

Ethics and the quest for happiness

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Abstract

This paper surveys what the advocates of authentic happiness are saying, and how they distinguish it from common perceptions of happiness in society. It examines how these advocates see the connections between ethics (or virtue) and happiness, and highlights similarities between this modern discourse and ancient philosophies, particularly Chinese philosophy. The observations of Albert Schweitzer on ethics are used to reflect on the connections between ethics and happiness in these various schools of thought.

Introduction

Our society seems to be dominated by the belief that happiness is obtained through the selfish pursuit of hedonism and ambition (Farrelly, 2007). At the same time, our society is rife with unhappiness and stress. In the last few years, a movement has emerged from the realm of psychiatry called "positive psychology" (Seligman, 2002), which is dedicated to the quest for "authentic happiness". This movement gives prominence to virtue as an integral aspect of happiness.

The positive psychology discourse draws on findings about the human psyche that provide new insights into how ethics and happiness are connected. The inference from the advertising world is that ethics is at best irrelevant and at worst an impediment to happiness. The business world operates on the assumption that happiness is a by-product of success, and ethics is seen in a negative light, as an extension of legal compliance and a hindrance in the drive for success.

Yet the association between ethics and happiness has been proclaimed since ancient times. Philosophers in Greece (eg Aristotle and Epictetus) and China (eg Confucius and Lao Tzu), for example, maintained that virtue was at the heart of true happiness. Virtue ethics, which still has many advocates today, maintains that a focus on the development of character is the pathway to a deep and abiding kind of happiness (*eudaimonia*).

The current authentic happiness movement is bolstered by prominent figures such as the Dalai Lama, who has spoken at conferences on happiness and who has also penned books on ethics. He maintains there is an essential connection between happiness and ethics.

Common to the thinkers on authentic happiness is the view that the basis of ethics is unselfishness, having regard to the well-being of others. This aligns with a definition of ethics that Albert Schweitzer formulated. But Schweitzer took a different view on happiness. He separated his ethical principle from any worldly outcome such as success or happiness. The advocates of authentic happiness offer findings that make it timely to return to Schweitzer's question.

Prefatory remarks

Philosophy and the social sciences

Kwame Anthony Appiah (2008) entreats philosophers and psychologists and other social scientists to talk to each other. He says that philosophers have tended to ignore psychology and held it in disdain, maintaining that the philosophical pursuit is about ideas, and these are independent of any supposed facts about the way people behave. Psychologists have likewise scorned philosophers as being impractical.

Appiah argues that psychologists need philosophers to tell them when they are not thinking clearly, or that they are making assumptions about values without being conscious of doing so. And philosophers need psychologists to tell them when their discussions are not anchored in the real world.

Scope

This paper does not seek to discuss virtue ethics and its Greek roots, on the assumption that this has been treated at length by other writers. Instead, the paper seeks to explain some of the key propositions being put forward by contemporary writers on the topic of happiness and to relate these to the interests of philosophers who study ethics. In particular, the paper deals with the propositions of "authentic happiness" as made by Martin Seligman, and the views disseminated by the Dalai Lama.

The current discourse on happiness is compared with ancient Chinese philosophy, especially that found in the *I Ching* and the *Tao Te Ching*.

The question of whether being virtuous is the foundation for happiness is then discussed through the writings of Albert Schweitzer, and his concept that the ethical life is not predicated on an answer to the question of whether we can look at the world optimistically or pessimistically.

Martin Seligman's views on positive psychology are discussed, but it is not suggested that he is the sole proponent of views on authentic happiness.

The quest for happiness

A context for the discussion of happiness can be established by looking to the social sciences for their analysis of our society's perspectives on happiness. Australian author Elizabeth Farrelly has recently published a critique of our society's obsession with material pleasures and possessions, *Blubberland: The dangers of happiness* (2007). In it she examines the evidence that our desires are continually rising – in fact, in direct parallel with an epidemic of depression.

Farrelly says that this mode of pursuit of happiness is threatening our very existence on the planet, as global warming and depletion of natural resources occur at an increasing rate. She says that, enticed by advertising, we are deluding ourselves into believing that to satisfy every desire is a right ("You're worth it"), indeed, even a kind of duty. Yet people's experience of life is increasingly what Mick Jagger complained of in 1969: "I can't get no satisfaction".

