

Club of Amsterdam

the future of Happiness

November 2010



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“Mankind”, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche observed, “does not strive for happiness; only the Englishman does that.” Yet, famously enshrined in the US constitution, the pursuit of happiness has conquered the world as a constant obligation: be happy now!

The ancient Greek sought “eudaimonia”, happiness, as the highest desirable good and the object of virtue. Jeremy Bentham, an English philosopher and reformer, later turned utility, or “Greatest Happiness”, into the basis or definition of virtue and made it useful as an organizing principle for society.

Advances in neuroscience, the empirical investigation of subjective well-being and quality-of-life studies have brought an evidence based understanding on what makes us happy. Once we have escaped from abject poverty, more wealth does not make us feel happier, yet the relative status it provides adds to our individual satisfaction. The reproductive advantage endowed by ambition and status ensures we always want twice as much as we have. This keeps our economy turning and suggests that we are destined to consume whatever there is without ever getting any happier.

No future for happiness, then? Some believe that happiness cannot only be measured but also taught, and that societies and economies, even a future, can be built on the idea that the opportunity to feel happy is truly valuable.

- What makes us happy? (Human nature, the individual perspective)
- What contributes to our common happiness? (The effect of society)
- How can there be most happiness? (The future of happiness)

► **Ruut Veenhoven**, Emeritus-professor of 'social conditions for human happiness', Erasmus University Rotterdam

Greater happiness for a greater number Is that possible?

Utilitarian philosophy holds that public policy should aim at greater happiness for a greater number of people. This moral tenet meets many objections, on pragmatic grounds it is denounced as unfeasible and on ideological grounds as undesirable. As a result the principle is marginal in policy making. These classic philosophical qualms are considered in the light of recent empirical research on life-satisfaction. The data show first of all that the principle is feasible; happiness of a great number is possible in contemporary conditions and it is also possible to create more of it. The data also show that the promotion of happiness fits well with other ideals; happiness requires conditions that we value, such as freedom, and happiness fosters matters that we value, such as good health and civil behaviour. Though happiness can conflict with these values in theory, it appears to match them in practice.

► **Nic Marks**, NEF Fellow, Founder, Centre for Well-being
The Happy Planet

Nic Marks asks why we measure a nation's success by its productivity -- instead of by the happiness and well-being of its people. He introduced the Happy Planet Index, which tracks national well-being against resource use (because a happy life doesn't have to cost the earth). Which countries rank highest in the HPI? You might be surprised.

► **Tim Mulgan**, Professor of Moral & Political Philosophy, Princeton / St.Andrews (in absence presented by Michael)
Utilitarianism for a broken future.

Philosophers often ignore future people - confident that, if we pursue our own interests, they will be much better-off than ourselves. Climate change undermines this optimism. Utilitarianism tells us that the interests of future people are as important as our own, and that our obligations to them are the most important part of morality. But many puzzles surround those obligations, as the identity, number, and existence of future people depend upon what we now decide to do. I outline these puzzles, and attempt to steer a path through them.

Concept by ► **Michael Munker**

19:00 - 20:00

Introduction by our Moderator

► **Michael Munker**

Michael briefly introduces ► **Tim Mulgan**, Professor of Moral & Political Philosophy, Princeton / St.Andrews (in absence)
Utilitarianism for a broken future.

Part I:

► **Ruut Veenhoven**, Emeritus-professor of 'social conditions for human happiness', Erasmus University Rotterdam
**Greater happiness for a greater number
Is that possible?**

► **Nic Marks**, Centre for Well-being, New Economics Foundation, London
The Happy Planet

20:00 - 20:30

Coffee break with drinks and snacks.

20:30 - 21:15

Part II:

How can there be most happiness?

Open discussion also including

► **Maarten Vendrik**, Assistant Professor, PhD, Maastricht University



Ruut Veenhoven

Emeritus-professor of 'social conditions for human happiness', Erasmus University Rotterdam

Ruut Veenhoven (1942) studied sociology and is also accredited in social psychology and social-sexuology. He is emeritus-professor of 'social conditions for human happiness' at Erasmus University Rotterdam in the Netherlands. Veenhoven's current research is on subjective quality of life. Major publications are: 'Conditions of happiness' (1984), 'Happiness in nations' (1993) and 'Happy Life-expectancy' (1997) and 'Quality-of-life in individualistic society' (1999). Veenhoven also published on love, marriage and parenthood.

Veenhoven is director of the World Database of Happiness and founding editor of the Journal of Happiness Studies

worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl

www.springer.com/social+sciences/well-being/journal/10902

www2.eur.nl/fsw/research/veenhoven



Nic Marks

Centre for Well-being, New Economics Foundation, London

Nic Marks thinks quality of life is measurable, and that true contentment comes not from material wealth but from connections with others, engagement with the world, and a sense of autonomy. He founded the Centre for Well-Being at the New Economics Foundation and is particularly keen to promote a balance between sustainable development and quality of life. He devised the Happy Planet Index of human well-being and environmental impact. People in the world's wealthiest and most resource consuming countries don't come out on top in terms of well-being, as presented to TED:

www.nicmarks.org

www.neweconomics.org



Tim Mulgan

Professor of Moral & Political Philosophy, Princeton / St. Andrews

Tim Mulgan was educated at the Universities of Otago and Oxford, where he wrote his DPhil on 'The Demands of Consequentialism' under the supervision of Derek Parfit, Bernard Williams, and Roger Crisp. He taught at the Universities of Reading, Oxford, Otago, and Auckland before becoming Professor of Moral and Political Philosophy at the University of St Andrews in Scotland in June 2005. In the academic year 2009/2010 He is Laurance S. Rockefeller Visiting Fellow at the University Center for Human Values at Princeton University in Princeton, NJ. His publications include 'Future people' (2006) The Demands of Consequentialism (2001) and Understanding Utilitarianism (2007). 'Ethics for a Broken World: Imagining Philosophy After Catastrophe' is forthcoming with Acumen. In absentia, his contribution is briefly introduced and presented in full in the Club of Amsterdam Journal.

www.st-andrews.ac.uk



Maarten Vendrik

Assistant Professor, PhD, Maastricht University

After receiving a Master's degree in theoretical physics from the Catholic University of Nijmegen and a Master's degree in econometrics from the Erasmus University of Rotterdam, Maarten C.M. Vendrik gained his PhD in economics from Maastricht University. He worked at the Institute of Theoretical Biology of Leiden University, the macroeconomics department of Erasmus University Rotterdam, and the economics department of Maastricht University. Currently he holds a position as senior assistant professor in microeconomics and public economics in the economics department of Maastricht University. Moreover, he is research fellow of the Institute of the Study of Labor IZA at Bonn. Maarten has published widely in high-standing international journals in theoretical physics and economics. His current research interests include labour economics, public economics, gender economics and applied econometrics. He has a special interest in the integration of psychological and sociological insights into microeconomic models, the implications of happiness research for economics, and the labour market problems of an aging population.

www.fdewb.unimaas.nl



Michael Münker

Michael Münker thinks that there is only one type of human on earth and hopes that it will be useful to ask how there can be most happiness. After training in physics in Munich and Zürich he worked in Goma with Médecins sans frontières, in Nürnberg and Delhi with a large corporation and in Munich and Utrecht with small companies. He lives in Holland as an entrepreneur bringing innovative medical devices to clinical practice and contributes to

www.milliongenerations.org