on the same matter that shows overwhelming support for the claim that economic freedom corresponds strongly with faster growth with only minimal -if any- trade-offs: J. Hall, and R. Lawson, 'Economic Freedom of the World: An Accounting of the Literature', *Contemporary Economic Policy*, Vol. 32, Issue 1, 2014, pp. 1-19.

[393] S. Oishi, and S. Kesebir, 'Income Inequality Explains Why Economic Growth Does Not Always Translate to an Increase in Happiness', *Psychological Science*, Vol. 26, Issue 10, 2015, pp. 1630-1638.

ways either by positing adaptation mechanisms (decrease in well-being as an effect of upward comparisons) or by differentiating between endowment and reward inequality (the implication being that the former and the latter have a negative and positive impact upon happiness, respectively).[394] However, none of these aspects of the issue are either well-studied or conclusive. Indeed, it remains unclear how much equality is optimal (considering that full equality, even if it were theoretically ideal from a happiness perspective, is detrimental to living conditions in the long-term and therefore would be a countering factor to happiness maximisation) and under what circumstances. If anything, existing evidence suggests that there is no universal and atemporal optimal level of equality and that is only if we (mistakenly) disregard completely the potential long-term effects of redistributive policies upon the economy, which are very scarcely studied (in tandem with happiness, that is). At best, we are left to concede that some negative relationship might, indeed, exist but neither a particularly strong one and nor one that can be formalised with any significant accuracy.[395]

On the contrary, the positive relationship between economic growth and well-being is much more studied, robust, and universal. Moreover, the two need not be mutually exclusive. If we, for instance, use a global reference point, it is clear that inequality has been declining steadily for the duration of the most recent period of sustained global growth (a period often dubbed as 'the third wave of globalisation').[396] In addition to that, if we consider that among

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[394] For the former, see, for instance: M. Hagerty, 'Social comparisons of income in one's community: Evidence from national surveys of income and happiness.', op. cit., and, for the latter, see: E. Hopkins, 'Inequality, happiness and relative concerns: What actually is their relationship?', *The Journal of Economic Inequality*, Vol. 6, Issue 4, December 2008, pp. 351-372.

[395] It should also be noted that the vast majority of studies that have been published on the matter are authored by scholars who generally support the existence of the negative relationship in question. Something that is not problematic on its own but might be an indicator of the existence of biases (esp. design and confirmation biases).

[396] For instance, Milovanovic and Bourguignon, two pre-eminent scholars on the issue of inequality, found that the recent wave of globalisation has coincided with a falling trend for global income inequality. See: B. Milovanovic, *Global Inequality: A New Approach for the Age of Globalization* (Cambridge, US: Harvard University Press, 2016) and F. Bourguignon, *The Globalization of Inequality* (Princeton, US: Princeton University Press, 2015).

the most equal countries (as ranked by their Gini coefficient) one finds a majority of high

GDP countries, it is reasonable to deduce that while equality-promoting policies might be

impeding growth in some underdeveloped economies, more equality appears to be growth's

natural by-product in the long-term.[397] [398] In turn, then, it would also be reasonable to argue,

even if we concede the existence of some beneficial effects of equality upon happiness, that

the calls for equality-spurring policies must never take precedence over those conducive to

economic growth. After all, relative happiness without equality is a frequent outcome when

material prosperity exists, whereas the opposite cannot be said to be the case.[399] In other

words, the inconclusiveness of the evidence on the issue along with the largely heuristic

character of whatever items of knowledge one may accept as settled is such that HE policy

recommendations on the matter carry more risk than practical value and should be left aside.

This is especially so in light of the peril of endangering a more certain source of happiness.

The risk is higher not only because economic growth is a more certain predictor of happiness

but also because of the potential longevity of its downside: happiness appears to be a lot

more responsive to policy and other material changes whereas GDP can be stagnant for years

even after the adoption of the right policies (e.g. in a scenario of a low-level equilibrium

trap).[400]

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[397] Norway, Finland, Sweden, Belgium, The Netherlands, Iceland, and Denmark are some of the high income countries that have one of the twenty lowest Gini ratios in the world. See: 'Gini Index-World Bank Estimate', *The World Bank*, 2017. Available at:
https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI/ [Last accessed: 30 August 2017].
[398] Indeed, this fact is often cited by those who dispute the happiness-equality correlation. Their logic is the following: Since equality is often found in the most developed economies, the actual correlation is between improved life conditions and happiness and, therefore, equality is either irrelevant or a minor contributor and, in turn, correlations such as the aforementioned are spurious. Indeed, this is but one of the many cases in HE wherein the inconclusiveness about the direction of causality raises controversy.
[399] Not all low-inequality countries fare well in happiness rankings whereas all of those that fare well are high GDP ones. For instance, in 2017's World Happiness Report all the twenty 'happiest' countries enjoy above-average GDP even if a vast majority of countries is not. In fact, all countries with high GDP fall under the top percentiles and the only outliers are countries that have recently experienced a sudden fall in their GDP (Greece in the 87th position and Portugal in the 89th in a total of 155 countries).In: J. Helliwell, R. Layard, and J. Sachs (eds.), *World Happiness Report 2017* (New York, US: Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2017), esp. pp. 20-22.
[400] In other words, flaws in purely HE-related policies can be remedied relatively quickly and easily. It should stand to reason, for instance, that once a spuriously positive correlate of happiness is identified it will be removed (e.g. an affirmative action, or a policy) as soon as its failings become obvious. Whereas, by contrast, a derailment from the path of growth is more permanent and its effects can be a lot more persistent. For evidence of the phenomenon see, indicatively, in: S. Bowles, S. Durlauf, and

Yet, the conceptual difficulties that we highlighted throughout this project, problematise policy-proposing studies on a more fundamental level, too. Considering that studies do not differentiate between the sources of happiness but rather seek to simply pinpoint its determining factors with an eye to ultimately maximising it, happiness (or unhappiness) occurring as a result of ephemeral or inauthentic fluctuations (e.g. due to adaptations or comparison effects) is treated in the same way as more long-term or more 'authentic' variants (e.g. those relating to notions such as 'the good life', however one may define it). White, for instance, raises the question of artificial mood boosters such as the antidepressants.[401] He cites a study that shows that the well-being of subjects that received such medication increased markedly even if their life circumstances were abhorrent and, equally, the subjects' attitude towards them remained unaffected (whereas the opposite could have at least been a sign of some genuine improvement).[402] It then follows that in a hypothetical comparison of two countries A and B where the only difference would be the attitude of the medical community towards the prescription of mood-boosting medicine and/or the rigidness of the legislation regulating them, the more lax country A would appear to be significantly happier. But would that be a genuine and, more importantly, meaningful measurement of its wellbeing? Could we draw any useful conclusions from such a comparison? And while the 'ceteris paribus' of our hypothesis exists only in fiction, the effects of such different approaches and/or legislations are actually existing and can be

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K. Hoff (eds.), *Poverty Traps* (Princeton, US: Princeton University Press, 2011), esp. ch. 1. Indeed, one of the key causes for a country to fall and remain into a poverty trap is found to be the lack of access to capital. But a policy insistence focusing on bringing about income equality would hamper capital accumulation and therefore would lead an economy to rely solely on foreign investment. Even so, foreign direct investment (henceforth FDI) is known (see, for instance, a brief review of the literature in: L. Andersen, O. Nina, and D. Te Velde, 'Reform, growth and poverty in Bolivia'. In K. Sharma, and O. Morrissey (eds.), *Trade, Growth and Inequality in the Era of Globalization* (London, UK: Routledge, 2006), esp. pp. 222-224) to increase wage inequality (at least in the short and medium-term) and, therefore, if a country is to have equality of outcome as its policy priority it would have to end up discouraging FDI (by imposing capital, price, and wage controls) which would solidify its position within the poverty trap.

[401] M. White, 'The Problems with Measuring and Using Happiness for Policy Purposes', *Mercatus Working Paper*, December 2014. Available at: https://www.mercatus.org/system/files/White-Happiness.pdf [Last accessed: 3 September 2017].

[402] R. Dworkin, *Artificial Happiness: The Dark Side of the New Happy Class* (New York, US: Carroll & Graf, 2006). It should be noted that this is not, in any way, a case against the use of such medication (which is, beyond doubt, the most appropriate treatment in a variety of scenarios) but, rather, a critique against the distortions that HE data may present because of it.

enough to skew the balance of any happiness comparison (and of its corresponding extrapolations) decisively. To discern the exact effect of each, however, would be practically impossible given the infinitude of relevant variables (if the unrealistic 'ceteris paribus' clause is removed), our lack of access to them (complete or simply our inability to accurately formalise/quantify them) and, therefore, our inability to control for them. In the end, such large-scale and over-ambitious projects, especially when it comes to policy recommendations where the status of HE as an exact science is either asserted or implied, are hardly defensible. Perhaps they can have some limited heuristic value but that too would be subject to the possibility of data enrichment along the lines described earlier. Overall, however, it is our contention that such efforts should be superseded by smaller scale projects wherein relevant variables are fewer (and, thus, more easily controllable), more accessible, and the data can be realistically richer and less distorted. Additionally, smaller-n studies enable the use of an increased proportion of qualitative data which could be effective in addressing difficulties mentioned in Chapter 2 (such as the 'upper bound problem' and problems with scaling-related biases).

Nevertheless, even if we, for the purpose of exhaustiveness, choose to discount the abovementioned conceptual and methodological issues, the task of typical happiness-maximising policy studies is far from being secure and uncontroversial. One difficulty in particular stands out and is best exemplified by Nozick's thought experiment about a hypothetical utility monster. Originally developed to support a critique of utilitarianism, Nozick hypothesised a being that received enormously greater utility from the sacrifice of others than the utility that the others lose from said sacrifice.[403] More realistically, we can imagine a scenario wherein this 'utility monster' would get a lot more units of pleasure from each unit of resource that was given to it, even if that resource was relatively trivial (cookies are an oft-cited example). Similarly, that gain would also be substantially higher than the

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[403] R. Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1974), p. 41.

utility that others would get if they were handed that extra good/service but also higher than what they would lose by surrendering it. Thus, for instance, in a distribution of resources A whereby this 'utility monster' would be marginally better off (i.e. get one good more than in alternative distributions) would also have the effect of increasing the utility that it derives by 100 units of pleasure. However, and perhaps expectedly in the example of a trivial good, in all alternative distributions where that extra good was given to different members of the population (other than the utility monster) it would only increase their utility by just one unit. As a result, and if we are to be in compliance with the utilitarian commitment to utility maximisation, we should favour redistribution whereby the majority surrenders its resources to the utility monster. Clearly, nonetheless, that would not be optimal for the majority of the population even if aggregate utility is maximised that way.

But to what extent is this problem relevant for HE policy? Firstly, and despite the fact that - as we have argued- happiness and utility should not (and are not, in most cases) be used interchangeably, the logic of aggregate maximisation (especially in the case of studies such as those discussed here) remains the same. Consequently, an equivalent 'happiness monster' would have the same effect upon the kind of society that policy envisages to bring about in order to maximise well-being. It would tend to gear to the distributions of resources most favourably to these 'happiness monsters' and, in general, cater for their needs even at the cost of the needs of the majority. Secondly, if we consider the widely-observed variability of the happiness responses of individuals to various parameters, it is not unrealistic to argue that such 'happiness monsters' already exist and problematise the logic of aggregation. Seligman, by way of example, considers that the decision to build a circus rather than a library on grounds of it producing more additional overall happiness inevitably implies that the preferences of those capable of cheerful mood (as determined -mainly- by genetic

factors) should carry a lot more weight than those of the less capable.[404] Granted, the

differential may not be as substantial as in the 'utility monster' theoretical experiment but it

can definitely be enough to affect the conclusion of a HE policy paper of this logic which,

more or less, blindly focuses on maximisation.[405] More importantly, the above goes to show

how there is no necessary correlation between a maximisation of the aggregate happiness of

a population and a maximisation of the happiness majority of the individuals which is the

theoretical aim of most HE research.

