Desires and Happiness: Aristotelian, Puritan, and Buddhist Approaches

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1. **What is desire? What is happiness?**

In this volume, desire is defined as wants that are linked to motivation, pleasure, and reward. In conventional terms, then, desire includes low-level physical cravings (e.g., water, food, sex), acquired cravings (e.g., alcohol, cigarettes, the New York Times), and, in a broader sense, even ideals that do not necessarily involve craving or withdrawal (e.g., a big house, promotion). In this chapter, we will discuss the role of desire in happiness, centering on two questions: "Are desires a blessing or a curse?" and "Does the satisfaction of desires lead to happiness?" First, we will provide our definition of happiness. We will then summarize two types of existing literature (a) the possession of desire and happiness, and (b) the satisfaction of desire and happiness. Next, we will review various theoretical accounts on desires and happiness, after which we will present two approaches to the dilemma of desires: a Puritan approach and a Buddhist approach. Finally, we will provide our own framework that classifies desire according to two types (cravings versus ideals) and two targets of desire (self versus others) to integrate the diverse and sometimes confusing findings.

According to Aristotle, happiness (Greek *eudaimonia*) is not a fleeting feeling but consists of a series of activities in accordance with one's virtues, ultimately culminating in a fulfilling life (Thomson, 1953). Far from an idle state, the Aristotelian conception of happiness requires the full utilization of one's mental and physical faculties. For this reason, Aristotle often equates the happy life to the contemplative life, yet contemplation is not enough. In addition to leading a fulfilling life, Aristotelian happiness requires favorable objective conditions such as a minimum level of wealth, good looks, physical health, and good relationships. He states "We are now in a position to define the happy man as 'one who is active in accordance with complete virtue, and who is adequately furnished with external goods, and that not for some unspecified

period but throughout a complete life'" (Thomson, 1953, p. 84). In short, Aristotelian happiness captures the virtuous and philosophical life of the privileged. He also emphasizes that virtuous actions give rise to the feeling of pleasure or pain in the *right* manner and at the *right* time (Nussbaum, 1986, 2001). A virtuous life is not just a merry life, but a deeply satisfying one.

Whereas a virtuous life evokes ideals of moral loftiness and integrity, some of which may elude reliable self-report, a satisfying life is more amenable to self-disclosure. Wayne Sumner (1996), a philosopher, conceptualizes authentic happiness as a subjective sense of life satisfaction. A shift from the Aristotelian virtue-centric concept of happiness to Sumner's subjective sense of satisfaction makes it easier for psychologists to investigate happiness. In the present chapter, therefore, we use Sumner's definition of happiness as "a subjective sense of life satisfaction" rather than the Aristotelian definition of a virtuous life.

To be sure, no one can make a fully informed judgment about his or her overall life. Our life satisfaction judgments, like any other complex judgments, may be distorted or biased in certain ways (Schwarz & Strack, 1999). However, despite some inevitable distortion from objective reality, people's self-reported levels of life satisfaction tend to be reliably corroborated by their spouse, family members, and friends (Schneider & Schimmack, 2009). Thus, in a typical survey context, people are able to form an informed judgment about their life satisfaction and seem to report their life satisfaction honestly, and a well-validated life satisfaction scale such as the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS, Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) may therefore capture reliable variance in people's long-term happiness. In this chapter, we use the term happiness to refer to a relatively stable sense of life satisfaction, or a sense that life is going well. When we use it to refer to a fleeting momentary mood of pleasantness and cheerfulness, we denote it as a happy mood.

2. The Role of Desires in Happiness

Is Having Desires a Blessing or a Curse?

When it comes to happiness, desires can be something of a double-edged sword. A life devoid of desire might strike many as bleak, and, indeed, apathy and amotivation are widely considered symptoms of depression (Beck, 1967, p.263-64). In fact, desires can certainly have a positive impact on our happiness; the desire to achieve personal goals positively influences our lives, and commitment to and attainment of personal goals enhances satisfaction with life (Brunstein, 1993). People who are pursuing their most important goals are happier, both in terms of life satisfaction (Brunstein, 1993) and positive affect (Emmons, 1986) than those who are not. Indeed, many researchers have found that it is not enough to look at people's objective life circumstances in determining their happiness; instead, is the concordance between objective circumstances and our desires or aspirations that predicts how happy we are (Diener & Fujita, 1995; Plagnol & Easterlin, 2008; Stutzer, 2004).

At the same time, however, research cautions that the *desire* to attain personal goals is not, by itself, enough. In order for personal goals to contribute to happiness, one must actually *attain* them. Discrepancies between what you desire and what you have actually achieved can lead to hopelessness, unhappiness and dissatisfaction. In a longitudinal study, Nickerson, Schwarz, Diener, and Kahneman (2003) found that desiring financial success was negatively associated with overall happiness, job satisfaction, and satisfaction with friends. However, this was true only for people with lower incomes. That is, wealthy people who desired (and had achieved) financial success experienced few negative consequences with regard to their friendships, happiness, or job satisfaction, but poorer people who desired (but had not achieved) financial success were likely to be unhappy and less satisfied with their jobs and friendships.

