Ann. N.Y. Acad. Sci. ISSN 0077-8923

ANNALS OF THE NEW YORK ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
Issue: *From Knowledge to Wisdom: Science and the Good Life*

A new science of happiness: the paradox of pleasure

Steve Paulson,[1] Kim K. Azzarelli,[2,3] Darrin M. McMahon,[4] and Barry Schwartz[5]

[1]Wisconsin Public Radio, Madison, Wisconsin. [2]Cornell Law School, Ithaca, New York. [3]Seneca Point Global, New York, New York. [4]Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire. [5]Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania

The pursuit of happiness is enshrined in the founding document of our nation as a fundamental and inalienable right. Yet nowhere is the method of this pursuit clearly defined. What, exactly, does it mean to be happy, and how can such happiness be sustained over the long term? Can happiness be accurately gauged or measured? How does the paradoxical relationship between happiness and pleasure shape our quest to lead the good life? And what does modern science have to tell us about this universal yet elusive pursuit? Steve Paulson, executive producer and host of *To the Best of Our Knowledge*, moderated a discussion that included attorney and author Kim Azzarelli, historian Darrin McMahon, and social psychologist Barry Schwartz, who joined forces to share their research and insight on happiness, pleasure, and the coveted good life.

Keywords: happiness; good life; pleasure; virtue; positive emotion

Steve Paulson: Thank you. It is great to be here; we have a wonderful crowd. We are thrilled to be kicking off our new series "From Knowledge to Wisdom: Science and the Good Life."

What makes someone happy? This may seem like the most basic question we could ask, but we all know that the answer is incredibly elusive. Clearly, *happiness* is not the same thing as *pleasure*, although they're related in some way. Happiness isn't, for example, necessarily something that one feels when kicking back on the weekend after a really grueling week of work, because sometimes all that free time can make one miserable. The things that make each of us happy some of the time don't always stay with us—they can be hard to hold onto.

We are going to be unpacking the idea of happiness during our conversation; we'll be talking about the history and science of what we've learned about the nature of happiness and well-being. Are people born happy or unhappy? Is happiness a skill we have to learn? Is there a connection between happiness and virtue, as Aristotle thought, or can a person without much virtue be just as happy as anyone else? The title of the event this evening is "A New Science of Happiness, the Paradox of Pleasure." We have a great panel; let me introduce our speakers.

Kim Azzarelli is a business, philanthropic, and legal advisor focused on advancing women and girls. Together with Ambassador Melanne Verveer, she's a cofounder of Seneca Women and coauthor of the book, *Fast Forward: How Women Can Achieve Power and Purpose.* She is chair and cofounder of Cornell Law School's Avon Global Center for Women and Justice and a partner at Seneca Point Global. Before her work with Seneca, she held senior philanthropic and legal roles at Goldman Sachs and Avon, respectively. At Goldman, she led the billion-dollar donor advised fund Goldman Sachs Gives. At Avon, she served as vice president, legal and public affairs, and corporate secretary. Kim is an adjunct professor at Cornell Law School, where she teaches on women, law, and the economy.

Darrin McMahon is a professor of history at Dartmouth College and author of the books *Happiness: A History*, which has been translated into 12 languages, and *Divine Fury: A History of Genius*, which was published in 2013. He has taught as a visiting professor at Yale, Columbia, New York University, the École Normale Supérieure, and the University of Potsdam. Darrin is a regular contributor to *Live Happy* magazine. His essays and reviews have appeared in such venues as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Boston Globe*, *Slate*, the *New Republic*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and the *Literary Review*.

doi: 10.1111/nyas.13068

Barry Schwartz is a professor of psychology at Swarthmore College, where he has taught for more than four decades. He has written 10 books and more than 100 articles for professional journals. In 2004, he published *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less*," which has been translated into 25 languages. Barry has published articles in various media outlets, including the *New York Times*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Scientific American*, and *Harvard Business Review*. Barry, along with his colleague Kenneth Sharpe, has also written *Practical Wisdom: The Right Way to Do the Right Thing*; very recently a new book came out called *Why We Work*. Welcome, all of you.

Barry, let me start with you. Let me start with a very basic question. What is happiness? Do you have a quick definition?

Barry Schwartz: No, I don't have a quick definition. Psychologists have been interested in answering two questions regarding happiness. One is, What is it? There is a kind of consensus answer to that. The second question is, What produces it? The way that most psychologists think about happiness is that it is a combination of positive emotion or positive affect, not too much negative emotion, and a high satisfaction with life. If one has those three things, one is (all else being equal) happy. Tools have been developed for measuring happiness that are rather imperfect, but less noisy than one might think, given how subjective happiness is.

Then there's the second question, What determines whether one is going to be happy? I would say that most attention has been directed at trying to answer that question.

Paulson: Kim, let me follow up. What's your thumbnail understanding of happiness?