A possible workaround could be to use median prices of happiness instead of the current

standard of the averages. By extension, it could be argued that a provision for equality of

happiness outcomes in tandem with that for happiness maximisation could help alleviate the

concerns raised above. However, neither is without problems of its own. While the use of

median prices may indeed reduce or completely eradicate the effect of outliers (such as the

'happiness monster' in our thought experiment), it does very little in the way of addressing

the distortion that can be caused by uneven distributions of happiness. In fact, in a perfectly

plausible scenario of bipolarity at the extremes (or in any scenario with a number of poles

and uneven distributions, for that matter), the use of median values can be completely

misleading. Conversely, the commitment to equality of happiness as a necessary concomitant

in the quest for happiness maximisation may be fool proof theoretically in the above regard,

however, it is hardly practicable. Indeed, that is in spite of the fact that an increasing number

of studies take this position.[406] On the one hand, these two goals can be antithetical and it

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[404] M. Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being* (New York, US: Free Press, 2011), p. 14.

[405] This is especially so if we consider that there need not be one happiness monster with extreme elasticity as in Nozick's experiment but, rather, there might be a large enough subgroup that shows particularly high elasticity of happiness (but within a realistic range) in response to a variety of material and other changes; in fact, a high elasticity of responses to the change of just one variable might be enough to problematise a study if it is focused on that particular variable. Indeed, this is patently plausible if we consider the case of a policy targeting a minority group for which a lot will be at stake (members of this group may potentially have a lot to gain as opposed to those external to it).

[406] The 2016 World Happiness Report with its focus on happiness distribution among countries and regions can be seen as a culmination of that trend in scholarship (See: J. Helliwell, R. Layard, and J. Sachs (eds.), *World Happiness Report 2016 Update* (New York, US: Sustainable Development

may not be easy to find a middle ground unless either takes precedence. But this risks a relapse into the effects mentioned before.[407] Further, it may also create incentive-related problems with unpredictable consequences that run against HE's nominal aims. Consider, for instance, the 'social treadmill' effects whereby individuals hardly derive any more satisfaction with increased income (or increased units of most any other determinant of happiness) when others in their environment experience similar increases.[408] More broadly, on the one hand, social comparisons may counterbalance the effects of whatever equality-of-happiness policy is adopted and, on the other, they may reduce incentives for long-term gains.[409] For example, upward comparisons may have a negative relationship with the happiness of an individual, however, they may motivate her to invest in effort (say in education or entry-level work experience or savings and similar happiness-deferring activities) that will help her reap sustainable happiness benefits in the future, in effect, by replicating happiness-inducing behaviours. Conversely, the beneficial (for happiness) effects

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Solutions Network, 2016), esp. ch. 2). However, the modus operandi of these studies is merely to empirically identify a correlation between higher well-being and increased equality of happiness and to offer potential explanations for it. Nevertheless, these amount to little more than informed guesses (as is the case, for instance, in the World Happiness Report) as the area is both understudied and riddled with difficulties, not least due to the great scope for spurious relationships and blurry lines of causality. For instance, and as is the case with income equality, happiness equality does not always translate into more overall happiness, indeed, many underdeveloped and/or war-ridden nations experience an equality of misery instead. Therefore, the relationship between happiness equality and higher average happiness observed in countries such as Denmark could be better explained by material conditions in that country (high GDP, peace, liberty, and similar), rather than by happiness equality. For these claims to merit some attention, and if we set measurement problems aside, separate studies should attempt to control for a variety of factors (such as the abovementioned but not limited to those) and examine whether the proposed relationship holds and to what extent.

[407] In addition, it could be hard to sustain the case for a state of affairs where only median happiness is maximised when there are alternative distributions with higher aggregates of happiness for the region/country/group in question. Indeed, there exists a long and inconclusive debate on that precise matter (median vs. average) within utilitarian literature. Edgeworth was the key proponent of averages, whereas earlier utilitarians typically argued for the greatest happiness of the numerical majority of people. For a brief history of the debate, see: D. Levy, and S. Peart, 'Edgeworth'. In J. Crimmins (ed.), *The Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of Utilitarianism* (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 128-131. A broader concern is that, unlike with, for instance, physical goods, happiness is neither scarce and nor has the attributes of a stock and, therefore, treating it in terms of distributions can be inherently misleading.

[408] Bruni is the foremost scholar studying this phenomenon. See indicatively: L. Bruni, 'Happiness'. In J. Peil, and I. van Staveren (eds.), *Handbook of Economics and Ethics* (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2009), pp. 205-206.

[409] These comparison effects can be of the substantial kind that social comparativists posit but the validity of the argument does not hinge on them being correct. Indeed, hardly any HE scholar refuses to acknowledge that comparisons impact happiness in meaningful ways. Rather, the only disagreement is on the extent and/or the determinants of that extent.

of downward comparisons may mean that policy should end up encouraging an 'optimal stratification' of society along with forced relocations so that the optimal comparisons may take place. However, it would be very questionable to argue that the happiness derived thusly is a legitimate goal of policy even if it brought about its nominal maximisation.[410] Finally, even if we disregard concerns such as the aforementioned, if we are to promote the equation of individual happiness we will be faced with the difficulty of interpersonal comparisons which, as was explained in the previous section, are particularly problematic as they compound the main problems of HE discussed throughout this project.[411]

More broadly, since most HE policy prescriptions typically involve some expenditure and/or investment of resources (e.g. in entitlement programs, public investments, and similar), and given that governments only have scarce resources at their disposal, the question of unintended consequences becomes more pressing. If governments have finite resources it makes best sense to invest them carefully in the satisfaction of more objective needs and preferences that the vast majority of people share (civil protection, healthcare, and so on), the argument of detractors of HE policy-making goes. But even if, in spite of this line of argument, HE is deemed to somehow deserve priority, the question does not dissipate. That is because the alternative uses of scarce resources might have better happiness outcomes in the medium to long term.[412] Or, as we have seen earlier in this section, since state resources

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[410] White (In: M. White, 'The Problems with Measuring and Using Happiness for Policy Purposes', op. cit.) considers the example of the relocation of a manager among less successful people which should translate into increased reported happiness. Conversely, however, it would also have negative effects for the 'less successful people' which means that there must be an optimal level of relocations where the trade-offs between the two end up maximising aggregate happiness. Importantly, even if this does not become an area for policy it does still affect data and can be seen as a further source of distortion of a more genuine and sustainable (seeing as individuals tend to eventually adapt, at least in part, to their environments) conception of happiness.

[411] It is the case that for the purposes of this section (namely, the consideration of all that is problematic with HE policy studies), we have deliberately laboured under the assumption that the main problems discussed in this project are not critical for HE. However, the problem of interpersonal comparisons cannot be ignored here for it would -justifiably- lead to the conclusion that the broader problem (namely that aggregations obscure distributions and, ultimately, paint a distorted picture) may not be insurmountable.

[412] That could possibly be the case in the shorter term, too. Consider, for instance, the case of a natural disaster dealt by an underfunded civil protection mechanism.

are derived mostly (if not exclusively) through taxation, it could be that lower taxation might translate into more individuals being successful in satisfying their preferences and/or, if that is not immediately possible, it might be conducive to a healthier and more prosperous economy that will enable them to do so in the future. In defence of these approaches, testing in order to establish whether a given HE-influenced policy amounts to the optimal (from a happiness perspective) use of resources is not easy and perhaps in many cases it can, in fact, be completely impossible. Consider, for instance, the difficulties in predicting the scale and the frequency of a natural disaster, let alone its potential impact upon well-being for varying degrees of funding being granted to the relevant authorities. Indeed, this difficulty is exacerbated by the HE's problems that we highlight in this project. HE logic takes the subject to be unchanging (in that past responses allegedly can predict future ones) but also expect it to have common or at least uniform responses to policies (clearly implies a common core of human nature) otherwise advocacy for them would be unjustified. Moreover, it also assumes that these responses are isolable (in terms of their causality) and, therefore, expects them to be replicable, too, despite the great scope for variability among an infinitude of relevant parameters (such as those determined by the unintended consequences underlined here). However, we established that all of these assumptions are unwarranted and, therefore, the scope of such studies is naively overoptimistic. Indeed, the low quality of data that is typically used in such large-scale and wide-scope projects further aggravates the problem and renders this a hardly justifiable scholarly endeavour.

A further source of broader complications is the fact that people do not prioritise happiness uniformly or statically. Indeed, empirical evidence suggests that large categories of people might even be averse to happiness or (at least) to some of its types.[413] However, since the

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[413] See: M. Joshanloo, and D. Weijers, 'Aversion to happiness across cultures: A review of where and why people are averse to happiness', op. cit., and for a review of studies that show the non-ubiquity of happiness as a goal, see: J. Aaker, and E. Smith, 'Not Everyone Wants to Be Happy', op. cit. Interestingly, at the far end of detractors of happiness one finds a professor of psychology who went as far as to argue that it should be classified as a disorder: R. Bentall, 'A proposal to classify happiness as a psychiatric disorder', *Journal of Medical Ethics*, Vol. 18, Issue 2, 1992, pp. 94-98.

advance of HE entailed the prioritisation of happiness, which is seen as a better -if not the ultimate- measure of success and fulfilment (as discussed in 1.2), this issue is very rarely considered. Nevertheless, if not everyone wants to be happy, or, at the very least, not everyone deems it a priority, how justified is policy-making on a happiness basis? A potential workaround offered by some, such as Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi, is the use of happiness metrics not as a standalone measure but, rather, as part of a composite measure that takes into account more traditional measures (HDI, GNP, and similar), too.[414] However, this again faces the challenge of accurate quantification. For example, how should happiness be weighted in that composite measure? Merely increasing the complexity of a measure by using other indicators does not necessarily make it more any more reliable or valid and nor does it solve the problem of diverse happiness preferences, even if it seeks to gauge a wider range of traditional, yet -ultimately- arbitrary, determinants of well-being. Additionally, it introduces the danger of double-counting certain variables as it is clear that the more traditional economic components of the measure do have an impact on metrics of happiness. Since a broad majority of people value happiness positively (even if not as their main priority) the issue might appear superficially trivial, however, especially if we consider the wide scope for unintended consequences discussed in this section (e.g. alternative uses of state resources and/or reduction of taxation), it is our contention that it cannot be ignored.