Authentic happiness

Martin Seligman (2002) distinguishes the concept of authentic happiness from "hedonics", which is the science of how we feel from moment to moment. Although many people run their lives on the hedonistic principle, he says the sum total of our momentary feelings turns out to be a flawed measure of how good or bad we judge an episode (or life itself) to be. We are in fact influenced by many personal factors in

assessing our level of happiness; we do not determine our happiness on objective measures.

This can be illustrated by the philosopher Wittgenstein, whom Seligman mentions. As a person, Wittgenstein was reputed to be melancholy, irascible and scathingly critical of himself and everyone around him. Yet, dying alone, he said to his landlady, "Tell them it's been wonderful!"

Seligman is a psychiatrist whose says his life was spent on treating mental illness, pathologies, until he realised how little his profession had contributed to the cultivation of positive mental well-being. Since then he has explored "positive psychology". A measure of the growing influence of this school of thought is that he has become the president of the American Psychology Association.

Authentic happiness, says Seligman, is different from hedonism because humans don't just want to feel good, they want to feel *entitled* to their positive feelings by the exercise of personal strengths and virtues. This explains why people who have circumstances that facilitate the experience of pleasure, such as wealth, possessions, fame and status, often do not exhibit the heightened level of happiness that might be expected. He says (2002, p8), "Positive emotion alienated from the exercise of character leads to emptiness, to inauthenticity, depression".

Seligman talks about gratification in contrast to pleasure. He describes gratification as an elevated state of mind that results from engaging our strengths and virtues in pursuit of the betterment of others. This pursuit engages our energy and attention, so that we are focused on the other person's good rather than on ourselves.

The positive psychology movement explores these strengths and virtues. Looking across cultures and religions, it concludes that there are six core virtues that are universal:

- wisdom and knowledge
- courage
- love and humanity
- justice
- temperance
- spirituality and transcendence.

From these are derived 24 "signature strengths".

Seligman uses the expression, "the good life" to describe the goal of positive psychology. Whereas the goal of a hedonistic life might be drinking champagne and driving a Porsche, the goal of the good life is using your strengths every day to produce authentic happiness and abundant gratification.

Perhaps the key issue that sceptics might raise is how happiness relates to circumstances. Seligman offers an equation to explain the nature of this relationship:

$$H = S + C + V$$

where H is your enduring level of happiness, S is your "set range", C is the circumstances of your life, and V represents factors under your voluntary control.

The variables in the equation are explained as follows.

H is not about momentary happiness which could be called pleasure or enjoyment. H is about how people rate themselves on questions such as "In general, do you consider yourself to be a very happy person or not a very happy person (say, on a scale of 1 to 7)?" Some people seem to enjoy life regardless of what is going on.

S, the set range, refers to our genetic tendency to operate at a particular level of happiness. Studies indicate that about 50% (notionally) of H is determined by inherited tendencies. For example, a person wins the lottery and is, for a time, excited. After a few months, however, their general level of happiness reverts to what it was before the lottery win; and this reversion occurs similarly after catastrophes.

S is also influenced by our tendency to adapt to good times by raising our level of expectations, what Seligman calls the "hedonic treadmill". This explains why the accumulation of material possessions and accomplishments does not lead to greater happiness.

C refers to life circumstances. The popular belief that people who are happy are all of the following – well-paid, married, young, healthy, well-educated and religious – turns out to be somewhat true and somewhat false. For example, above a minimum threshold of safety, increases in wealth have negligible effects on personal happiness.

There is statistical evidence that some of these factors are associated with a higher level of happiness, for example, marriage and religion, but Seligman concludes that these factors do not have a strong association with happiness, and in any case it is usually difficult for people to change these circumstances.

The area that Seligman says deserves the most attention is V, what is under our voluntary control. *Authentic happiness* explores his thesis about how a higher level of enduring happiness can be cultivated. He says there are three kinds of positive emotion:

- about the past – for example, contentment, which can be increased by exercising gratitude and forgiveness, and by overcoming belief in determinism
- about the future – for example, optimism, which can be increased by learning to recognise and dispute automatic pessimistic thoughts
- about the present – where there are two discrete kinds of emotions – pleasures and gratifications.