Kim K. Azzarelli: I think of happiness in a similar way, but maybe I approach it from more of a practitioner's perspective. It's important to distinguish between common definitions of happiness as a fleeting emotion versus the happiness associated with deriving greater meaning. What we often refer to as *happiness* is an emotion that in its most simplistic sense correlates to *need reduction*. For me, that makes sense—you're hungry, you eat, you're happy; you like shoes, you go shopping, you're happy. But I tend to distinguish that from the happiness that is correlated with finding meaning, which we're going to get to. *Meaning*, for me, creates a kind of halo of happiness that lasts beyond the moment, and that comes from being able to tie something to a larger purpose—that's one of the theses of our book. For me, happiness is a more simplistic emotion that comes and goes, while meaning is something that transcends and can last throughout time.

Paulson: Darrin, I want to turn to you because the history of happiness is fascinating—it has meant a number of different things over time. I'm wondering if you could just give us a brief thumbnail sketch, maybe going back to the ancient Greeks.

Darrin M. McMahon: Sure. You wisely didn't ask me what happiness is, because when historians get asked that kind of question they can't give an answer. I had an AP reporter ask me that same question when my book on happiness had just come out. I told him, "Historians don't attempt to answer such questions in the abstract; instead, they look at changes in meaning over time and developments and shifts." But the reporter kept pushing me . . . . Of course, the lead line of the story that got published was, "Historian writes book on happiness—can't define it."

I like to start with the word. It's a striking fact that in every Indo-European language, the word for *happiness* is cognate with *luck*. This is true in English. The word for happiness derives from the Old Norse, a Middle English term, *hap*. We still use it in terms like *happenstance* or *perhaps*. It simply means *luck* or *fortune*. You can find this in every language. I think that's very interesting. One of the things it says is that most cultures for the better part of human history didn't think of happiness as something we could attain for ourselves. Happiness was what happened to you, and that was in the hands of the gods, fate, or fortune. People could not control it.

Today, we think of happiness very differently. In the Western tradition, broadly speaking, the notion of happiness as fate is attacked very explicitly by Socrates and Plato, who set the Western philosophical

tradition in the direction of trying to figure out how to be happy. Everyone *wants* to be happy. But *how* do we bring this about?

I would argue that every major wisdom tradition—every major religious tradition—poses that same question. The thing that they all have in common is that happiness is not a fleeting emotion. Indeed, it's not an emotion at all. Happiness is a product of a well-lived life. And, happiness takes work; it is not something that happens to you; it is something that you have to train for. For Aristotle, happiness is a life lived according to virtue. For the Buddha, everyone has the capacity for happiness, but most people live lives of suffering because they haven't cultivated the resources necessary. That's an important lesson.

Paulson: I find it interesting that you haven't used the word *pleasure* at all, which seems to be such a big part of our modern understanding of happiness. When did happiness get linked to having a good time?

McMahon: Jeremy Bentham, the great English Utilitarian, gave us the phrase, "The greatest happiness for the greatest number. The greatest good for the greatest number." Bentham is speaking a truth of the 18th century—that is, happiness *is* pleasure. That significant shift occurs roughly in the late 17th and 18th centuries. Before that point, no one—not even Epicurus—would have equated happiness and pleasure so directly. Pleasure might have been *part* of a happy life, but it wasn't an emotion. When Aristotle writes a treatise on what he calls the passions, what we would call emotions, he doesn't even include happiness because happiness isn't an emotion. Happiness is a measure or a gauge of a well-lived, flourishing, complete life.

Some of the religious traditions accord a space for pleasure. When Christians imagine the happiness of seeing God face to face, they imagine it to be a kind of ecstasy. Thomas Aquinas says it is like being "drunk on God"—it's so great that you'll be able to look down and see people suffering in hell, which will add to your own pleasure. He has a sense of pleasure as *feeling*, to some degree. Yet, God's grace and virtuous activity are the main drivers here. That is challenged in the 18th century, when happiness becomes something that puts a smile on your face—which is a very different thing.

Paulson: Let me bring this up to the present and turn to you, Barry. From a psychologist's perspective, what is the difference between happiness and pleasure?

Schwartz: Of the three components of happiness I mentioned that psychologists focus on, positive emotion, if one experiences pleasure one almost certainly will experience positive emotion. Whether we use the word *happiness* or not to describe it, the emphasis in modern industrial societies in the last half-century or so has been the yellow smiley face. What it means to be happy is to feel good. What it means to be happy is to experience pleasure. *How* that comes about is secondary. Your objective is to have a smiley face for as many hours of the day as you possibly can. That maybe is derived from Bentham and the Utilitarians.

In modern times, it's completely divorced from what we do—what we achieve. Sure, there are ways to get the smiley face on the cheap, as it were—one is by taking psychoactive drugs. Yet, lots of things that take effort, for most of the time that one is expending the effort, do not result in one having a smiley face. Psychologists write books that are meant to appeal to popular audiences, and they have the word *happiness* in the title. That encourages people to think that what they're talking about is what most of us think happiness means, which is walking around with a smiley face. Self-help books present the lowest possible understanding about what it means to be happy. What it means to be happy is that you experience pleasure.