However, even for wealthy people, the desire for financial success was not wholly benign; despite being financially well-off, wealthy people who desired financial success expressed less satisfaction with their family lives.

Several studies by Solberg, Diener, Wirtz, Lucas, and Oishi (2002) help to further illustrate the dangers of desires that seem to lie tantalizingly out of reach. In one such study, participants were asked to imagine that they were middle class and that people wealthier than them possessed items that were either more or less desirable than their own; items which, by virtue of their lesser wealth, the participants presumably could not afford. They were then asked how satisfied they were with their imagined middle class income. In a second similar study, participants were asked to imagine their current desires as well as their actual anticipated future annual income. After being informed that they either would or would not be able to afford what they desired in the future, they were then asked how satisfied they were with their anticipated future income. In both cases, participants who perceived more discrepancy between their desires and their actual states felt less satisfied with their income than those who did not. That is, people were less satisfied with their own income when they were told that wealthier people owned more desirable items as well as when they were told that they could not achieve their desires with their anticipated future income, all highlighting the fact that while desire may sometimes positively influence our lives, this is less likely to be the case for desires that we expect to go unfulfilled.

Research on materialism, or the tendency to place value on material acquisitions, has also suggested that desire can impair happiness, and that the desire for material goods can be a symptom of unhappiness. A meta-analysis concluded that on the whole, materialists are less happy than non-materialists (see Burroughs & Rindflesche, 2002; Kasser, 2002 for review). Norris and Larsen (2011) hypothesized that since materialists want more than what they have

and focus on the discrepancy between the two, they should feel less life satisfaction than non-materialists. Supporting this hypothesis, they found that materialists were indeed less happy than non-materialists, a discrepancy explained by the extent to which materialists wanted more than they had.

What about education? By opening the door to greater opportunity, might education serve as a buffer against some of the pitfalls of desire, such as the unhappiness that comes from desiring what one cannot realistically obtain? Unfortunately, the answer appears to be "no." In fact, more educated people are even more likely to desire what they do not have and less likely to be happy. Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers (1976) found that college graduates live in nicer houses in nicer neighborhoods, yet they are no more satisfied with their housing or neighborhood than high school graduates. By opening the door to more options and opportunities, education may actually foster ambition and desires for things that may or may not ultimately be attainable (see also, Michalos, 1985).

Always wanting "the best" might also be particularly pernicious. People who actively seek the best possible outcomes may be successful in terms of occupational status and income, but they tend to be less happy (Schwartz, Ward, Monterosso, Lybomirsky, White, & Lehman, 2002; Iyegar, Wells, & Schwartz, 2006; see however, Diab, Gillespie, & Highhouse, 2008 for the null findings). Barry Schwartz and his colleagues conducted a series of studies, showing that "maximizers," who want to make the best choice possible and thus closely examine every available option, feel less happy and experience less life-satisfaction than "satisficers," who are satisfied with the first choice that is "good enough" to meet their basic requirements (Schwartz et al., 2002). Maximizers may expect greater success and thus compare their current situation (no matter how good) to potentially better outcomes. They often do this by comparing themselves to

other successful people, which can only confirm their own relative perceived "shortcomings." Accordingly, dissatisfaction quickly arises despite the fact that maximizers actually fare quite well by objective standards. For example, Iyegar et al. (2006) reported that maximizers are more likely to be admitted to top-15 universities in the United States and obtain higher salary jobs following graduation than their satisficer counterparts (indeed, every one-unit increase in the composite maximizing score was associated with a $2,630 increase in annual salary!). However, despite being objectively more successful, maximizers were actually *less* happy than satisficers, because maximizers tended to focus on what they could not obtain, opening themselves up to strong feelings of regret. In the end, the satisficers, who were not as successful as the maximizers in terms of occupational status or income, were the happier of the two.

Related to satisficing, when goals are too difficult to attain or simply impossible to attain, disengagement from goals appears to be conducive for happiness. For instance, Miller and Wrosch (2007) found that adolescents high in ability to disengage from difficult or impossible goals showed healthy levels of C-reactive protein, systemic inflammation, whereas those low in goal disengagement showed an increase in C-reactive protein over time. Thus, although the pursuit of personally important goals is associated with happiness in general (e.g., Emmons, 1986), mindless pursuit of impossible goals is not.

Finally, recent studies found that wanting to be happy itself might be detrimental to happiness (Gruber, Mauss, & Tamir, 2011 for review). For instance, wanting to be happy was associated with loneliness and social disconnection. Of course, the causal direction could be from loneliness to wanting to happy rather than the other way around. Nevertheless, wanting to be happy might not be a productive desire for happiness.

Does the satisfaction of desires lead to happiness?

Desires by themselves may be a mixed blessing, but what about satisfying one's desires? Surely getting what you want must make people happy. To answer this question, Oishi, Schimmack and Diener (2001) asked undergraduates to keep a daily diary, which they used to examine the relationship between participants' daily experiences of physical pleasures (e.g., foods and sex) and happiness on that day. They found that people generally felt happier on days when they fulfilled their physical desires, compared to days when they did not (the average within-person $r = .43$, $p < .01$). In addition, average physical pleasure over the 23 days was positively associated with life satisfaction, $r = .28$, $p < .01$. Thus, overall, the satisfaction of physical pleasures was moderately associated with daily satisfaction and long-term life satisfaction. Interestingly, not everyone experienced this boost in happiness. Sensation seekers, who look for novel, exciting experiences, obtained more happiness from physical pleasure than non-sensation seekers. Overall though, these findings suggest that at least some kinds of pleasure can lead to happiness, depending on what people seek and desire.