Happiness can thus be increased in several ways. Happiness in the present can be increased by savouring, mindfulness and combating the numbing effects of habituation. This is the pleasant life. Alternatively it can be increased by gratification. Seligman says the latter is more abiding and is characterised by absorption, engagement and flow, where the person is not conscious of feelings at all. Gratification comes about through the exercise of strengths and virtues in all the arenas of our life – work, love and parenting. (Note that Farrelly identifies art and creativity as another important arena of life.)

Seligman goes one step further. He asserts that the good life is not just about maximising positive emotion through the exercise of strengths and virtues, but is also about meaning and purpose, the service of something larger than you are.

The Dalai Lama on ethics and happiness

The Dalai Lama's contribution to the global conversation about ethics and happiness (2000) comes from the Tibetan Buddhist perspective. He starts with the Buddhist premise that we all desire to be happy and to avoid suffering. It is in our nature; we do not need to argue for this or justify it.

The Dalai Lama makes the same observation about modern western society as Farrelly, that is, despite the abundance of material goods and technology, anxiety, discontent and depression are prevalent. His view is that "this inner suffering is clearly connected with growing confusion as to what constitutes morality and what its foundations are" (2000, p6).

However, he does not explain this confusion about morality in terms of loss of religion. He sees it in terms of altered relationships between people. In modern society, people have exchanged their dependence on one other for dependence on machines and technology. Accordingly, we are led to think that others are not important to our happiness, and their happiness is not important to us.

Technology holds the promise of instant solutions and instant knowledge, producing the idea that our happiness is created externally. His assertion is that external factors

“cannot provide the happiness that springs from inner development”. Our external focus is causing us “to lose touch with the wider reality of human experience and, in particular, to overlook our dependence on others” (p11). In the process, the Dalai Lama says, we are losing our inner dimension.

He asserts that there are some universal ethical principles which can help everyone to achieve happiness. He refers to values such as compassion, patience, tolerance and responsibility. These principles are unified by concern for the well-being of others, what he calls in Tibetan, *shen-pen kyi-sem*, “the thought to be of help to others”. Happiness lies in ethical conduct defined in this way. The Dalai Lama calls for a spiritual revolution, which he describes as:

“a radical reorientation away from our habitual preoccupation with self. It is a call to turn towards the wider community of beings with whom we are connected, and for conduct which recognises others’ interests alongside our own” (p24).

The connections between ethics and happiness are grounded in a conception of reality called dependent origination. This conception sees reality as an infinite and indefinite series of interrelated causes and conditions of which we are but part. Everything that exists is part of this web, and every action has this universal dimension. Thus, self cannot be understood independently of relationship with others, and our interests are inextricably linked with the interests of others. And so “ethics is the indispensable interface between my desire to be happy and yours” (p48).

As an extension of this concept, the Dalai Lama says that the most important element of the ethical nature of an act is neither its content nor its consequences, but its intent. In Tibetan, this is *kun long*, which he explains as the individual’s overall state of heart and mind, including feelings, motivation and disposition.

This understanding of reality draws us to the conclusion that “altruism is an essential component of those actions which lead to genuine happiness” (p62). This is a conclusion that aligns wholly with that of the positive psychology movement.

Philosophical notions of ethics

Western philosophical approaches to ethics have largely taken some form of teleology, where moral judgements are made on the basis of the consequences of actions, or deontology, where judgements are based on duty and the intention of the person acting (Northcott, 1996). In either case, the focus is confined to actions and the reasons for actions.

Appiah (2008) highlights this issue, arguing that much of modern philosophical debate on ethics has been reduced to the analysis of decisions made in response to hypothetical situations (“quandary ethics”). He maintains that practical philosophy should be about how life can be lived well, not relegated to the role of a clinical intervention to be applied when one faces a quandary.

Hence, an examination of character is of interest to the person wishing to know how to live an ethical life. This sends us into the domain of virtue ethics. Van Hooft (2006) contrasts virtue ethics with the ethics of duty (Kant’s deontology; he could have likewise contrasted virtue ethics with consequentialism). He says that virtue ethics differs in a number of ways. It extends beyond the sphere of the moral, chiefly by focusing on the question, “what should I be?” rather than on the question “what should I do?”.

Solomon (1996) says that the Kantian ethics shifts our attention away from the inspirational matters of ethics, namely, excellence. And utilitarianism, he says, focuses on abstract principles and rationalisation to the neglect of individual responsibility and the development of character.