Lastly, HE-based policy proposals that aim at wide-ranging conclusions, suffer from a final difficulty that manifests itself as a methodological one but is, largely, conceptual. Namely, the tendency of subjects to adapt to changes and, in turn, the reflection of this upon self-reported happiness, along with (and on top of) the overall relative nature of happiness. It is particularly evident if one takes the set-point theorist's credo at face value but it does not require full (or even partial) adoption of their positions to become apparent. Simply

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[414] J. Stiglitz, A. Sen, and J. Fitoussi, *Mismeasuring Our Lives: Why GDP Doesn't Add Up* (New York, US: The New Press, 2010), esp. preface.

considering the immense material and societal progress that the world has experienced one should have expected this to be an era characterised by immense happiness as compared to only a couple of centuries ago. In reality, however, there are no signs that happiness grew analogously or even at all. That is demonstrably the case if we focus on more recent periods for which we have more elaborate happiness records.[415] [416] This anomaly could be down to either adaptation phenomena (as argued by set point theorists) or to the relative nature of happiness due to comparisons (as argued by cognitive perspectives in HE). Alternatively, it could be explained by the inherent limitations of scales of happiness such as the upper bound problem (as discussed in Chapter 2), which effectively means that subjects are required to adapt (even if one is reluctant to subscribe to any adaptation theory) the happiness levels that they report with an ever changing meaning for what amounts to average happiness or absolute happiness (a response of a 5.5/11 and of 11/11, respectively, on an eleven point Likert scale) for more happiness is always possible. However, this relativisation of happiness responses (and even more so of aggregations of diverse responses) further problematises policy prescriptions based on such data. Indeed, the comparison of data across different cultural systems or within the same one but for different time periods becomes patently problematic. By the same token, even the aggregation of data collected from the same period from people of a given culture (even with the extra requirement that we have put forward here, namely for the subjects to belong to a common linguistic community) becomes questionable as subjects cannot be expected to adapt their expectations and/or calculations in a uniform way for their circumstances did not evolve uniformly or in any homogenous manner (except maybe for only a handful of variables). This would have required the existence of a common core of human nature so extensive that it would have been justifiable to take the uniformity of adaptations for granted. However, as we

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[415] For an argument along these lines, see: M. Fleurbaey, and D. Blanchet, op. cit., ch. 5.
[416] These might not be reliable for reasons explained throughout this project, however, they are the very data (or data of the very logic) that shape HE policies of the kind in question here.

have argued, such claims are not tenable (see 3.2). Overall, the objections for projects of the kind considered here are simply too many to ignore.

In a nutshell, the problems with the conceptualisation (and, therefore, the measurement) of happiness along with problematic conceptions of the subject (as well as with the resulting methodological problems) that we stress throughout this project, manifest themselves, perhaps expectedly, at the level of HE policy studies, too. What is more, HE-inspired policy prescriptions are predominantly making use of the most dubious methodological tools, which is also to be expected as those are the very tools that enable large scale and wide-scope claims which make them particularly attractive for policymakers and other interested parties alike.[417] The scholarly (and its popularised variants) debate about some of HE's most popular themes such as the happiness of a given nation and/or about the effect of hypothesised determinants such as inequality upon a nation or a region would not be possible if one were to reject the methodological approaches that are at issue here.[418] However, unless the scepticism that was elaborated here is answered convincingly, such policy proposals are bound to both fail in their stated aims and create unintended consequences that could, contrary to expectations, worsen the happiness outcomes even as defined and measured by the same scholars. As we have argued, this is especially the case for wide-scope projects wherein the assumptions and oversimplifications are simply too many (for obvious reasons of expediency) and not built on any logically consistent epistemic ground. Importantly, this goes beyond the relativisation of knowledge that a neopragmatist perspective would be comfortable with. The same could be said of the acceptance of some knowledge as partially useful for heuristic purposes.[419] That is because neither of those epistemic moves justifies,

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[417] Indeed, the problematic nature of the methodologies in question is a result of the flaws at the conceptual and meta-HE level: the aggregation of quantitative data towards the construction of an average subject is enabled only if one assumes a considerable core of human nature, as was illustrated in preceding chapters.

[418] Indeed, a mere search with search terms such as the above-mentioned will return thousands of results both in scholarly databases and in quality newspaper and magazine articles.

[419] A further alternative excuse for the use of these studies, in spite of the various concerns that one may have about them, is the argument that they are at least as good as the next alternative for a

nor, indeed, can condone, the convoluted and, ultimately, distortive conceptualisations (and the corresponding operationalisations) of happiness that are being used in the afore-discussed policy papers that often lack consistency. By the same token, the various problematic assumptions about human nature that we identified that often run counter to logic or counter to evidence cannot form the basis of any meaningful epistemic project no matter what its epistemological foundations are.

Ultimately, studies where an independent variable X (or a set of variables $\{X_1, X_2, ..., X_n\}$), usually related explicitly or implicitly to a policy, is linked to happiness (Y) as the dependent variable and whereby the data used is derived from low-quality quantitative surveys are of little value and should be abandoned. Any relationship that is identified will likely prove to be spurious upon closer examination and, therefore, misleading. Since, as was argued, policies along such posited relationships have the potential for unpredictable adverse consequences, the lack of accuracy is enough to delegitimise them. At best, if a pattern of correlations is particularly strong and is corroborated by all available methodologies, scholars may wish to highlight it and suggest potential lines of causality albeit always in a self-aware and always-provisional manner that would be bereft of the self-assuredness that enables wide-ranging policy prescriptions such as these discussed here. Instead, such precarious conclusions can be used to inform individuals (both when they are acting in their private life and in their various social capacities) where the validity of the hypotheses in hand may be tested more readily and with fewer and less severe wide-reaching unintended consequences.[420] Indeed, the difficulties associated with the use of inductive logic in order to

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scholar to gauge the preferences of subjects. However, if two measures of something are both problematic (particularly when the problems affect the very core of the data as in our case here), this does not legitimise the newer one; both should be rejected. For an argument making the case for the use of problematic measures along the aforementioned lines, see, for instance: D. Bok, *The Politics of Happiness: What Government Can Learn from the New Research on Well-Being* (Princeton, US: Princeton University Press, 2010), Ch. 2.

[420] Indeed, this is a viewpoint already held by a minority of scholars, which first appeared in the mainstream at an international HE conference in 2007 where it became one of the most polarising themes. See: R. Foroohar, 'Money vs. Happiness: Nations Rethink Priorities', *Newsweek*, April 2007. Available at: http://www.newsweek.com/money-vs-happiness-nations-rethink-priorities-97465 [Last

come to HE conclusions (due to the wide variety of variables at play, their non-quantifiability, and their intense instability) can be mitigated if the induction is carried out by each individual separately, following broad guidance from HE scholarship that should limit itself to pointing towards tentative relationships and potential causalities. However, it is also the case that not all HE scholarship is carried out along the problematic lines highlighted here. Therefore, it shall be possible for such scholarship to bear useful fruits in terms of policy prescriptions even if these are more limited and narrow in scope which would be a natural consequence of, one the one hand, the use of richer and, inevitably, more local data that can be more receptive to the contingencies highlighted here and, on the other, of the refusal to use problematic methodologies such as unwarranted aggregations and intertemporal and/or intercultural comparisons.

Lastly, in lieu of a summary, we shall gather together the various positive elements that a re-constructed HE study should consist of. Starting with the first stage, that of formulating a research question, for it to be feasible, researchers should focus on the local and the contingent. For instance, rather than looking at the happiness of a nation or large subnational units at various points in time, like so many studies do, they should focus instead on smaller populations (e.g. the local or even sub-local level) and on a singular time frame, wherein extraneous variables are more easily controlled for and temporal effects are neutralised. While studies with such research foci already exist, they represent only a small minority of HE and, importantly, they are rarely accompanied by appropriate sampling practices. More specifically, and in line with the preceding analysis, instead of large randomised samples (which typically come along with large population studies in HE), research designs should opt for cluster sampling and more specifically multi-stage ones (with

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accessed: 7 September 2017]. Of course, not all relationships that an 'informatory/advisory' HE will put forward will be testable at the individual level. However, individuals may come together and organically choose to act collectively upon that information, perhaps at a local level first and in any case in a bottom-up manner (rather than in the currently dominant opposite fashion).

at least two-stages). Unlike with area sampling, whose main aim is to reduce costs, the clusters here may traverse geographical boundaries as sampling will primarily establish whether subjects belong to congruous linguistic cohorts (as per the neopragmatist requirements). However, while traditional cluster sampling assumes external homogeneity (between groupings) but internal heterogeneity among each, so that the study's conclusions derive from (random samples of) the whole population and, thus, have implications for it, here it would be more of a procedural thing with the main aim being the study of each cluster separately on the second (or later, if necessary) stage.[421] External implications and mutuality among tendencies could be considered but only on a tentative and opportunistic basis and to the extent that the rigorous preconditions set out earlier in this chapter are met.

As regards the process of conceptualisation, while it would ideally be done organically through processes of concept formation on the ground (as part of separate fieldwork or in the context of the previously discussed first stage of multi-stage sampling), in cases where it is carried out a priori, concept definitions should be at once as clear and open as possible. Clear in order to preclude confusion and undue conflations and open both in order to enable refinements as necessary (if the design accommodates them) and to allow for a hybrid approach in terms of how the concept is operationalised. Operationalisations shall aim for rich (or "thick") data with the goal being, on the one hand, again the control for confounding variables (demographic, cultural, psychological, and other) and, on the other, the increased comparability of data. To that effect, qualitative small-n studies, wherein the focus is on specific domains (or even sub-domains) of life should be preferred to wide-scope 'total happiness in life' foci. In line with the elusiveness of identity and meaning, however, operationalisations should always strive to embrace whatever approaches of credible reliability and validity are available in order to corroborate findings. Thus, by way of

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[421] For a more expansive discussion of this technique see the proposals for the amelioration of QoL approaches in 4.2.2.

example, a qualitative study based on unstructured interviews could be complemented with a quantitative objective-list measure and, perhaps, even with a physiological study. Or, in the case of a heavily SWB-based design, it could be complemented by data collected through the dairy method (so as to control for temporal effects such as memory bias) and any number of other viable approaches (preferably non-subjective ones, in this case); a kind of a heterophenomenological stance. To the extent that two or, ideally, more, methodological pathways lend empirical support to a finding, this will enjoy a more secure, even if always provisional, status. We cannot circumscribe the ideal (or a 'minimum acceptable') number of different approaches needed, given the idiosyncrasies of each study, as well as the highly variable character of concerns about resources, but, clearly, the more corroboration there is, the safer the conclusions shall be. After all, as explained earlier, such a hybrid operationalisation is imperative if we are to be consistent with our emphasis on the contingencies of HE.

Concerning data processing and following our rejection of aggregations (principally of large-scale cardinal happiness measures), as well as of interpersonal comparisons (of all kinds, including, most notably, international and intertemporal) between them on grounds of incommensurability, designs should cater for smaller scale statistical analyses, instead. Importantly, those include comparisons among linguistically homogenous groups. And while, as explained before, the desideratum for linguistic homogeneity in the most comprehensive sense possible may come at the cost of increased resource intensity, it also opens up the possibility for meaningful comparisons that would have been previously unthinkable. For example, members of online communities from across the world and across different age-groups could very well form a linguistic community for the purposes of clustering, especially as it relates to specific subdomains of life. Indeed, this compartmentalisation would also be in line with the Foucauldian analysis of the self-constitution of subjects in their various capacities in different domains of life. Such

comparisons would transcend traditional spatial limits and would, therefore, have a highly novel extrapolatory potential. However, when studies select their means and aims they should not necessarily mimic the modus vivendi of current studies; comparisons and similar statistical processing of data need not be their main, much less the sole, tool and/or goal. Linguistic communities could very well find use (which would be reason enough for their undertaking, following neopragmatism) for separate analyses of each cohort, especially considering that the populations that some cohorts refer to may be particularly large. There may even be some scope to compare and contrast data without falling back to the distortive and oversimplifying practices criticised in this project. For instance, in a case where happiness conceptions in both cohorts B and C correlate better with a number of other metrics of happiness (objective-lists and physiological measures), one may wish to examine the divergence of cohort A and attempt to account for it. It will then be up to its constituents to decide whether to adapt it but that would be secondary or even irrelevant to HE. Instead, it is the number of interesting relationships that may be discovered in the process that would be ripe ground for it. Furthermore, provided that data is of adequate quality and depth, some heuristic statistical processing may be defensible. Indicatively, a regression analysis, presuming a strong correlation coefficient, low P-value, and appropriate corroboration through other approaches, could point towards tentative tendencies (or lack thereof) of a HE phenomenon but, critically, not to iron laws or happiness functions (as in the deterministic status quo). Similarly, subject to the same provisos, a longitudinal or a time series study can heuristically benefit from probabilistic Bayesian inferences vis-à-vis variables of interest.