In a similar study, Tay and Diener (2011) analyzed nationally representative data from 123 nations and found that the satisfaction of basic needs (e.g., foods, shelter) was moderately and positively associated with life evaluation (the appraisal of where one's current life stands on a ladder scale from 0 to 10, $r = .31$). Satisfaction of basic needs was much more strongly associated with positive life evaluation than the satisfaction of safety/security, social support/love, mastery, or autonomy ($rs \leq .18$). In contrast, the satisfaction of social support/love ($r = .29$), respect ($r = .36$), mastery ($r = .29$), and autonomy ($r = .26$) were more strongly associated with positive feelings than the satisfaction of basic needs ($r = .12$). In general, the satisfaction of various desires is positively associated with life satisfaction and positive affect,

although the magnitude of the association varies depending on the indicator of happiness used, as well as the type of desires.

What about with regard to more high-level desires, such as the desire for financial success, or the attention of a loved one? Of course, satisfying a desire generally indicates that the current situation has improved, and it is natural to expect that such satisfaction should bring happiness. As noted earlier, achieving personal goals does in fact lead to happiness (Brunstein, 1993; Emmons, 1986), particularly if they are the right kinds of goals. For instance, Sheldon and Kasser (1998) showed that the satisfaction of goals consistent with a person's intrinsic psychological needs (e.g., self-acceptance, intimacy, or community involvement) leads to greater happiness than achieving more extrinsic goals, such as financial success, physical attractiveness, or popularity. To the extent that a desire involves the satisfaction of intrinsic psychological needs, fulfilling it may afford similar benefits to happiness (see however Oishi & Diener, 2001; Oishi, Diener, Lucas, & Suh, 1999for cultural differences in the type of goal attainment). Likewise, as discussed earlier, many studies have shown that people are happier when the gap between their current circumstances and aspirations is small, suggesting that satisfying one's aspirations may be generally associated with well-being (Plagnol & Easterlin, 2008; Stutzer, 2004).

Even if the satisfaction of some desires or aspirations leads to happiness, however, it would be premature to conclude that desires are, on the whole, a good thing to have. Might we be better off if we did not have any desires that required satisfaction in the first place? Even fulfilled desires can breed their own problems, which may acquire a life of their own and endure even after the initial desire is achieved. Easterlin, a very prominent economist and researcher on happiness, noted this fact as early as the 70s in what has come to be called the "Easterlin

paradox." Easterlin (1974) argued that material wealth was strongly related to happiness at the individual level, but not nearly so much at the national level. He looked at happiness data from the United States during a period of rapid economic growth from 1946 to 1970, and found that levels of happiness remained essentially unchanged throughout the period, despite the rapid increase in personal income. Easterlin attributed this stability in happiness to the influence of social comparison processes; people judge their levels of financial well-being not against some objective criterion but against that of others. Thus, economic development did not necessarily lead to greater happiness because as incomes rose, the standard of consumptions rose with them. As the economy grows, people's desires grow, too: they want a newer car, a larger house, more expensive jewelry, leaping from one desire to the next as each is "fulfilled" in turn. Even worse, because such success is relative to the success of others, it invites people to embark on an infinite consumption race, leading everyone to nearly inevitable dissatisfaction and unhappiness (Frank, 1997).

That increases in income are accompanied by a nearly inevitable increase in material aspirations has been documented extensively by economists since Easterlin first pointed out this paradox. Thus, although income may temporarily lead to increased happiness, the desires and aspirations that accompany it largely negate many of those positive effects and quickly erode any chance of lasting happiness (Clark, Frijters, & Shields, 2008; Stutzer, 2004).

Likewise, because the standards for success are relative rather than objective, people easily adapt once their desires are achieved and revert to their baseline level of happiness (e.g., Brickman & Campbell, 1971; Kahneman, 1999). For many individuals, happiness boosted by winning a lottery (Gardner & Oswald, 2007), moving to a new house (Nakazato, Schimmack, & Oishi, 2011), or marrying the love of your life (Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2003) does

not seem to last. Eventually people become dissatisfied with their present situation, even if that situation or outcome was previously highly desired. As people adapt to this "new normal", they interpret this dissatisfaction as a sign that something is missing. In their quest to re-experience the temporary boost in happiness that they experienced initially before adaptation set it, they set their sights even higher. Such disappointment might be exacerbated by the fact that they likely expected happiness much more intense and lasting than the one they actually experienced (Wilson & Gilbert, 2008). In this revolving cycle of desires, the standard for success rises higher and higher and people want more and more.