This emphasis on ethics being about reasons for decisions in particular situations is reflected in definitions of ethics and morality. James Rachels (1993, p19), for example, defines morality as “the effort to guide one’s conduct by reason, ie to do what there are the best reasons for doing, while giving equal weight to the best interests of each individual who will be affected by one’s conduct.”

Peter Singer (1993, p10) similarly refers to reasons: “The notion of living according to ethical standards is tied up with the notion of defending the way one is living, of giving a reason for it, of justifying it.” Van Hooft (2006) argues that virtue ethics is based on a better-grounded understanding of moral psychology. It embraces the role of emotion in moral decisions, as well as the social aspect of ethical questions and the interdependence of humans.

These aspects of virtue ethics echo the perspectives of positive psychology and the Dalai Lama on the pursuit of happiness. One philosopher whose approach to ethics has something in common with these schools of thought is Albert Schweitzer.

Schweitzer’s definition of ethics emphasises selflessness in our relationships with others: “In a general sense, ethics is the name we give to our concern for good behaviour. We feel an obligation to consider not only our own personal well-being, but also that of others, and of human society as a whole.” (quoted in Hill, 1980)

This is a conception of ethics that also acknowledges the importance of feelings. Schweitzer says of Kant that he actually blocks the natural sources of morality. He does not allow direct sympathy for another to be counted as ethical: “The inner feeling for the suffering of another as if it were one’s own is not to count as duty in the real sense of the word, but only as a weakness by which the evil in the world is doubled” (1987, p185).

Thus it seems that Schweitzer shares the view that ethics, understood as acting with regard to the well-being of others, is the pathway to happiness. In fact, this was the very question that, for him, was open. He sought to discover “both an ethic and a profound and steadfast attitude of world- and life-affirmation” (1987, p xiv).

His ethic was crystallised as the ethic of “reverence for life”: “I cannot but have reverence for all that is called life. I cannot avoid compassion for everything that is called life. That is the beginning and foundation of morality” (1996, p36).

But Schweitzer wrestled with the issue of whether he was a pessimist or an optimist – “my knowledge is pessimistic, but my willing and hoping are optimistic. I am pessimistic because I feel the full weight of what we conceive to be the absence of purpose in the course of world events” (1998, p242; he was writing in 1931).

The question of the connections between ethics and happiness is deserving of further examination. Proponents of virtue ethics would draw on Aristotle, Epictetus and the like to expound their concept of happiness and show its links with acting ethically, and with developing character through integrity, excellence and judgement (Solomon, 1996; van Hooft, 2006; Hursthouse, 2008). We propose to explore what Chinese philosophy has to say on the topic.

Chinese philosophy, virtue and happiness

This exploration of virtue in Chinese philosophy will be impressionistic and sketchy, for three reasons. Firstly, there is no monolithic philosophy. For example, Confucius (the *Analects*) followed a path which differed in many respects from Lao Tzu (*Tao Te Ching*). Secondly, the *I Ching*, another fundamental text, is not intended as the statement of a philosophical position but as a compendium of wise responses to a variety of situations.

Thirdly, for the most part, the philosophy is not expressed as a set of abstract propositions but in the form of images, vignettes and aphorisms. The philosophy is

imbibed rather than deduced. Reference to "Chinese philosophy" is really a reference to a milieu which underlies any particular thinker or text, and this milieu could be described as cosmological.

Hursthouse (2008) says "The growing interest in ancient Chinese ethics currently tends to emphasise its common ground with the ancient Greek tradition but, as it gains strength, it may well introduce a more radical departure". It is suggested here that there is no reason to process Chinese philosophy through a Greek filter.

What follows is a set of propositions that attempt to provide a preliminary insight into the *I Ching's* perspective on ethics, drawing on numerous translations and texts (Anthony, 1981; Karcher, 2003; Denning, 1995; Wu Wei, 2005; Legge, 1964; Wilhelm, 1975; Cheng Yi, 1988; Selter, 2002).

The cosmology that infuses the *I Ching* is based on the oneness from which spring yin and yang – female and male energy. Yin is receptive force; yang is creative force. Their interaction gives rise to all things; they ebb and flow in a cycle of ceaseless change. Yin and yang complement each other. For example, yin is the intuitive, while yang is the intellect. Yin is earth and darkness; yang is heaven and light. "From the attractions they exert we can learn the nature of all beings in heaven and on earth" (31 Hsien, Influence).