Finally, whatever conclusion they arrive at, studies should use carefully worded language in order to avoid reversing the benefits of the approach proposed here. Thus, several notes of caution should be in order as it pertains to all the matters raised here (as necessary) and, instead of the current self-assured tone of certainty with claims of universality and timelessness about the attributes of subjects or of happiness, scholars should acknowledge

the contingency of the subject matter of HE, as well as the provisionality of their epistemic projects. These shall not take the form of dry caveats at the introduction of papers or near the conclusion; after all, one can find plenty of such examples in literature already. Rather, they should permeate papers from the abstract through their very end, including in purely methodological sections, so that it would be impossible for other HE scholars or implementers of HE prescribed policies to ignore them or downplay their import. They should recognise the instability in the identity and meaning of all the field's key concepts, the heuristic nature of most operationalisations (owed to the fact that we only have imperfect ones to select from), the particularly fertile ground for both exogeneity and biases, the great risk for unintended consequences in HE-informed policy and, as a result, embrace a more advisory role than its currently prescriptive one. Epistemic modesty and its visibility may not be the central issues facing HE but they are important for omitting them runs the risk of jeopardising whatever progress is made. That is because individuals external to HE studies (other HE scholars, policymakers, and so on) may be tempted to treat it as 'business as usual' and interact with it as they would with any of the positivist paradigm.

4.3.3 Policy implications

So far we have established that the contingency and sheer diversity of conceptualisations of happiness combined with the radical indeterminacy of the nature of subjectivity should preclude HE from using certain -currently oft-employed- methodological tools. By contrast, other methodological practices were shown to be more congruent with these two main observations. However, this shift, which is undersigned by the adoption of a neopragmatist framework, has implications for the status of HE knowledge. Considering it to be deterministic is (at least in a majority of cases) no longer tenable, instead, the heuristic status was deemed more apposite. In turn, this impacts the kind of policies that HE can

study, assess and/or prescribe, as was argued in the previous subsection. Nevertheless, the very premises of this project have some broad policy implications of their own and this subsection aims to offer a preliminary exploration of them.

First and foremost, we should be reminded that the neopragmatist solution to signification and meaning problems that is advocated here comes with certain provisos. These exist to ensure that a society is adequately open and free so as to allow the neopragmatist approach to be meaningful in the particular context of HE.[422] The 'open' part here seeks to describe a society where creativity and pluralism are not only ostensibly protected by law but are also instrumental in fashioning the community so that their processes may impart new (or older, albeit imported) meanings to the concept of happiness and all other relevant for HE concepts. Such a society will be roughly akin to how Bergson and Popper conceptualised the open society.[423] [424] And while the 'free' part is already implied for the most part by the 'open' part, it also connotes a full depoliticisation and removal of forms of social power from the operation of the above processes so that the as-authentic-as-possible input of each individual feeds in and shapes the outcome of a linguistic community. That said, to assume that each individual will have an exactly equal influence on the outcome would be naïve. After all, we have seen in Chapter 3 how forms of power (and in particular social power) should be seen as fluid and ever-present rather than as a 'thing' that can be simply taken away by those who possess it. However, for HE purposes, merely an informed consent should suffice at least as the bare minimum. In practice, the above conditions can be met with constitutionally

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[422] Neopragmatism might, indeed, be able to function in less than free and open societies in other contexts and/or from other perspectives (e.g. to offer a justification for the elite ideology in a traditional hierarchical society). However, in the context of HE, wherein our concern is to arrive at as authentic as possible meanings of happiness (in order to gauge it, inter alia), a closed and/or unfree society would simply lead us into a relapse to the flaws of the past (see 4.1) albeit with an ostensible meta-epistemological justification.

[423] Bergson's focus is on morality and religion but his 'open morality' which is brought about by 'creative emotions' results in an open society which can be seen as the prototype of Popper's iteration. See: H. Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (Notre Dame, US: University of Notre Dame Press, 1932/1977), esp. ch. IV.

[424] K. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton, US: Princeton University Press, 1945/2013).

guaranteed individual and political freedoms similar to those of modern liberal democracies (as in Popper's analysis) with a particular emphasis on the protection of freedom of expression which, unfortunately, should not to be taken for granted even in liberal democracies.[425] Further, a noteworthy development that pertains to the openness of a society has been the emergence of Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 and the ever-growing use of both over the last couple of decades. Their architecture and overall functioning are definitely conducive to non-hierarchical meaning creation from the bottom to the top and should, therefore, be advanced, protected, and guaranteed (e.g. by the protection of anonymity and privacy where possible, the unimpeded exchange of data in mutually voluntary transactions, and similar).[426] Interestingly, such technologies and trends typically have a strongly deterritorialised character which may, on the one hand, make the identification of 'linguistic communities' a more complex process but, on the other, and on top of the increased participation of individuals in meaning creation, it allows them to freely part and join different communities with minimal costs as opposed to the potentially immense exit and entry costs tied to moving between traditional territorial communities.

Secondly, policy should be receptive and amenable to the understanding of subjectivity proposed here: a subject which is not only freed from the shackles of essentialism but that is also able to constitute itself by engaging in techniques of self-creation within the potentialities enabled by BwO (as per Deleuze and Guattari), even if only within whatever societal and other constraints might inevitably exist (as per Foucault). Indeed, the free flow among different subjectivities should always be possible as a means to combat these

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[425] For a review of the debate and a powerful defence of freedom of speech see: K. Gelber, *Speaking Back: The free speech versus hate speech debate* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins, 2002). For an exploration of the status of freedom of speech in several liberal democracies from a judicial point of view, see: I. Cram, *Contested Words: Legal Restrictions on Freedom of Speech in Liberal Democracies* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2006).
[426] For a collection of essays on the advantages of Web 2.0 with an emphasis on potential threats to the privacy of users, see: C. Fuchs, K. Boersma, A. Albrechtslund, and M. Sandoval (eds.), *Internet and Surveillance: The Challenges of Web 2.0 and Social Media* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2012), esp. part I.

constraints. This is critical for HE even if one does not subscribe to the fairly intuitive assertion that self-creation and authenticity has a kind of positive relationship with happiness in itself.[427] That is so because, regardless of whether the two are related and how, if the happiness data are to be authentic and meaningful, they have to be reported by self-created subjects, rather than by individuals who had an artificial and external subjectivity imposed on them and/or had to choose from an only limited number of contrived subject positions. If the latter were the case it follows that our data would be completely inauthentic and, therefore, heavily distorted.[428]

In terms of concrete policies these should be the removal of the state from the micromanagement of the subject and the abrogation of processes that can interfere with processes of self-creation. Most notably, these include attempts at normalisation as well as the favouring of any one lifestyle choice (or set of choices) either by positive discrimination and/or material means (e.g. redistribution, proactive promotion policies including those with little material cost such as those resulting from nudge theory, and similar; see also 1.2). Indeed, Foucault's equivocal stance on the then-emergent neoliberalism of the early 1980s can be explained, in part, by the resulting withdrawal of the state from policy areas relating to the regulation of the self.[429] In terms of positive policies, it should include provisions to

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[427] This relationship is posited by many, most frequently, however, by those upholding a eudemonic notion of happiness. While fairly intuitive and consistent with whatever minimal consensus there exists about the determinants of happiness, our point here is not to assess it for the authenticity of an identity is crucial for HE anyway. For an example of such a position along with a sporadic review of similar arguments see: M. Martin, *Happiness and the Good life* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), esp. ch 4.

[428] Distortion here means as compared to the happiness responses and effects that a freely self-created subject would have given. A case could be made that artificial subjectivities are real nonetheless, but a HE of the artificial subject would reinforce it, and ultimately, solidify it (especially the more effective that that HE is). This is problematic in its own right for apparent reasons but it could also lead to a longer-term decrease of base-line happiness due to its encouraging of a disharmony between the variables that might be seen as happiness-inducing for the artificial subject and the ones that the subject may harbour organically (perhaps even unknowingly). Thus, such epistemic endeavours would only perhaps have some very limited value in the short-term at the peril of a potentially much larger happiness cost in a longer time horizon.

[429] The strikingly ambiguous for some (due to Foucault's broader opposition to liberalism) attitude of Foucault towards neoliberalism is examined in: D. Zamora, and M. Behrent (eds.), *Foucault and Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2016), esp. ch. 3.

protect and maximise individual freedom, as per the previous paragraph, which is clearly an essential prerequisite for the promotion and engenderment of self-creation. Given the string of constraints inherent to all societies that were discussed in Chapter 3, individual freedom should be understood in the broadest and most inclusive sense (mostly negative freedom, though), as a countering force.[430] To the extent that the above policies are implemented successfully and, thus, lead to a society of increased heterogeneity and fluidity in subjectivities, a further positive effect upon HE (albeit on a secondary level) will likely be observed. Namely, it should further delegitimise the status quo in the field which posits a fixable core (and, therefore, common) human nature which is stable and/or even core identities. And, while it would be naively optimistic of us to expect that the critique developed here along with some measures towards the facilitation of self-creation processes suffice for the HE paradigm to change (especially as it pertains to human nature), even slight advances can have a positive impact and, therefore, that pursuing the above-mentioned goals has value is beyond serious doubt.

Thirdly and finally, policies should promote political decentralisation on as many domains as possible. For one, this is congruent with the requirements of neopragmatism. Since no general HE can exist but, rather, only specific ones on the basis of distinct linguistic communities,[431] these must be in agreement on the meanings of their key concepts and on their broader goals. A lack of the former would cause obvious methodological problems, particularly if we consider the centrality of signification in the neo-pragmatist framework;

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[430] Positive freedom might be difficult to define without (an inherently problematic) theory of human nature along with an ethics. What is more, pursuing it without impinging on both positive and negative freedoms of others may prove impossible. After all, negative freedom is the kind that corresponds more fully with the ideal of self-creation anyway. That is because all external influences (even if ostensibly positive) are risk factors for hetero-determination and the return of externally-imposed subjectivities on the self from the back door.

[431] This is not to preclude the possibility of HE conclusions that would transcend the contours of a linguistic community. Indeed, conclusions drawn from different linguistic communities could very well be compatible or commensurable and could lead to broader conclusions which have applicability (and, thus, value) for their inter-communal frame of reference. Rather, such parallels will always be precarious and the end-point of a study, not the axiomatically assumed starting point (as is currently the case).

the existence of a linguistic community is the sine qua non of any epistemic project. A lack of the latter, on the other hand, would render the evaluation and the goal-setting processes of HE problematic, if not impossible. We should be reminded that, while neopragmatism repudiates foundationalism and epistemic objectivity, it replaces them with utility as the justification and arbiter of all epistemic projects. As such, a minimum consensus on the goals of the community or, in other words, on what counts as useful, is an essential prerequisite for a HE to exist and to be evaluated. Decentralisation will take decision-making closer to the individuals so that different communities with different goals will be able to use their unique HE conclusions to adopt happiness-conducive policies geared to them specifically. This will naturally coincide with increased mobility as individuals will have a further important parameter to consider when making residency-related decisions; one characterised by high variability.[432] Physical mobility, however, may not always be possible or, indeed, desirable by all individuals. While full mobility would be ideal from a neo-pragmatist perspective, its lack does not represent an impenetrable problem for, as we have seen, HE scholars can work through it by adopting strategies that were not previously available (e.g. clustering of subjects of non-territorial linguistic communities). In terms of implementing happiness-optimal policies it could, however, be somewhat trickier if individuals were unable or reluctant to move physically (many can plausibly have good reasons for this). Nonetheless, there is a lot of room for innovative policies to address this difficulty and ameliorate its effects. For instance, local government services and policies that do not require and/or depend on the physical presence of an individual can be devolved to the individual; individuals should be given the freedom to pick and choose or even to 'shop around' for services and policies in a similar manner to the pay-per-view and on-demand model of pay television.[433] The potential for such policies is immense but remains largely unexplored

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[432] Decentralised decision making entails more control over policy-making but with it comes also the possibility of radically different policy outcomes which, in turn, will create flows in or out of the community in question (in case of positive and negative outcomes, respectively).