In addition to unstable and relativistic standards of happiness, another impediment standing in the way of happiness is that people often experience conflicting goals and desires. Hofmann, Kotabe, and Luhmann (2013) found that people felt no happier upon satisfying their desires if the desire they achieved conflicted with other goals. In their study, participants reported their current desires and emotional experiences for one week using their cell phones. When their desires (e.g., eating chocolate) did not conflict with other personal goals (which was the norm), satisfying that desire did increase feelings of happy moods (see also Oishi et al., 2001). However, if those desires did conflict with other goals (e.g., going on a diet), then satisfying the desire did not intensify happy moods. In such cases, satisfying those desires did result in some positive feelings, but the accompanying feelings of guilt and loss of pride undermined the positive effects of satisfying the desire, resulting in no net gain in happiness.

3. Existing Theoretical Accounts

In sum, desire can be a blessing and a curse. Furthermore, while the satisfaction of some desires appears to lead to happiness, the satisfaction of many other desires does not. In this

section, we will summarize existing theoretical accounts that might help explain these divergent findings.

Hierarchy of Desires

Like Aristotle, Plato also argued that happiness is distinct from pleasures (Waterfield, 1993). While pleasure may be enjoyable, he argued that it can never bring lasting happiness, because pleasure (especially sensual pleasure) is the relief experienced by the removal of pain rather than a distinct good in its own right. When we drink because we are thirsty or sleep because we are tired, it feels good because the water alleviates our thirst and the sleep alleviates our tiredness. Yet neither water nor sleep can be expected to bring us true happiness. Likewise, satisfying our desires may resemble the removal of pain, in that its chief reward consists of relief from wanting. Happiness can come only from pursuing what is good for it's own sake, not merely from escaping the bad. Both Plato and Aristotle maintained that the pleasure of the mind differs from worldly pleasure. The pleasure of the mind is pure and more conducive to happiness because it is arises not from relief at the removal of pain but out of the goodness of the pursuit of virtuous pleasure. According to Aristotle and Plato, then, desire is a blessing if it is the desire for knowledge, logic, art, and so forth. In contrast, desire is a curse if it is the desire for food, sex, and other low-level needs, or for acquired needs, such as alcohol and gambling, which are characterized by uncontrollable cravings and strong withdrawal symptoms.

This classical division of pleasure into two classes, one consisting of "high-level" desires amenable to lasting happiness and the second consisting of "low-level" needs unlikely to contribute to real happiness, has parallels in contemporary psychological science. Hofmann et al. (2013) classify desires into two classes: temptation vs. non-temptation. They define non-

temptation desires as "low conflict desires" (p.2) that people do not attempt to resist. Temptation

desire thus typically includes low-level physical needs such as sex and acquired desires such as

sweets, whereas non-temptation desire includes the desire to work and experience leisure

(although for non-dieting individuals, sweets are not "high conflict" desires, and therefore

considered non-temptation desires). Hofmann et al. found that temptation desire, when satisfied,

gives rise to mixed emotions, whereas non-temptation desire, when satisfied, does not. Thus,

temptation desire is a curse because even when we satisfy it, we experience undesirable emotions

as well as pleasure, whereas non-temptation desire may be more of a blessing because its

satisfaction produces only positive feelings. Overall, then, Hofmann et al.'s temptation account

provides a clean psychological explanation for why the satisfaction of some desires is conducive

to happiness while that of other desires is not.

Spiral of Desires: Why is the Satisfaction of Desire not Enough?

One of the reasons why the satisfaction of temptation desires is problematic is that giving

in to them often makes it difficult for individuals to pursue other important goals in life

(Hofmann et al., 2013). Continually satisfying your desire for sweets can lead to poor health;

continually satisfying your desire for alcohol or drugs can lead to even worse outcomes.

However, non-temptation desire is not entirely free of problems either. Fame and financial

success may both be non-temptation desires, but seeking fame and fortune rarely leads to

happiness in the end. However, whereas the fulfillment of temptation desires (e.g., eating sweets)

often puts one at odds with other conflicting goals (e.g., losing weight), that is not the primary

problem with non-temptation desires. The main issue with non-temptation desires isn't that they

lead to conflicts with other goals, but rather that the act of satisfying a non-temptation desire

only strengthens and magnifies it. The rich want to become richer; the famous yearn to become ever more famous. As our achievements grow, so do our aspirations. Aspirations and new desires stem from a variety of sources: they evolve from past experience (e.g., past gains in income spur increased aspirations and less happiness), are provoked by social comparison (e.g., observing the material goods of wealthier peers), and accompany positive expectations about the future (e.g., by aspiring to what one expects to gain) (McBride, 2001; McBride, 2010; Stutzer, 2004). When there is a discrepancy between one's evolving aspirations and one's actual situation it can lead to diminished happiness, even when the person's original desire was achieved. As discussed earlier, Easterlin (1974) has documented this effect with growing national income. Even though wealthier countries tend to be happier, people within those countries do not become happier as their income increases, due in part to social comparison and in part to growing desire. This issue of growing desire is conceptually akin to Brickman and Campbell's (1971) hedonic treadmill; just as an old desire is satisfied, a new desire emerges.