It follows that our external circumstances are subject to ongoing change; worldly success is generally not permanent, and nor is adversity.

Humans (both male and female) have the forces of both yin and yang within them. As humans, we can choose to work with our circumstances to develop our character, or follow the path of the "inferior person". The inferior person is egotistical, selfish, unethical, and focused on the lower instincts. The "superior person", through his/her ability to distinguish the inner qualities of things and people, is able to modify the flow of circumstance. The "superior person" devotes him/herself to correctness, which concerns self-regulation, self-improvement and the service of others.

The *I Ching* consists of 64 hexagrams. The reader selects a reading for a particular circumstance through a randomised method. This may be an affront to western expectations of rationality. Yet, if the scope of our attention is opened up to the concerns of virtue ethics it has to be admitted that our questions include not only moral dilemmas but also questions that extend beyond the realm of morality, and here the rules of morality are of little assistance.

To illustrate, my concern may be whether to accept a particular job. This is not an inherently ethical issue. But even in matters involving ethics, elements of strategy and prudence arise. Suppose my concern is how to deal with my knowledge of a person in my company who is dealing illegally with clients' funds. First, I know I can't hide from the fact that it is illegal, as well as being against company rules. But then I have a number of options as to how to address the issue – talking to the person directly, talking to a manager, or going to the police. Each option may have different outcomes in terms of the person, the company, myself, and what the *I Ching* calls "correctness".

This is the rich context of the *I Ching*. Ethics takes its place in the midst of politics, personal relationships and society. Its response to my question could be any of the 64 hexagrams. I accept that it is responding to the full context of my circumstances, and suggesting what is most productive to my character. There is unquestionably an ethical component, which will be consistent with the underlying philosophy. There are many lessons that are possible.

This is not a world of simple answers. It is a world where the goal is growing awareness, of others and their motivations, and of self. It is also a world with a constant message about what it takes to become a "superior person". The canvas is broader than ethics because to become a superior person we have to make choices about occupations,

pastimes, relationships and projects as well as moral questions about right and wrong (most of which are not difficult to fathom, just difficult to carry out).

The *I Ching* always assumes you understand the basics of moral responsibility, and have some level of self-awareness. For example, it says in various places: "renovate a corrupt situation", "act in accord with the spirits who activate a central principle in you", "drive out the old and open the field of the new", "communicate your message now; if you do not announce the message you will be cut off and isolated".

This kind of text is vulnerable to scorn from an outsider's perspective. What needs to be borne in mind is that once the scope of attention is broadened beyond morality, we are out in the open without a map, and we have to make decisions on the strength of who we are in the moment. In the language of virtue ethics, we are cultivating our character; in the language of the *I Ching*, we are seeking to become a superior person.

The commentary on the hexagrams in the *I Ching* enables a person to view their situation from its cosmological perspective. Whatever it has to say to people in particular situations, its consistent message is about the nature of the world and the value of the quest to be a "superior person". And for that we have to have integrity, we have to be ethical towards others, and we also have to go beyond that – we have to lead by inspiring others to live in tune with their fellows and with the earth, to work in harmony with the spirit, and to ponder the heart's concerns.

The faith that underlies the *I Ching* is that if we are not desperate for any particular outcome, if we carry the trust that things will work out, then the universe will conspire to assist the return of light. There may be difficulties at the beginning, we may have to be patient, we may have to lie low when inferior people hold the ascendancy, but in the meantime we can cultivate our character and know that they will fall in good time. Rushing water dissolves obstacles, flowing on through danger.

The question for the superior person is: what nourishes the people? The *I Ching* is a ritual tool that nourishes the sage-mind: "The way to the source is open. Correct your stance through inner work." "Take up the battle. The spirit will carry you through."

If we were to reflect on the *I Ching* in terms of ethics and happiness, we have indicated here that the external trappings of success generally come and go. The ethically developed person can moderate this ebb-and-flow to some extent, but he/she cannot control it absolutely. What is important is that the peace of mind of the ethically developed person is not determined by external circumstance. When times are adverse, the superior person cultivates his/her character. Spiritual integrity is the constant whereby the superior person remains in tune with the universe.