[433] Interestingly, perhaps enabled by the rapid advance of the use and the functions of the internet, we have witnessed several advances to that effect in recent years. An example of this is the e-residency service offered by the Estonian state to qualifying individuals from around the world (see: T. Kotka, C. del Castillo, and K. Korjus, 'Estonian e-Residency: Benefits, Risk and Lessons Learned'. In A. Ko, and

(even though, as explained in the most recent footnote, it has started to attract interest as of late). Due to space limitations, we cannot survey it here, however, it is clear that a radical and relentless spirit of the principle of subsidiarity should be the guiding principle. Constitutionally enshrining it and/or legally guaranteeing it otherwise would be a good start but not enough on its own. Rather, constant experimentations and deepening of policies along those lines would be required.[434]

Besides, a call for an as widespread and deep as possible decentralisation is a logical policy consequence of our observations here for a few other, but related reasons, too, mainly stemming from the here-advocated new character and status of HE-derived knowledge. Namely, as was underlined, much of the output of HE scholarship will have to be demoted to a status characterised by provisionality and lower degrees of certainty than that of an exact positive science (that HE currently claims for itself). The concessions made in the adoption of a neopragmatist framework and the non-dismissal of heuristic elements necessitate that 'demotion' and with it come consequences for both HE scholarship (methodology, aims, and themes) and its status. However, not unlike what was mentioned in the case of HE's treatment of human nature, it would be unrealistic to expect a substantive change in HE's self-image in that regard, at least in the short-term. Therefore, decentralisation can help minimise the effects of flawed HE-inspired policies in parallel with potential self-

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E. Fransesconi (eds.), *Electronic Government and the Information Systems Perspective* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International, 2016)). For a broader discussion of already-existing radical decentralisation policies and theoretical ones alike, see: A. Tucker, and G. de Bellis (eds.), *Panarchy: Political Theories of Non-Territorial States* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2016). The concept of 'panarchy', as outlined by the above-cited work, or the idea of 'secession down to the individual' are not, of course, new concepts. The latter has, for example, been a persistent ideal for classical liberals and anarchists (See, for instance: L. von Mises, *Liberalism: In the Classical Tradition*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, US: Cobden, 1927/1985), esp. ch. 3.2 and also: D. Gordon (ed.), *Secession, State & Liberty* (New Brunswick, US: Transaction Publishers, 1998)). However, technological advancements bring with them new possibilities for partial devolution that were previously either unthinkable or impossible, which might energise a new impetus and perhaps even create a devolutionary snowball effect.

[434] After all, even weaker guarantees of subsidiarity are often observed very poorly and/or only partially. See, for instance, a critique of the sporadic compliance of the EU with its own principle of subsidiarity, in: G. Gelauff, I. Grilo, and A. Lejour (eds.), *Subsidiarity and Economic Reform in Europe* (Berlin, Germany: Springer-Verlag, 2008), esp. ch. 1.

improvements of the field. The transfer of decision making and, in general, of a series of policy-related processes to the local level should have two benefits. On the one hand, it will minimise the scope for large-scale national policies to address HE concerns and, on the other, whatever policies are implemented at the local level will have more discernible effects (and therefore will be easier to assess) and those who make them will be more directly accountable (and therefore more responsive to individuals affected by them). In turn, this should help nudge HE's focus away from the macro-level, independently of the outcome of the aforementioned meta-HE debate. The mere existence of more local policies than in the past will presumably translate into more scholarly interest in them. Moreover, the advisory rather than authoritative status in tandem with the localised and specific versus generalised knowledge is more consistent with decentralised political structures anyway. At a minimum, it allows individuals to voice their feedback more readily (as opposed to the 'broken telephone' of distortions that occurs between an individual and the more remote national sovereign) and, at a maximum, it gives them the freedom to 'vote with their feet'. Equally, problems such as those of unintended consequences, of perverse incentives, as well as those stemming from the various problematic scenarios of utility maximisation that were highlighted in the previous section, shall be drastically reduced as injustices and imbalances will be more visible (and their causes more easily discernible) and the policy-makers are more likely to take stock of them and address them accordingly.

A final reason to call for decentralisation is the understanding of happiness (and of the lack thereof) as having a signalling function. Because much of how different subjects define happiness and what its key determinants are, comprises, as we have seen, complex and often tacit information, always embedded into contingent socio-cultural contexts, the tasks of formalising definitions, quantifications, and tracing determinants are often proven to be very tricky. By contrast, happiness and the multifarious and often contingent ways by which it can be expressed (not necessarily intentionally) and perceived can act as means of a direct

distribution of information about choices and/or life events that are conducive or, at least, ancillary to happiness in specific contexts. Direct here means without the need for explicit and witting recodification and, subsequently, for painstaking formalisations and generalisations. Potts, who calls for a 'decentralised HE' along the above lines, argues that such happiness signals represent a unique way of helping us to identify useful (for happiness) behavioural adaptations as 'an emergent property of the co-evolution of institutional rules, market rules and behavioural rules', drawing direct parallels with the Hayekian theory of knowledge and its understanding of the price system as a signalling and coordinating mechanism in the distribution of complex and tacit knowledge (in that case about the availability of goods and services, the demand for them, relevant preferences, and so on).[435] [436] In other words, the explicitly epistemic project of HE, with its various difficulties, may be complemented (if not bypassed completely)[437] via the use of happiness signals as a direct form of learning for individuals 'by example' from their peers and other agents without the need for translation first to the general (HE) and then again back to the individual (HE applications) at the cost of critical distortions at each step.[438] However, as Potts notes, the proper functioning of such a mechanism relies upon the existence of robust social competition but, also, upon the individuals having ample room for experimentation, too, which would enable them to achieve optimal outcomes (in a similar way that a richer gene pool results in more efficient natural selection and adaptation processes).[439] Both,

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[435] J. Potts, 'The Use of Happiness in Society', *Policy: A journal of public policy and ideas*, Vol. 27, Issue 1, 2011, pp. 3-10.

[436] F. Hayek, 'The Use of Knowledge in Society', *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 35, Issue 4, Sep. 1945, pp. 519-530.

[437] Potts, in fact, argues that there is hardly any legitimate scope for HE, at least not as a traditional epistemic field. However, even if one fully subscribes to his premises, there is no reason why there cannot be any meaningful generalisation derived from his advocated form of decentralised HE (provided, of course, that they abide by the conditions set out earlier in this chapter). Indeed, such a HE would be more in line with the advisory role that was put forward earlier in this chapter.

[438] In some cases, these distortions would be due to the contingency (and, therefore, non-generalisability), whereas in other cases they will be owed to the tacitness and/or unintelligibility of the relevant information. The implication is that individuals are in a better position to make judgements on a case-by-case basis about the applicability of a determinant of happiness to their own case and even if they are wrong the negative happiness consequences will impact only them (unlike in the case of top-down HE-inspired policy). Indeed, it is by trial and error and by mirroring choices resulting from other trial and error processes that this mechanism operates.

[439] J. Potts, 'The Use of Happiness in Society', op. cit.

however, are best served by a decentralised polity (arguably, the combination of the two may not be possible at all in a centralised one) wherein experimentation at the individual level and the corresponding learning processes can flourish with minimal external restrictions and influences such as from formal top-down institutions. Such restrictions will naturally always exist to an extent but the increased accountability of the local level shall hamper or distort the transmission of happiness signals significantly less.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusion and Way Forward

5.1: Recapitulation

We have already established that this project, in spite of its critical attitude, affirms the importance and feasibility of HE, albeit with a reformed epistemological grounding and remit. In order to make the case for the proposed changes, it begun by first aiming to shed light upon the main difficulties of the field and found that they can be condensed into three categories: conceptualisation (and, therefore, also operationalisation) problems, difficulties with flawed understandings of the subject, and, finally, an ill-conceived perception of the epistemological horizon that frames the field and determines the status of its output. However, since this project's analysis is not merely negative, it also sought to address each category of problems positively. In particular, insights from post-structuralism provided a very apposite framework for the elucidation of each of the three problematic areas. Where the negative impetus of post-structuralism, with its scathing critique of the epistemic infrastructure of HE, may have mistakenly been interpreted as a call for epistemic nihilism, neo-pragmatism supplied positive recourse. Indeed, both theoretical components were shown to not only be compatible but also complementary and uniquely apt for our purposes here. Next, we considered the practical effects of this theoretical intervention upon HE methodology and what it would entail for already-existing scholarship. Special attention was paid to what the project's advocated position entails for HE policy applications which, as was shown, come with some difficulties of their own. In fact, as was shown, all three categories of problems relate to such difficulties and, as a result, compound their problems. In sum, while

HE is viable and not all already-existing flawed scholarship needs to be discarded, HE scholarship would potentially benefit from not only making substantive methodological changes but also from narrowing its scope as, in doing so, it would become more focused. In this section we aim to bring these parts together in order to make the importance of the project's conclusion for HE and beyond more clear. We shall do this by summarising the identified difficulties and, then, by considering the treatment of this project for each.

The first area of criticism concerns the limitations of conceptualisations of happiness. Perhaps the most obvious difficulty that falls under this category is problems with the identification (and misidentification) of happiness. More specifically, on the one hand, happiness (in the relevant for HE sense) is problematically identified with emotions and/or responses that only capture some of its aspects or even none of them (consider, for instance, conceptualisations that take into account momentary hedonic reflexes). On the other hand, distinct emotions are often treated as being identical or, at best, as commensurable and, therefore, their corresponding concepts are often used interchangeably or are taken to be comparable, respectively. A notable example (but by no means the only one) is the conflation between hedonic and eudemonic kinds of happiness. As is natural, such crude conceptualisations inevitably result in distortions from the outset that are compounded at later stages and, thus, result in conspicuously bad science. Post-structuralism may not be essential in uncovering either of the those subcategories of difficulties (indeed, as was explored, there are already exists some critical literature on the areas in question), however, given the often implicit and tacit character of these conceptualisations as well as their ubiquity (in spite of those already-existing criticisms), the post-structuralist emphasis on meaning, as well as its undermining of the positivist scientism that pervades HE, can be proven key in bringing these flaws to the fore of the scholarly debate, as well as to point towards ways of overcoming them conclusively. This will, of course, be a gradual process but, to the extent that it is carried out effectively and persistently, it should gradually mitigate

such problems and pave the way for a HE that has moved beyond them.[440] As for already-existing research, it should inspire a self-critical spirit that will lead to necessary amendments with various possible outcomes (depending on the specifics of each case) but, importantly, it need not result in the outright rejection of all literature.