Building on the hedonic treadmill theory, Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2012) suggest that bottom-up and top-down processes combine to prevent desire from leading to lasting changes in happiness. Bottom-up processes (such as adaptation and habituation) lead us to feel fewer and fewer positive emotions from our satisfied desires. For example, the owner of a new car experiences diminishing enjoyment of the car once he has become accustomed to it and the car is no longer "new and shiny." At the same time, through top-down processes, the satisfaction of one desire simply breeds new desires and aspirations to replace it, instigating a cycle of desire that can never be quite fulfilled. The owner of the new Toyota soon sets his sights on a new Lexus instead. Positive events (e.g., losing weight, becoming popular) lead to even greater aspirations

(e.g., losing even more weight, making even more friends), which highlights the discrepancy between what one has and what one wants, which then leads to even more negative feelings.

Kasser (2002) describes this process neatly with the example of Netscape founder Jim Clark. At first, Clark thought that he would be really happy if he made $10 million. But when he made $10 million, he wasn't happy. Instead he wanted to make $100 million. When he actually made $100 million, he still wasn't happy. Instead he wanted to make $1 billion. When he actually made $1 billion, he presumably said "Once I have more money than Larry Ellison [Oracle], I'll be satisfied" (Kasser, 2002, p. 43). We all doubt if Clark would ever be happy if and when he overtakes Larry Ellison. But it is clear that new desires can grow in tandem as old desires are satisfied, a process that is exacerbated by social comparison in a never-ending feedback loop.

In addition to social comparison and the hedonic treadmill, another reason why the satisfaction of a desire does not lead to greater happiness may be our lack of self-knowledge. As shown by Wilson, Gilbert, and their colleagues (Wilson & Gilbert, 2008 for review), research on affective forecasting suggests that we are not always very good at predicting how we will feel about events and achievements in the future. We overestimate how long we will feel good after a positive event, and we overestimate the length and negativity of unpleasant events. In short, we expect the good things to be better and the bad things to be worse than they really are. Unsurprisingly, this may be true of desires as well. We desire things which we hope will bring us happiness, not realizing that this happiness may be neither as intense nor as enduring as we expect and hope for. A variety of research suggests that we often want things that we think will make us happy, even though ultimately they do not bring us lasting happiness, such as winning the lottery (Gardner & Oswald, 2007), buying a new house (Nakazato et al., 2011), and getting

married (Lucas et al., 2003). It is important to examine whether the satisfaction of desires fails to bring us happiness because we want the "wrong" thing, or because we simply habituate. Indeed, it is difficult for desires to bring us happiness if we desire something we don't really want, need, or like. If the self-knowledge hypothesis is correct, better self-knowledge might increase the chance that the satisfaction of desires leads to greater happiness. Yet is not clear how one might go about achieving this goal.

From the position of Self Determination Theory (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2000), processes like habituation and evolving aspirations are not the main reason that achieving our desires failts to bring us greater happiness. Instead, they argue that the type of desire is crucial, offering an alternative taxonomy than the temptation/non-temptation distinction discussed above. According to Ryan and Deci, the satisfaction of desires leads to happiness when the desires are based on intrinsic motivations, but not on extrinsic motivations (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2012). Even in the case of the pursuit of material wealth (which is typically classified as an extrinsic goal), achieving such financial goals is positively associated with satisfaction of life when that desire is motivated by the intrinsic pursuit of success more broadly (i.e., when intrinsic interest in success, which enables people to distinguish themselves from others, is the primary motivation; Garðarsdóttir, Dittmar, & Aspinall, 2009).

From the self-determination perspective, intrinsically motivated goals, which come from the self and have their origin in people's own lives and intimate relationships rather than being externally imposed, are regarded as basic psychological needs, in the same way that food and water are basic physical needs. When goals and desires represent intrinsic and basic psychological needs, satisfying them may well lead to happiness. From the self-determination

perspective, then, it is not necessarily knowing what is desirable for the self and pursuing it that brings greater happiness, but pursuing so-called intrinsic goals.

4. Two Approaches to the Dilemma of Desire

In the previous section, we summarized existing theoretical accounts for why the satisfaction of desire does not always lead to happiness, ranging from hedonic adaptation to social comparison to self-determination theory. As seen above, desires in general, and sensuous ones in particular, pose hurdles for the path to happiness. In this section, we present two approaches to handling the dilemma of desire (for a summary, see Figure 1). One is a Puritan (Protestant work ethics) approach, or trying to satisfy one's desires via self-discipline. Instead of removing or reducing the main desires (goals) themselves, this approach tries to satisfy one's higher-level desires or attain one's main goals through hard work, and the exertion of self-control to resist temptation (lower level desires). It is equivalent of trying to save $20K by either working more, while exercising self-discipline in spending less. An alternative approach, however, is offered by Buddhism. Rather than seeking to attain one's higher-level desires, this approach instead advocates trying to remove, reduce, and accommodate the desires themselves. Instead of working more (like the Protestant work ethic would advocate) or spending less (like the Puritan virtue of self-control), the Buddhist approach might question the desire to save $20k in the first place ("Why need more?"). Thus, this approach might lead you to modify the goal (to save $10k instead) or give up on the goal entirely.