Other elements of Chinese philosophy

There are other elements of Chinese philosophy. All draw upon the cosmology of the *I Ching*, which goes back over 3,000 years. Confucius, around 500BC, gave Chinese society a comprehensive set of prescriptions for the moral life, translated into social norms. The concept of finding true happiness through living a virtuous life permeates the writings of Confucius (2001). For example:

"The Master said, 'Those who are without virtue cannot abide long either in a condition of poverty and hardship, or in a condition of enjoyment. The virtuous rest in virtue; the wise desire virtue'" (*Analects*, 4-2).

Lao Tzu, the author of the *Tao Te Ching*, also dates from the time of Confucius. Lao Tzu's perspective is more mystical compared with the social agenda of Confucius, but Confucius described Lao Tzu as a dragon, one who commanded the inner truth. The *Tao Te Ching* of Lao Tzu envisages a state beyond the practice of ethics (extracts from chapter 19 "Returning to naturalness", translation by Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English, 1972):

When one rediscovers reverence and love
there is no need of ethical teaching.
Ethics, kindness, even wisdom,
are not in themselves sufficient.
Better by far to see
the simplicity of the given,
the beauty of the natural,
to be one with oneself and with others.

Schweitzer (1987) finds this unsatisfactory. While he accepts the idea of a mystical conception of the world, he calls Lao Tzu's ethics an "ethics of resignation, consisting of inward liberation from the world". What Schweitzer wants is an "ethics of working in the world and upon the world" (p301). On the other hand, he criticises Confucius for basing his ethics on an optimistic interpretation of the world and society, and thereby relegating ethics to the acceptance of society's pronouncements on the subject (which Confucius played a large part in formulating).

It is accepted here that these forms of Chinese philosophy venture beyond the dynamic of the relationship between the development of personal virtue and happiness, although the meaning of happiness in this context is in need of clarification. The question is, to what extent is there common ground between the modern happiness discourse and the tenets of ancient Chinese philosophy?

Searching for common ground on virtue and happiness

Virtue

The concept of virtue seems to be basically compatible between the three sources we have explored. Seligman says that the virtuous person is characterised by unselfish endeavour, and he/she cultivates the core virtues. Notably, his core virtues have been distilled from a survey of the world's major religions and philosophies. Virtuous people exhibit the qualities of contentment, gratitude, optimism, wisdom, courage, love and justice. They are spiritual, in the sense that they recognise the spirit, or non-material, aspect of humanity and the world.

The Dalai Lama's perspective is in harmony with positive psychology. Virtuous people foster the well-being of others. They recognise the inner dimension and they live out the universal ethical principles, which are essentially the core virtues as described by Seligman.

The *I Ching* posits the character of the "superior person", who is aware of the inner dimension of existence, and the forces of yin and yang that are constantly at play. Superior persons follow the path of correctness and virtue. They exhibit fairness and justice but they also know when to show compassion. They are humble, patient, they control their negative emotions and in leadership positions they work for peace and harmony.

Happiness

The starting point for this discussion was the mass market propaganda that seeks to bolster consumption by inferring that it leads to happiness. A similar trance lies over the business world, which operates on the basis that material success and power are the pathways to happiness. It was the role of the advocates of authentic happiness to show us the extent to which this propaganda is untrue.

The three sources we explored offer a similar proposition, that living a virtuous life will yield happiness of some kind. Seligman describes this form of happiness as an enduring,

positive state of mind which is not dependent on external circumstances but on the effect that living unselfishly has on us emotionally. He suggests that we consolidate this state of mind by developing a sense of the meaning of our life. The evidence for the virtue-happiness link is the psychological studies which demonstrate the association statistically and anecdotally.

The Dalai Lama expresses the link between virtue and happiness similarly. He says that serving the well-being of others leads to genuine happiness, which is a state of mind that is cultivated. He argues for the virtue-happiness link through the idea of dependent origination, which asserts that the thoughts and actions of all of us are connected in a web of causes and conditions.

The *I Ching* says that the world is a flux of energy due to the interaction of yin and yang. Being virtuous does not overcome the ebb and flow of energy, but it does enable the superior person to work with that energy constructively and to endure harsh times with patience. It does not assert that virtue leads to happiness, for its concern is with living in the world here and now. What it does convey is that staying aware of the inner dimension and continually correcting our path enables us to "look into the heart of heaven and earth" (Karcher, 2003, p271). This is probably better described as insight than as mysticism.