A corollary group of difficulties of this category pertains to problems of operationalisation. These are particularly important as, even when conceptualisations are fully explicit and elaborate (which, as noted, is very rarely the case anyway), they are deemed to be the least important part of HE studies; a necessary evil standing in the way of empirical considerations. As such, they are given little attention and thought and they are hardly ever the centre of contention in the scholarly debates of the field. What is more, even when a conceptualisation is not susceptible to the problems mentioned in the previous paragraph, this offers no guarantees that the concept will not be operationalised in ways that merely introduce these problems at a later stage. In other words, while a robust operationalisation almost always implies a sound conceptualisation (at least in the sense that it is not guilty of the flaws discussed earlier), the opposite is not always necessarily true. Indeed, this turns out to be the case very often and, since the vast majority of HE literature is empirical in nature, this is all that matters, ultimately. Moreover, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that even when difficulties are not owed explicitly to a problematic conceptualisation they can be traced to some fallacious or partial understanding of happiness.

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[440] As was argued in previous chapters, and as we shall see later in this section, to a degree, problems of conceptualisation are insolvable in that the radical indeterminacy of happiness will always problematise the various conceptual approaches. 'Moving beyond them', therefore, here implies merely finding a way to acknowledge this and incorporate it into HE. Additionally, the elementary problems considered here in particular, as well as the underlying epistemological assumptions are more fundamental and exacerbate these less evident difficulties; eliminating them can pave the way for substantial improvements in the quality of the concepts used (and, therefore, to the quality of HE output, too).

As we saw in Chapter 3, post-structuralism helped us establish that all meanings are fluid in that, not only are they part of an endless chain of (at best, only externally) arbitrary signification (as structuralism acknowledges) but, crucially, this system is neither stable nor can it have reference to a transcendent signified (or 'a point of pure presence') that would legitimise it and act as the guarantor of its stability and completeness. As such, arriving at stable and final definitions is not deemed feasible and, therefore, cannot be a desideratum. Given the increased complexity and elusiveness of the subject in hand (happiness), ignoring the definitional indeterminacy of our key concept is especially problematic here. As a result, the situation does not lend itself to pragmatic oversimplifications which comprise, however, the modus operandi of most HE projects on the matter. One response could be that of epistemic nihilism: if language, an essential tool for the analysis of empirical evidence, is unstable and incomplete, the status of exact scientificity becomes unachievable, which puts the overall value of the pursuit in question. Nonetheless, we illustrated that this need not be the case. Indeed, the post-structuralist critique does not imply epistemic nihilism but calls, by contrast, for an epistemological revolution. Here, in particular, neo-pragmatism offers a congruous way out of the ostensible cul-de-sac: it repudiates all notions of (transcendental) epistemic objectivity but, at the same time, maintains that contingent meanings and truth claims can have value for specific people (and, more often, groups of them) in their specific contexts and to the extent that they can be used as tools for the achievement of specific goals. Yet, this does not imply a welcoming of an epistemic free-for-all, either. Most notably, obvious flaws (such as the unwarranted conceptual conflations that were discussed earlier), as well as attempts to reinstate foundationalism and even positivism through the back door, are unsustainable as they would undermine HE at its core.

Indeed, the latter is often carried out subconsciously, and should be seen more as symptomatic of a tacit acknowledgment of the apparent weakness of the various conceptualisations and operationalisations of happiness rather than as an attempt to address

the objections raised here. After all, these have not gained traction in literature so as to trigger such an explicit response. The foremost example of such a tendency is the over-reliance upon operationalisations (based on self-reports, but not exclusively there) that treat happiness as measurable in scales where happiness represents the positive area of an equally split continuum of unhappiness and happiness. Indeed, this is a clear case of the hierarchical binaries that Derrida so vehemently criticised. The goal of this in HE is not (or, at least, needs not be) to privilege happiness for strategic purposes but, rather, to ground it safely in a symmetrical dualism that guarantees its notional substance.[441] Indeed, this is the only way by which linguistic units take value or are signified, as even structuralists conceded before Derrida. Derrida's innovation was to add that such binaries also rely on contrived hierarchies whereby one of the two terms is prioritised and the other becomes subjugated to it. However, these hierarchies, as well as the supposed antithetical relationship of the two terms are always fictional and, therefore, inherently unstable. Treating them, thus, as the opposite ends of a homogenous and symmetric continuum is severely problematic. That is the case not only because it is arbitrary and therefore a weak operationalisation but also because it logically entails that unhappiness and happiness are commensurable which leads to methodological steps (such as aggregations, comparisons, averaging) that further compound the problem.

Other operationalisations, including physiological ones, were found to be partial (in that they only captured an -often not precisely known- part of the whole picture), if not completely problematic. To be sure, the approach adopted here is not essential in order to elucidate these weaknesses. Rather, its merit is that it sheds light upon the non-tenability of the partial treatment of a phenomenon as complex as happiness, not least because, and unlike what may be the case in other research fields, the sum of the parts does not constitute the whole. It

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[441] Arguably, even if that were the case it would not be at issue here for the acceptance of a HE largely entails happiness as a (privileged) desideratum.

should be noted, however, that this should not be translated as a call to abandon imperfect methods; after all, no epistemic method was flawless from its inception. Rather, this work aims to expose and highlight the dubious ways by which HE attempts to ground itself in order to promote its self-image of an exact science. It is only when that is the case or when an approach lacks internal consistency or is predicated upon flawed assumptions (as in the various cases highlighted throughout this work) or uses unsustainably problematic methodologies, that this project takes issue with HE scholarship.[442]

In fact, experimentation and the use of different approaches should be strongly encouraged but, at the same time, it should be made in a self-aware manner which acknowledges the limitations in each case and the status of work-in-progress rather than that of a finished good. It is not the author's intention to predetermine the exact shape and form that this experimentation may take, not even on the elementary stage of concept formation.[443] That would run against the preconditions of the neo-pragmatist framework, as they were detailed in the previous chapter. What is implied by them, however, especially as it pertains to conceptualisations (and, therefore, operationalisations, too) is a receptiveness to the contingencies of the local and social meaning-giving processes. For these to be meaningful for a social science subject like HE, these processes should take place in a socio-political context that is adequately open and free from coercion. Moreover, this has implications for research, past and future. The treatment of concepts created in different contexts and historical times as interchangeable (and, therefore, commensurable and comparable, too) is

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[442] Examples that were reviewed include various biases that are particularly pertinent in HE, problems with scales (quantification, upper bound problem, and similar), comparability issues, and other. It was not within the scope of this project to be exhaustive in dealing with all methodological issues but merely to highlight and take issue with important patterns of problems, particularly as they exacerbate (or engender, in some cases) the main difficulties that this project identifies in HE.
[443] Naturally, as was mentioned earlier, organic concept formation in the field will likely be less liable to the problems raised here, however, this may not always be possible.

no longer tenable but steps can be taken to retrospectively address these concerns even in already published research (although obviously this will not be possible for all).[444]

The second area of criticism concerns the theorisations of the subject used in HE, both explicitly and, more commonly, implicitly. We have shown that almost all studies rely on a fixed model of subjectivity that they typically treat as both universal and atemporal. This was evidenced either explicitly, for example, in studies which advocated a centred and fairly rational subjectivity or a less-than-rational one which, however, has fairly universal and predictable divergences from the rational, or implicitly, and we derived it from the methodological steps that were taken and implied one.[445] Certainly, in most cases these were not full accounts of subjectivity (it would have been off-topic, after all) but even tiny and partial accounts of it have clear methodological implications. For instance, the treatment of responses on self-reported happiness surveys using Likert scales as fully comparable, implies not just the adoption of a common concept of happiness by all subjects (which have often very different nationalities, localities, and other demographic characteristics) but also a uniform interpretation of the questions and the scales, a common way of quantifying happiness, uniformity of response bias effects, and so on. Furthermore, the conclusions and prescriptions of HE studies are often laden with similar implicit assumptions. For instance, if independent variable X is deemed to be causing outcome Y in a given sample, it is almost automatically presumed that such effects will be replicable in the general population (assuming merely a formally representative sampling). Granted, most studies that address relationships and phenomena relevant for (and applicable to) the general population will resort to this modus operandi. However, the generalisability of, say, an economic

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[444] For a detailed look on the methodological implications see 4.2.2 and for the impact upon already existing research as well as for ways of addressing the here-discussed limitations see 4.3.1.
[445] For example, comparison theory approaches to HE make the assumption that people will universally compare themselves to their peers and other individuals of their environment. In addition, they make further assumptions about the kinds of comparisons that people (choose to) make depending on their and their environments' circumstances as their approach typically seeks to gauge the effect of each type of comparison upon happiness.

phenomenon does not (always) necessarily require that the individual members of the general population have uniform responses to given determinants whereas for HE that is a sine qua non. Given the inherent complexity of the mechanisms regulating happiness, thus, such studies must presume a substantial degree of universality among subjects if they are to be valid (externally, at least).

However, with the help of post-structuralist critiques of humanism and other fixed theories of subjectivity, we were able to establish that, as Weedon puts it, subjectivity is neither unified nor fixed but, rather, a site of disunity and conflict.[446] Instead of consisting of a core of 'human nature' that is stable and universal, it constitutes a precarious assemblage that is always caught up in a process of becoming and, as Derrida so keenly remind us, always remains inscribed in language (which, in itself, entails a further host of contingencies).[447] As such, attempts to fix it down or to treat it as static and unchangeable (for instance, as part of an essentialist 'human nature' discourse) will not only do injustice to the study of the topic but may also lead to a reinforcement of the suppression of change. What is more, as was the case with meaning, subjectivity, too, is often treated partially (or in a piecemeal fashion) but the sum of different aspects of subjectivity does not equal the whole of a subject. This does not, of course, mean that progress in the understanding of subjectivity in the health sciences is not recognised but, rather, that since our knowledge of the self is far too incomplete, it cannot be anything but misleading. Extrapolations made from tiny parts of seemingly secure knowledge (e.g. a specific part of the nervous system) are at best precarious projections that paint a distorted, patchy, and, ultimately, limited picture of the whole. After all, as was shown, certain findings from the health sciences seem to corroborate the fluidity and diversity of the subject that this project maintains. Such attempts merely betray the anxiety

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[446] C. Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1987/1997), p. 21.
[447] Derrida was quoted arguing for that, among other places, in: R. Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 125.

of scholars to ground their theorising into a seemingly solid point of presence. Indeed, these scholarly moves could be interpreted as a manifestation of the strategic (and, therefore, highly intentional) actions of an unfavourable constellation of power, as Foucault and other post-structuralists would argue, but this need not be the case for it to be problematic.[448]

Rather, HE should encourage the open-endedness of subjectivity, its fluidity and precariousness, as well as to be receptive to it. The Deleuzian concept of a BwO, along with Foucault's subtle ethics of self-creation (through a process of *ethopoiein*), offer an apt way for the consideration of the subject without falling into the pitfalls of essentialism. The practical implications for HE, as were explained in the previous chapter, include: the interrogation of such assumptions at all stages of a study (most notably, however, at the stage of conceptualisation/operationalisation, and also, in the case of policy studies, at the final one, that of prescriptions); increased use of data of higher quality as the simplistic quantitative data that is being currently used (especially in large-scale projects) becomes increasingly problematic and unsustainable in light of these criticisms;[449] and, finally, other methodological changes with an eye to getting closer to the individual and contingent subject. Indicatively, these could include smaller scale projects with small-N designs that shall have increased receptibility to the local and contingent. Importantly, some of these measures can also be applied retrospectively to already existing studies through methods explored in the previous chapter (e.g. data enrichment).