The Puritan Approach

Hofmann, Luhmann, Fischer, Vohs, and Baumeister (2013) examined the Puritan approach to desire: namely, self-control. Puritan concepts of self-control involve not only

discipline in working hard to achieve one's high-level desires (e.g., hard work, focus, perseverance), but also discipline in abstaining from indulgence in low-level desires which may impede or interfere with those goals. And, in fact, Hofmann et al. (2013) found that trait self-control (the ability to resist temptations) was positively associated with long-term happiness because it helps participants stay on target with their goals. Interestingly, however, they also found that individuals high in self-control felt happier than others moment-to-moment as well. So it was not the case that these individuals were laboriously and painfully exerting self-control to resist temptation and achieve their goals; rather they seemed to do this with pleasure. This might be partly because individuals high in self-control also tend not to have many temptation desires that conflict with their larger goals in life, or it might simply be that when self-control comes easily, it can be invoked to overcome such temptations relatively painlessly. In a similar vein, Quoidbach and Dunn (in press) found that participants randomly assigned to give up chocolate for one week later savored and enjoyed chocolate more. This is somewhat surprising because people might presumably feel guilty while eating chocolate, especially since eating chocolate may conflict with many college students' fitness and weight loss goals. However, it is likely that the successful resistance of temptation for one week gave them moral license to indulge chocolate without guilt later. In other words, self-control may lead to moderation in consumption and simultaneously greater enjoyment of the occasional consumption of a highly desired object. These findings suggest that Puritan self-control might actually increase the intensity of pleasure when the desire is eventually satisfied. Temptation desires generally pose a challenge to everyone. However, individuals low in self-control tend to have a particularly difficult time navigating temptations. Thus, temptation desires are especially bad for individuals without good self-control.

Thus, the Puritan approach to desire teaches that high level desire is not itself a problem. It is the low level desire which must be resisted (in the case of self-control in the face of temptation) or a motivator for engaging in hard work or perseverance (in the case of working hard to achieve a "high level" desire). By aggressively pursuing the "right" desires and resolutely resisting the "wrong" ones, the Puritan approach promises that happiness is largely a matter of self-discipline. However, despite being the focus of most empirical psychological work, the Puritan approach is not the only approach to desire and temptation.

The Buddhist Approach

The other approach to handling the temptation problem can be found in both traditional Buddhist philosophy as well as Ancient Greek Stoicism, which both hold that, far from fostering happiness, desires are a primary cause of unhappiness. The path to happiness, according to Buddhism, lies not through the satisfaction of desires, but through freedom from desire itself. Likewise, the Ancient Greek and Roman Stoic philosophers warned against wanting things beyond one's grasp, suggesting that people should instead desire that which they already have (Irvine, 2008).

Although both Buddhism and Stoicism advocate that desire breeds unhappiness, their practical approaches differ. Desire, the Stoics suggested, is a fact of life, which can even potentially be used to our benefit if understood and handled wisely. Because it is the absence of something that makes us desire it, the stoics reasoned that we should routinely imagine the loss of the things that we have and hold dear so that we might desire them instead (p. 68, see Koo, Algoe, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2008 for empirical evidence). In this way, by making us want what we've already got, desire becomes a tool that works for rather than against us. Far from holding

that people should never have any aspiration or ambition, the stoics simply cautioned that people should concern themselves only with things within their control, as concerning oneself with anything else is a waste of time. According to one modern interpretation (p. 88-95), this means that, rather than desiring to win a tennis match (something not wholly within a person's control), one should make one's goal simply to practice hard and play to the best of one's abilities (something presumably within one's control). That way, it is wholly within one's power to meet one's goal and to avoid the disappointment of an aspiration thwarted, the outcome of the match notwithstanding.

Buddhism, on the other hand, takes a different approach. Unhappiness, Buddhism teaches, is not only a result of desire, but an inherent aspect of it. If desire is the longing for something you do not have, then wanting what you do not or cannot have is in itself a form of suffering that can only end when desire ceases. However, desire does not cease simply because it has been satisfied. The problem is that, in truth, it cannot ever be fully satisfied. Because all things in the world are temporary in the end, they can never truly satisfy desire; ultimately any sense of success is (necessarily) an illusory and temporary one. The person who eats today will be hungry again tomorrow. Buddhism teaches that the failure to understand this is what gives rise to desire in the first place, and that one path to reducing desire lies in understanding that all things are temporary. Ultimately, however, Buddhist philosophy advocates that only the cessation of desire can bring lasting happiness and an end to suffering. Wanting what you don't have, Buddhism teaches, can never be a good thing, no matter how much self-control or discipline you exercise.

If we use the analogy of Puritan vs. Buddhist/Stoic approaches, self-determination theory is a variant of the Puritan approach, or seeking *primary control* by trying to obtain what you

want. The Buddhist, or Stoic, approach to happiness, on the other hand, might be seen as advocating what some researchers have identified as *secondary control* (Morling & Evered, 2006)—not getting what we want (primary control), but wanting what we've already got. Norris and Larsen (2011) found that the satisfaction of desires leads to happiness when people are satisfied with and attending to the things they actually have and nothing more. Similarly, non-materialists tend to be happier than materialists because non-materialists are more easily satisfied with what they already have. Brown et al. (2009) showed that mindfulness, a state of receptive attention to present events and experience, narrowed the perceived discrepancy between desires and people's actual states and also enhanced happiness. Several mindfulness intervention studies also found that participants randomly assigned to the mindfulness intervention show reduced craving for alcohol (e.g., Garland et al., 2010) or smoking (e.g., Brewer et al., 2011). Together, these findings suggest that curbing desires by finding satisfaction with one's current state (accommodating desire to one's current situation), rather than trying to satisfy ever-growing desires, may be one of the keys to avoiding the trap of desire.