Debating virtue and happiness

Schweitzer (1987) cautions us that an ethic cannot be based on evidence about the world. That evidence is always equivocal. Ethics is an inherently human activity. It is the activity directed to secure the inner perfection of the individual and civilisation (p57). Facts about the world give us reasons to be optimistic or pessimistic, but if they determine our ethical views, we are simply following nature instead of exercising our human capacity to find meaning and commit to an ideal.

Explaining further, Schweitzer says "true philosophy must start from the most immediate and comprehensive fact of consciousness" (p309). He expressed this as "I am life which wills to live, in the midst of life which wills to live". Ethics thus consist in "my experiencing the compulsion to show to all will-to-live the same reverence as I do to my own. There we have given us that basic principle of the moral which is a necessity of thought" (p309).

With this conviction, a person seeks to secure happiness and success, for the will to live exercises itself as the will to realise ideals. But it does not live on happiness and success: "It sows as one who does not count on living to reap the harvest" (p283). People make progress in ethics, not by accommodating themselves to the sad realities of the world (facts) but by "coming to hear more and more plainly the voice of the ethical" (p317).

Schweitzer's view on the authentic happiness movement might have been as follows. It is encouraging that research suggests that living a virtuous life is associated strongly with genuine happiness. But we should be wary of being too persuasive in this argument. Were people to become patient, considerate and grateful merely because they thought it would improve their chances of feeling happy, the moral force of the admonition would be derailed. Eventually, people would be likely to find themselves disenchanting.

Alternatively, the *I Ching* provides a sounder approach. There is a story about a farmer whose horse ran away. His neighbour expressed his commiserations, saying, "That's too bad". "Perhaps it is," said the farmer. The next day the horse came back with five wild horses in tow. "That's wonderful," said the neighbour. "Indeed it would seem," said the farmer.

When the farmer attempted to break in the wild horses, he fell off and broke his leg. "That's terrible," said the neighbour. "So it would seem," said the farmer. Then officials from the government came, wanting fit men to join the army to fight the war they were

having. The farmer couldn't go because his leg was broken. "That's a good thing", said the neighbour. "Perhaps it is," said the farmer.

The key message of the story is that we would be wise to consider how best to appreciate the ebbs and flows of fortune. The *I Ching* would counsel us to accept what confronts us and adapt to our circumstances, ever looking to the horizon, as if we were a king looking after our lands and our people.

Conclusion

This paper has a number of caveats. The treatment of Schweitzer's views has focused on his ideas about the foundations of ethics, and should not imply an unequivocal acceptance of his philosophy of reverence for life as he formulated it.

The treatment of the *I Ching* is my personal interpretation, albeit informed by many others. The *I Ching* has been seen through many filters – German missionaries in China, Carl Jung, modern Chinese scholars and a multitude of westerners from a variety of disciplines. Exploring the *I Ching* is more like interpreting a painting than identifying a set of unimpeachable propositions. I believe a coherent philosophy of ethics can be derived from it, that can be applied appropriately to contemporary understandings and concerns.

It should also be noted that the insights and findings of the authentic happiness advocates are currently in some danger of being damaged by zealots. In organisations and schools, champions of the cause are attempting to educate employees and the young in how to be happy. This is creating in some places a culture of "compulsory happiness". Some observers (Patty, 2008) are suggesting that, ironically, this will lead to depression among those who think they should be happier than they are.

A radical position would be to reject the claim of Aristotle: "Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence". Rather, it might be wiser to temper this enthusiasm with the words of Paul Morel, in D.H. Lawrence's novel, *Sons and lovers* (1913).

"My boy," said his mother to him, "all your cleverness, your breaking away from old things, and taking life in your own hands, doesn't seem to bring you much happiness."

(And Paul replies:) "Damn your happiness! So long as life's full, it doesn't matter whether it's happy or not. I'm afraid your happiness would bore me."

It is more important to establish a way of living one's life that is worthwhile than to target happiness as one's goal. Happiness is best seen as a by-product. An exploration of worthwhile aims of living is contained in Chapter 9 of *Human values and ethics in the workplace* (Martin, 2007).

Carl Jung, who was a enthusiast for the *I Ching*, put it this way:

"As far as we can discern, the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being" (1962).

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