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[448] In fact, this could be argued not just for the explicit/implicit assumptions about subjectivity (which can be criticised as part of a normalisation attempt: the artificial construction of ready-made subjectivities and subject positions which appear as the only normal/natural options and to which HE can be seen as supplying a theoretical reinforcement) but also with regard to HE conclusions. Since HE prides itself on supposedly uncovering the determinants of happiness, following its prescriptions, as well as abiding by its assumptions about subjectivity can be a reasonable course of action for someone who seeks happiness maximisation and self-fulfilment (which, arguably, will generally be the majority of a population).

[449] The rationale is that the responses of any given subject as captured by a simple measure (such as single-item measures in self-reported happiness surveys) cannot be treated as commensurable and/or comparable with other responses unless a core of subjectivity is first assumed. Moreover, that core has to be adequately representative of the whole so as to guarantee that the responses given by all subjects refer to the same thing and are quantified in a uniform manner.

The final, and broader, area of criticism concerns the theory of knowledge that underlies HE projects. Fuelled by a positivist ethos that is supported by (and supports) the logics found in both of the previous areas of critique (the commitment to precise and final meanings as well as to the knowable and/or essential subject), HE studies understand themselves as, or at least seek to promote the image of, being cases of an exact science. Even when concessions regarding the degree of error are made, they are coupled with superficial or problematic claims of adequate reliability and validity so that the status of an exact science is preserved and its conclusions are seen as objective, accurate, and final. Furthermore, since the concepts are taken to be adequately robust and the operationalisations accurate and complete, they lend themselves to complex statistical processing that enables ostensibly fruitful extrapolations. However, for reasons mentioned earlier in this section, but also owing to the inherent contingencies of most, if not all, social science discourses (as explained in 3.1.3), it is clear that the status of an exact science is unwarranted for HE. As such, it further exacerbates the here-identified difficulties. For one, it renders identifying them and, therefore, tackling them more difficult as it reinforces the logics of both foundationalism and essentialism. Just as important, however, is its effect upon methodology and policy prescriptions. The liberal statistical processing that we mentioned before, aggregations, and large-scale or precarious (e.g. cross-temporal, cross-cultural) comparisons only appear justifiable within the dominant positivist framework. In turn, such superficially prolific methods harbour an epistemic optimism that enables far-reaching and, at times, very specific policy prescriptions. However, as was shown, these are rarely effective (at least not as intended) and may even effectuate adverse outcomes.

Poor effectiveness, however, should not be always blamed exclusively on flawed assumptions or other methodological errors as it may also be owed to a neglect (on the part of the research designer) to consider potential unintended consequences. In theory, this need not be an endemic issue in HE, and thus pertinent for an approach as broad as the one that this

project adopts. In practice, nonetheless, HE policy prescriptions are replete with such failures to consider unintended consequences (including to happiness) and this can be pinned to two reasons. Firstly, and most obviously, it is a fairly hard task. As it pertains to happiness alone (which is just one of the potentially relevant potential unintended consequences), happiness outcomes are so polyparametric that it could be incredibly hard to either calculate or estimate the effect that the variance in one (or more) independent variables may have upon future outcomes. As is always the problem in HE, many of these parameters may not be known (so as to control for them, e.g. with appropriate case selection), quantifiable, or both. Yet, having to consider the potential impact of a change in a variable upon them in a future hypothetical scenario makes it all the more difficult. Attempts to use past evidence for such estimates merely compound the problem of unwarranted positivist assumptions.

Secondly, the problematic positivist ethos that characterises many HE scholars will naturally discourage them from such considerations. If it is assumed that an observed relationship has the robustness and rigidity of a law of the natural sciences, it logically follows that such considerations are only secondary or even not relevant at all for the discovery of a scientific law is important in its own right. In the same way that, for instance, in physics, the discovery of quantum mechanics did not invalidate classical mechanics nor did it render it less important. Indeed, this is the case when both observe the same phenomenon that affects the same body (albeit with different levels of focus, each) and even if, ultimately, the former may have consequences to the body other than what classical mechanics would have predicted. By the same token, a HE scholar that thinks that she has uncovered a positive relationship between a certain policy and happiness will not deem it necessary to think of the unintended consequences of that policy. However, in a world of finite resources (natural and material) such considerations cannot be ignored for even the very happiness outcomes in question may turn out to be adverse in a longer time-frame (if not immediately thereafter).

Therefore, it is this project's contention that the certainties about the assumed stability and universality of the hypotheses of HE should give way to the acceptance and acknowledgment of the field's instability and of each posited relationship's contingencies and provisionality. The adoption of neo-pragmatism already implies that: if meaning, justification, and knowledge become sociological matters, HE's façade of exact scientificity inevitably collapses. To be sure, this means that the use of many of the ostensibly extremely efficient methodological approaches and tools will have to be moderated, if not abandoned, and with them the scope for policy prescriptions will become narrower and the attached certainties will be undermined as a result. For instance, it should no longer be tenable to extrapolate conclusions about the totality of a population based on weak quantitative measures (let alone if the data was collected from fundamentally heterogeneous samples), nor should it be possible to derive conclusions about the determinants of happiness that would apply regardless of time, space, and other relevant parameters. Indeed, the implied, from the above, rebalancing of the role of HE which will become (as we saw in 4.3.2) more that of an advisor and less that of a prescriber will also result in more self-conscious and epistemically modest scholarship that will, in turn, reduce the risks highlighted in 1.2. With the self-assured attitude and all-encompassing character of HE scholarship gone, the ideology of happyism will subside and the case for HE-inspired state paternalism will weaken.

That said, to the extent that the scholarly study of happiness yields observations and insights that are deemed valuable (by a given community), there still exists great scope for very fruitful research. Nonetheless, for it to be free from contradictions and inconsistencies, it will have to be closer to the local, the individual and, more broadly, the contingent. Moreover, having got rid of the mantle of exact scientificity, HE will then be at liberty to make use of tools that may have been seen previously as being at odds with the requisites of an exact science but are fully compatible with its here-proposed remit (which implies an epistemically-informed advisory role). An example of that, as was reviewed in the previous

chapter, is the use of heuristic (rather than deterministic) tools and concepts (that could, in fact, be the same as the hitherto deterministic ones, albeit with a changed status) but it should, more broadly, encourage a pluralism of approaches and methods that may not be even conceivable at this stage. Without a doubt, if one of them ends up producing more useful output it will naturally prevail but there will be nothing epistemologically (or methodologically) imperative to it that would tie HE to that particular epistemological (or methodological) position eternally. In point of fact, as was established, an integrated approach that combines different tools and approaches is, ultimately, preferable for if no one approach can claim the status of a stable and exact science, corroborating evidence collected through different methodological avenues can be our best realistic approximation of it. In 4.3.2 we offered several concrete examples of what such a reconstructed HE may look like.

Finally, this project explored in a cursory manner some broad policy implications that follow directly from our conclusions about the preconditions for a fruitful HE. Firstly, a political environment that fully allows freedom of expression and association and encourages public debate is a requirement for the neopragmatist framework to be feasible and the better the quality of the aforementioned, the more effective it will be. Protection of online freedom of expression, especially in the contexts of Web 2.0, 3.0, and privately run overlay networks (due to the less rigid and hierarchical structures of all three), should be a particular focus as they enable the formation of livelier linguistic communities and facilitate the liberal and/or opportunistic transition of their members from one to another. Further, individual freedom should be maximised as a required (if not sufficient) condition to leave room for processes of self-creation to emerge and freely take their desired path. These are, of course, desirable in their own right, especially if compared to the alternative of individuals having to choose and abide by subject positions and traits that were contrived for them (not *from* them). Importantly, though, they will also contribute to improving the quality of HE by further

frustrating the paradigm of fixed subjectivities and by improving the quality of data.[450]

Lastly, decentralisation of policy making as well as of the various centralised functions of the states and other forms of government (including local authorities) as closer to the level of the individual as possible was shown to be a desideratum for various reasons. Most notably, it is congruent with the goal of minimising unintended consequences (by making them more visible, and by moderating the top-down character of policy-making, among other reasons), it would facilitate the creation and spreading of non-traditional linguistic communities (which is desirable for reasons explained earlier in this section), and, finally, it is a requirement if we are to make full use of happiness' signalling potential for it enables social competition and radical experimentation, which, as we established, are both indispensable to the well-functioning of such a signalling mechanism.

5.2: Limitations, Challenges, and Potential Issues

A project that attempts to be as novel and wide-ranging as this one is liable to attract a number of possible critiques and criticisms. While we considered potential challenges to our approach as they arose (in each relevant section) and found that they do not pose existential threats to our project, a few of them can still raise questions or undermine its efficacy. Acknowledging them is important not only as a note of warning for future researchers but also, in some cases, as we shall see, in order to call for further research that will address them directly and with the appropriate level of depth.

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[450] It is reasonable to expect that as fixed and artificial subjectivities collapse, the authenticity of HE data will improve and, on a second level, the need for richer data will be made clearer.

The most obvious challenge is that the here-adopted approach is too broad and theoretical to amount to something practically meaningful (i.e. to help effect change). This critique is not without some merit. This project does not engage closely with specific instances of literature (except in order to illustrate a point) and nor does it attempt to find and treat flaws in an immanent manner (unless a difficulty is readily apparent). As a result, our conclusions are broad and the methodological and policy implications that we derive from them rarely go into very detailed specifications; instead, they offer a blueprint that, at times, is highly abstract. However, this is a conscious decision for it is the author's contention that this relatively detached level of focus is the most apt one for our purposes here. That is because, as argued earlier, this project takes issue with HE's systemic flaws, which can be best identified and tackled at the level wherein they originate. Consider, for instance, how tackling each of the countless different -but equally problematic- conceptualisations of happiness separately would not only be an impossible task but it would also be futile as newer ones, equally (or more) problematic, would always crop up if the source of the problem remained unaddressed. Similarly, a close critique of all the various problematically positivist methodologies employed in HE would not only require a much larger space than is available in the context of this thesis, but it would also leave the door wide open for future issues of that kind that we may not be able to even conceive at this stage. After all, had the standard modus operandi of social science debate (with its emphasis on immanent critiques and exchanges) been adequate here, the field would have reached a much more satisfactory condition by now, given its considerable longevity. That said, however, it is definitely the case that further studies will be necessary in order to particularise the conclusions derived here but we shall return to that in the following section.

Criticism may also be levelled on a different, but related, plane. Namely, our largely categorical treatment of HE scholarship (especially in Chapter 2). However, this choice stems directly from (and is necessitated by) this project's choice of focus. With it as a given,

the only other options would have been to either treat a limited selection of studies in more depth or to attempt to treat the near totality of approaches. Yet, the former would have been unjustifiably particularistic, while the latter would have been non-feasible (given the immense number of studies that are published in this field every year), at least not within the space constraints of this project. Granted, the approach adopted here will inevitably consist of some oversimplifications and stereotyping. In addition, some approaches may not fit well in any of the categories, even if the third one (needs-based theories) included an especially wide range. Finally, the fact that our categorisation was not one based on disciplinary boundaries means that it may have brought under the same label approaches with only a few things in common that may not even be directly distinguishable. Nevertheless, as was explained in Chapter 2, our categorisation did not aim to find affinities and to group together approaches that have large numbers of similar attributes in common; such a direction would have, perhaps, been more fitting for an encyclopaedic exposition of the field (but it would have also had required many more categories). Rather, this thesis aimed to divide approaches according to their fundamental assumptions so as to illustrate the ubiquity of the problematic aspects that are stressed here and how their presence is independent of disciplinary and methodological contours. Lastly, to the best knowledge of the author, there are no cases of approaches that would contradict (or be substantially different to) any of the premises of each category. In a nutshell, while the categorical approach inevitably introduces a degree of simplification and, therefore, distortion of the details of the actual picture of the field, it was, in this context, our least risky option and any mistakes and/or injustices that this oversimplification entails do not, in any case, pose a critical threat to this project.