Research on satisficing suggests several other strategies that may help people pursue greater happiness without invoking greater desire as well. Schwartz et al. (2002)'s work on choice shows that although people think they want more choices, they are actually happier with their decisions when their choices are limited. Voluntarily choosing to limit one's options (such as by looking at only one or two televisions when shopping) or evaluating one object at a time (single evaluation) instead of evaluating multiple objects simultaneously (joint evaluation) may enhance satisfaction with one's eventual choice and reduce the temptation to engage in upward comparisons (Hsee, Hastie, & Chen, 2008). In short, ignorance may (sometimes) be bliss - you can't want what you don't know exists, so you're better off not knowing! Iyengar et al. (2006)'s

work on satisficers suggests that some people naturally tend to pursue this strategy by pursuing available options only until a suitable choice is found, rather than looking for the perfect option. And as we've seen, this strategy seems to work – satisficers are, on the whole, happier than people who don't satisfice.

Kurtz (2008) suggests another strategy for enhancing happiness without feeding desire. The art of savoring, she explains, is the art of wanting what you have, rather than trying to have what you want. Focusing on day-to-day pleasures and savoring the moment may increase appreciation and desire for what one already possesses, thus leading to greater happiness without the desire for more. In this vein, Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2012) suggest that continued appreciation of the positive changes in one's life can prevent adaptation to them, and advocate variety as a further prophylactic against habituation. Tatzel (2003) makes a similar point in proposing that even material goods may make us happier if we focus on the experiential aspect of owning such goods, including focusing on the aesthetics, functionality, and pleasure afforded by them (see also van Boven & Gilovich, 2003).

Taking a slightly different tact, Dunn, Aknin, and Norton (2008) suggest that the path to personal happiness lies in focusing not on ourselves and our own situation, but on others, and on making them happy instead. In a study comparing personal purchases with purchases for others, these researchers found that people experienced longer-lasting and more positive boosts to their happiness after spending money on a friend as compared to spending money on themselves. Such purchases may be less likely to provoke desires for more and may be more resistant to the effects of habituation and adaptation. Perhaps instead of attending to our own desires, we should attempt to fulfill the desires of others if we hope to achieve happiness.

5. **Finale: A Synthesis**

Although we use Sumner's (1996) definition of happiness as authentic life satisfaction, we use Aristotelian concepts of pleasure in our attempt to understand desire and happiness. Aristotle did not view all kinds of pleasures equally, declaring that "intellectual pleasures are superior to sensuous ones" (Thomson, 1953, p.324), which he regards as transient. We likewise distinguish between two types of desires: (a) low-level physical or acquired craving ("I've got to have it") and (b) non-craving, or ideals ("I would ideally like to have"). This classification is similar to Hofmann et al.'s (2013) classification of temptation versus non-temptation desires. In addition, we distinguish between two targets of our desires: (a) ourselves, and (b) others. Most desires concern the self ("I want X"), whereas some concern others ("I want Y to be/have Z"). Table 1 summarizes our conceptualization.

Desire: Cravings vs. Ideals

As seen above, the satisfaction of low-level physical or acquired desires does not generally lead to an increase in happiness. The satisfaction of these desires (or cravings) simply restores the individual back to baseline, or the equilibrium point. They are the psychological equivalent of eating because you are hungry, or sleeping because you are tired. In Aristotelian terms, they are pleasant because they offer relief from pain, not because they are good in their own right. As we have seen, cravings may also be particularly susceptible to conflict with other goals, so that even those pleasant feelings of relief are mixed with negative feelings in other regards. However, it should be noted that deprivation with respect to these low-level cravings is not healthy either (Hofmann, Kotabe, et al., 2013; Oishi et al., 2001).

In contrast to low-level desires, which rarely lead to enduring happiness, we propose that the satisfaction of higher-level ideals, *can* sometime lead to an increase in happiness over time, as the satisfaction of such ideals often entails a positive change in life circumstances (e.g., more

freedom, Inglehart, Foa, Peterson, & Welzel, 2008; see also Diener, Lucas, & Scollon, 2006 for long-term changes in baseline happiness). Such desires are also less likely to conflict with other desires, and achieving them may be a wholly positive experience rather than a mixed emotional experience. Yet even ideals may still be problematic for happiness. Ideals are not immune to hedonic treadmill, adaptation, and habituation effects and ideals, once achieved, have a tendency to spawn new ones. So while ideals may not always be lead to happiness, they at least have the potential to contribute to it in a way that cravings do not.