A further point of contention could be the degree to which our methodological and policy prescriptions are applicable. With regard to the former, it is, indeed, the case that so far there have been only limited attempts of purely neo-pragmatic applied projects in fields of

social science.[451] This can be partly explained by the fact that neopragmatism is relatively recent, especially if we consider the additional factor of disciplinary entrenchment. The discourses of epistemologists or philosophers of social science rarely cross paths with those of the actual social sciences and when that happens it is even rarer for the intersection to be fruitful; in most cases they are restricted to heated exchanges that further fortify each side within its disciplinary ghetto. At best, developments in either camp will take some time to feed through to the other one and, at worse, this may not happen at all. For instance, it is only recently (more than half a century after its emergence) that the classical form of American pragmatism, a precursor of neo-pragmatism, gained significant influence in social science fields such as IR.[452] In other fields we have witnessed only some very early signs of potential influence (e.g. in political science and economics) and it remains doubtful whether these will evolve into anything significant anytime soon.

Another, and perhaps more important, reason for this limited interaction (especially as it pertains to applied social science) is that the neopragmatist methodological implications are not always either convenient or conducive to the most epistemically optimistic aims. Let us return to the case of HE in particular. The subtle processes of sampling that this project argues for, for instance, will likely be more time-consuming and resource-intensive than traditional sampling techniques. Similarly, the identification of clear-cut linguistic communities might not always be conclusive or even feasible and, thus, the time and resources that would have been expended on such tasks may end up being, in effect, wasted.

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[451] The situation is somewhat better in the case of other variants of pragmatism although less so in the realm of applied social science and more in theoretical debates. For further reference, see this 2-volume collection of essays that takes stock of the impact of various forms of pragmatism upon the social sciences: R. Frega, and F. Da Silva (eds.), 'Pragmatism and the Social Sciences: A Century of Influences and Interactions, vol. 1', *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, Vol. 3, Issue 2, 2011, and R. Frega, and F. Da Silva (eds.), 'Pragmatism and the Social Sciences: A Century of Influences and Interactions, vol. 2', *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, Vol. 4, Issue 1, 2012.

[452] M. Cochran, 'Pragmatism and International Relations: A Story of Closure and Opening', *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, Vol. 4, Issue 1, 2012. Available at: http://ejpap.revues.org/777 [Last accessed: 17 October 2017].

But even if one sets these problems aside, other practical difficulties remain. For instance, the scarce availability (or even complete unavailability) of the kind of richer data that this project calls for will make corroborative as well as comparative studies harder and will, in any case, limit the potential for extrapolations. Retrospective data enrichment may be a possible workaround, as suggested earlier, but not all data lend itself for that (for example, consider the case of data from a longitudinal cohort study). It is also worth mentioning that the collection of richer data (which generally implies smaller samples), as well the clustering along neopragmatist lines (e.g. according to membership of a linguistic community), inevitably come at the cost of an increased risk of various biases (such as selection bias but also a plethora of biases that mostly affect qualitative research). As more and more studies adopt frameworks akin to the one that is proposed here, these problems will be ameliorated but their frontloaded nature will likely hinder the framework's adoption.

Furthermore, the narrower (including in the sense of more limited) scope for HE that results from the framework that this project proposes essentially entails limited prescriptive power for HE research. However, a lot of research funding is channelled towards, or tied to, policy papers and, in any case, to concrete and readily applicable scholarly conclusions. To an extent, the same is also true when it comes to outlets that publish social science studies; the less applied and the narrower the scope of a study, the more difficult it may be for it to get published and/or to catch the eye of scholars partaking in vigorous debates. It would seem, therefore, that the implications of our intervention to HE would be to increase the costs of research, on the one hand, and to reduce the sources of funding, on the other. Further, based on the Foucauldian analysis of discourse formations in 3.1.3, it is reasonable to expect that these calls for an epistemic reform will be met with additional resistance from both the scholarly establishment and the constellation of power that shaped it (or played a part in shaping it) in the first place. Taken together, these potential implications pose a pragmatic problem that no amount of scholarly idealism should lead us to overlook. At the same time,

this shall not serve as a justification for HE scholars to continue partaking in (or revert to) epistemically untenable practices, either. Rather, it shall impel us to find practical solutions that the status quo of HE research did not necessitate or allow thus far. For example, HE scholars could seek alternative sources of funding and/or to try to make research along the here-advanced lines more resource-efficient. Moreover, efforts should be directed towards uncovering and emphasising the theoretical infrastructure that supports the predominant flawed assumptions. If ample light is shed upon them, it will be easier to tackle them but this will, by no means, be a straightforward and swift process. To the extent that, as Foucault suggested, discourses are the means by which power produces speaking subjects, overturning the status quo would be a gradual and lengthy process which will require sustained effort and a number of studies that would address the matter explicitly and ad hoc along the lines set out here.[453]

Lastly, our adoption of heuristic methods, patterns, and tendencies as legitimate epistemic tools and means may also raise justifiable confusion. After all, are not unwarranted generalisations and dubious methodological steps at the epicentre of what this project set out to critique? Moreover, even if these are deemed acceptable, should we not put forward a criterion (or set of criteria) that would arbitrate when a heuristic method is appropriate/applicable/preferable for reasons of consistency (if not for anything else)? Or, similarly, shall we not determine a statistical threshold above which the strength of a statistical relationship or pattern may be deemed meaningful enough to inform HE scholarship? As regard the former charge, it would be justified if one ignored another key dimension of this project: the critique of the positivist attitude in HE, as well as the rejection of the status of an exact science for HE. This project does not make the case that less-than-certain knowledge should be rejected but, rather, that it should be acknowledged for what it is. In fact, the status for HE knowledge that is proposed here is the only one that is

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[453] M. Foucault, 'Orders of discourse', *Social Science Information*, Vol. 10, Issue 2, 1971, pp. 7-30.

thoroughly compatible with these kinds of knowledge (provided, of course, that it is not guilty of any of the fatal flaws identified here). After all, as was argued, heuristic devices are already being used and sometimes the language that is adopted by a minority of approaches (an advisory and/or probabilistic one, rather than a prescriptive and/or deterministic one, respectively) is appropriate. This project, therefore, aims to encourage HE scholarship to embrace the probabilistic and provisional status of its knowledge and see it as an opportunity to refresh the field and its methodological practices. As regard the latter questioning, arriving at precise mechanisms that would detail the appropriateness or legitimacy of heuristic devices and the robustness of statistical relationships exceeds the scope of this work. That is not only due to thematic or length limitations but also because the task in question calls for specialised further studies that would proceed on a case by case basis and explore such questions more immanently and with respect to specific contexts (so as not to contradict the neopragmatist ethos) and not in an aprioristic manner that ignores the particular.

5.3: Conclusion and Further Research Prospects

Overall, while the perspective adopted here is clearly far from being free from difficulties, it seeks to present an approach that is conscious of its methodological and epistemological limitations and thereby more able to adapt to the mobile and contingent nature of its subject matter. To sum up, it has advanced the following points. First, it located the source of ineffectiveness of HE in three problematic areas. More specifically, those pertaining to the: conceptualisation (and operationalisation) -mainly- of happiness, theorisation of the subject, and positivist status of HE knowledge. Second, it introduced post-structuralism and

established that it supplies the most apposite theoretical arsenal by which to trace the roots of these problems and neutralise them. Third, it illustrated that neopragmatism can supplement post-structuralism by providing an epistemic springboard that is sensitive to the post-structuralist critique and, therefore, makes no (or minimal, depending on how one interprets the neo-pragmatist use of utility) metaphysical commitments. We then explored what the above steps imply for the methodology and epistemology of HE and proceeded to a preliminary discussion of a small number of broad policies that follow logically from the premises of our approach. And while most studies point to the need for further research that would build upon their own, this project is slightly more ambitious: it aims to affect the epistemic trajectory of the whole field of HE. Without a doubt, this is but a tiny step in a very uphill road, not least due to the difficulties mentioned in the previous section.

What is more, as already argued, this project necessitates a number of further studies, not so much corroborative (as is usually the case with projects that propose a ground-breaking shift) but, rather, in order to specify our general observations and conclusions and to particularise them in specific contexts. We have already mentioned a couple of such potential studies in previous sections. For instance, they could focus more on the here-presented policy implications of our premises. Indicatively, they may explore the degree to which they are, indeed, feasible without unintended consequences that would have adverse effects or they could, instead, adopt a speculative attitude and experiment (theoretically and empirically) with various decentralising policies. This separate (from HE) research area may be already fairly lively, but its potential is nearly infinite and, perhaps more importantly here, the impact of such policies upon happiness is largely unexplored. Naturally, it would require a large number of carefully designed smaller-scale studies, geared towards and receptive to the local contingences and this, logically, raises pragmatic concerns such as how to marshal adequate scholarly attention and resources towards such undertakings. To answer this and similar pragmatic concerns, careful strategic planning will be required, that

could perhaps even take the form of a study. Furthermore, on equally pragmatic grounds, shorter studies could focus on strategies by which the here-proposed methodology could be made more efficient so as to counterbalance the increased resource intensity it entails.

A further promising area for future research could involve the examination of scenarios wherein the criteria for a well-functioning neopragmatist framework are not met. For instance, in the case of an illiberal regime where freedom of speech is not encouraged (or even allowed) would our conclusions retain any relevance? If the social mechanisms of meaning and truth creation operate under non-meritocratic and potentially authoritarian principles, it would be reasonable to expect that the output of both processes will not be representative of and/or meaningful for the community in question. Even if the dominant uses of meaning and concepts were somehow fully shared (e.g. through very effective exertion of absolutist power) by all members of the community, the truth-making mechanisms would be subject to distortion on multiple different levels that the epistemic integrity of our approach would be severely jeopardised. Perhaps, in such a scenario, a 'repatriation' of these processes into the realm of the scholarly study of HE would prove to be optimal for various potential reasons (e.g. because the academia could enjoy a relatively higher degree of freedom (compared to the general public) or because academic rigour would help reintroduce a measure of 'objectivity'). A multitude of similar questions and scenarios could be explored with further research on various levels (both in HE and meta-HE domains).[454]

Finally, an ulterior goal of this project is to incite further inquiries and debate in the area of meta-HE. Ideally, this undertaking will help spark the debate on the issues treated here but,

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[454] As elsewhere, the notion of a meta-HE should be understood here as the metatheory of HE, a broad area of scholarly consideration of the form, methodology, foundations, and subject matter of the field of HE.

importantly, it could also compound the scholarly interest in the broader area. A number of related, but other than the ones that this project focused upon, meta-HE issues present ample opportunities for innovative and much-needed studies. Indicative sub-areas of interest include: the debate around the utility of HE and the ranking of happiness, its perception and use in public policy, the question of the complementarity and feedback mechanisms of qualitative and quantitative empirical research, as well as between non-empirical (theories of happiness, conceptual developments, and similar) and empirical components of HE, and many other. The precise course of the meta-HE debate cannot, of course, be predicted or circumscribed here, however, the need for its emergence is so pressing that any development towards this direction will be to the benefit of HE. Once this epistemic area is recognised, there are reasons to be optimistic that a lively debate will soon materialise, allowing HE to develop beyond its embryonic, cursory, and often expedient character in the treatment of meta-HE issues. This, along with the adoption of the here-advocated framework, will be essential steps if the field is to ever realise its immense potential.

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