Origins of Desire: Self vs. Others

Although most research on desire and happiness has been concerned with the desire of the individual him or herself (i.e., "I want x") the key to delaying hedonic adaptation might lie in positive feedback from others (e.g., hearing "thank you" from a friend, a returned favor). Because of the positive feedback in the form of expressions of gratitude and reciprocal actions that often accompanies acts done for others (Algoe, 2012), acting to fulfill others' desires might give rise to a more significant and lasting change in happiness than acting solely on one's own behalf. Illustrating this feedback loop, Muise, Impett, Kogan, and Desmarais (2013) recently found that couples high in partner-oriented sexual desires (high scores on items such as, "How far would you be willing to go to meet your partner's sexual needs?" and "How high a priority for you is meeting the sexual needs of your partner?") maintain their own sexual desire for a longer period of time, a strong predictor of sexual and relationship satisfaction among long-term couples (Muise, Impett, & Desmarais, 2013). These findings suggest, then, that rather than being a sacrifice, satisfying your partner's desire can simultaneously increases your own happiness as well, as your partner's satisfaction tends to have a positive impact on your own happiness but without the negative drawbacks that usually accompany desires. Of course, however, the type of

desire is important as well. If a partner's desire took the form of a craving for cocaine, helping to satisfy his desire might not increase one's own happiness, even if he thanked his partner and gave or did something in return. In the case of sexual behaviors though, the satisfaction of a partner's desire *can* satisfy one's own desire. In a sense, this is a situation where two individuals desire the same thing, and each of them helps each other to achieve the goal. The satisfaction of a partner's desire can produce happiness, especially when it also satisfies one's own desire. Then, the satisfaction of a *shared* desire might be the most potent path to happiness.

So, in the end, are desires a blessing or a curse? Like many things, the answer is, "it depends." In clarifying the link between desires and happiness, it is important to distinguish between desires-as-cravings and desires-for-ideals, as the underlying mechanisms between the two are very different. Cravings, or low-level physical or acquired desires, are likely to be a curse, because they invite people to step aboard a non-stop hedonic treadmill, in which any boost in happiness is both temporary and fleeting. On the other hand, ideals (although not without their own pitfalls) are more likely to have the potential to be a blessing, leading to positive changes in an individual's life, especially if we satisfy the desires of others rather than our own. However, even ideals may not always lead to happiness. In addition to distinguishing between cravings and ideals, it is equally important to investigate the interpersonal nature of some desires. Somewhat counter-intuitively, the satisfaction of another's ideals (instead of one's own) might be most conducive to achieving long-term happiness. Especially if the desires are shared, satisfying them can create a positive feedback loop: the happiness of both people is even further enhanced by knowing that the other person is likewise happy. Future research might apply these insights and important distinctions in further illuminating why it is that some desires leads to happiness whereas others does not.

Finally, as stated above, most empirical approaches to desire have adopted a viewpoint that could be considered decidedly Puritan in nature. This approach accepts desire as a given, and focuses on how people achieve the "right" desires through discipline and hard work while resisting the "wrong" desires by exercising self-control. The Buddhist approach offers an alternative: rather than regulating how we respond to a desire, it advocates regulating the desire itself. Although some desires may be simply out of our control, it would be ideal to investigate the effectiveness of a Buddhist or Stoic approach in the future: namely, how to increase happiness by reducing one's desires, or by working to shift them to conform to one's present circumstances.

Desire is and will remain a significant part of people's lives. It shapes our day-to-day actions, from trivial tasks such as deciding what to eat or which shoes we want, to larger decisions with far-ranging implications, such as the craving for drugs and alcohol or the thirst for knowledge. It, without a doubt, has a large impact on our happiness and unfortunately, as we have discovered, that impact is often a negative one. The question of how to live happily with our desires is an ancient one that has concerned philosophers and religions from around the world, from the Ancient Greek Stoics and Aristotle to Buddhism and our own more recent Puritan tradition. Learning to live with, channel, and perhaps even regulate or reduce desires may be a challenge, but one that is potentially fruitful for people's overall well-being and happiness in life. The research discussed here can help us understand how to live a happy life with (or even perhaps one day even without) desires.

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Table 1. The Type and the Target of Desire: Does the Satisfaction of Desire Lead to

Happiness?

Desire	Self	Other
Craving	No	Some
Ideal	Some	Yes

Puritan:

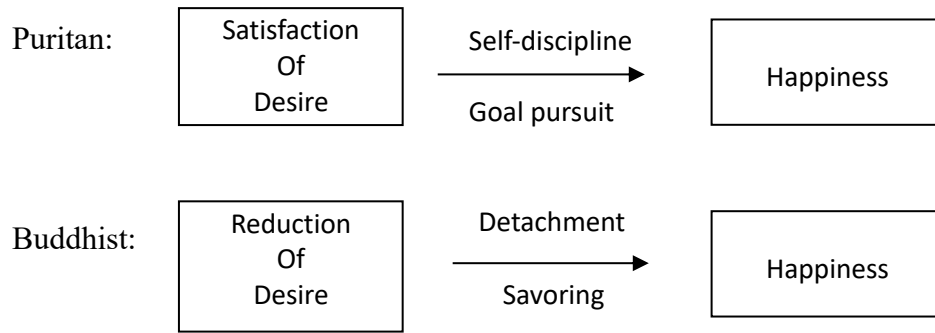| Satisfaction Of Desire | Self-discipline ⟶ Goal pursuit | Happiness |

Buddhist:

| Reduction Of Desire | Detachment ⟶ Savoring | Happiness |

Figure 1: Two Approaches to Desire and Happiness