Paulson: Is one of the differences that pleasure is fleeting, whereas happiness is something that is more long term?

Schwartz: Darrin was trying to suggest this—happiness is an achievement. At least from Aristotle on, happiness is something that you *earn* by doing good things, by being a good person, by achieving excellence in various aspects of your life. It's worth having conversations about what it means to achieve excellence,

as that's not an uncontroversial idea. But it is work to be happy—yet this is not the way most people think about happiness in modern society.

Azzarelli: The definition of happiness today that modern life associates with is pleasure—a happy face, a yellow happy face. I do think that happiness should be more of a lifestyle, which is this concept that you have to work for it; it's a by-product, if you will, of doing. Attaining it requires an active approach, a game plan, just like an athlete has a game plan to achieve his or her goal. It's a cognitive process—you have to think about it—then you have to go act on it. It's an *in vivo* concept of going into the world and acting and learning. It's also an evolutionary process, and a by-product of having a larger arc of meaning, which I hope we'll talk about—the happiness that Darrin and Barry are talking about.

Paulson: I want to come back to the word *virtue.* We associate that with Aristotle. He saw virtue as being a core piece of happiness. My understanding of virtue is that it's doing good in the world, right?

Azzarelli: In my mind it is, and a lot of the research shows the happiest people in the world are people who don't focus on their own happiness but who are in the service of others. Your friend (*looking at Darrin*) Dr. Gilbert says, "Go volunteer at a homeless shelter. You may not help the homeless but you're definitely going to help yourself . . . "

Paulson: If you do good, in other words, you will feel good . . .

Azzarelli: Exactly. Helping other people may be one of the best ways to help yourself.

Schwartz: I don't think that was Aristotle's understanding of virtue.

McMahon: It's true that the meaning of the word virtue changes a lot. But Aristotle's conception of happiness is what psychologists and philosophers would now call *eudaimonic,* from the word *eudaimonia*, which is the Greek word for *happiness* or *flourishing*—as opposed to a *hedonic* conception, which is about pleasure. Aristotle believed that living virtuously, which for him meant living well, living as one is supposed to live, is realizing one's full potential—potential that most people won't realize, frankly, because it's too hard. Living well will have pleasure as a by-product. There will also be pain. Virtue is its own reward in this respect.

One of the things that is so exciting about the new psychological research that people like Barry have been doing is that in certain respects they're validating older notions. Our colleague Jonathan Haidt, who is a social psychologist, wrote the wonderful book *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*, which presses this point. To take one example, Aristotle says that one of the human virtues is magnificence—you have to be generous; you have to give your money away, and that that is a key element of a flourishing, happy life. As a number of modern studies confirm, it turns out that's true.

Paulson: But don't we all know people who have devoted their lives to doing good or saving the world and yet are sometimes miserable? One might say such people have become martyrs by trying so hard to do good . . .

Are we really willing to conflate the notions of virtue and happiness?

Azzarelli: That hasn't been my experience. I find the opposite. The people who focus the most on themselves are the least happy people. People who are able to go out and do something in the world are happy—it gives their life a perspective. We talked a little bit about this before.

It depends on how one defines what success is—what happiness is. If you only see the immediate vicinity of your world, you're not seeing other ways people live; you have a very narrow perspective of what "normal" is and you compare yourself to a very narrow framework of "reality." One of the important stories in the book and frankly in my life is related to the work of the Virtue Foundation with acid violence victims in

Cambodia. Dr. Ebby Elahi, a New York surgeon who was working there as a volunteer, had come across a baby who had been doused with acid while breast-feeding with her mother. Through collaborations with many doctors and institutions, he operated on her and was ultimately able to restore her sight. At the time I was working at Avon and saw a film about this baby. I thought I had been doing good work and had a sense of the world, but until I saw that child doused with acid at barely one month old, I didn't realize the way the rest of the world was really living. It changed my whole perspective about what I could do from where I was sitting.

I have found that the more one can get out of a narrow frame of reference, the better. Barry speaks about this very well in *The Paradox of Choice*, that is, the curse of expectations. What are our expectations about success? How do we define success in our culture right now? How narrow is our framework? People who get "out" of themselves and help other people change their perspective about what is "normal." A very positive by-product is that it changes the expectations about one's own life and gives one's life greater meaning. One realizes that gratitude becomes one of the keys that can unlock happiness and meaning.

Schwartz: Yet I do think it's possible to live a good life, a virtuous life, a life that serves other people, and be miserable. The question is how is that possible? The answer is that happiness—meaning positive emotion—is not *just* about being virtuous. Suppose your aim in life is to eliminate global warming, and you get 80% of the way there, and on your deathbed I ask you, "Are you happy?" And you say, "In fact, I'm miserable because I thought we would eliminate global warming and all we did was take a few baby steps in that direction." So, unhappiness can follow failure, which, one might argue, is the result of unreasonably high aspirations.

It raises, though, an interesting question. Is it possible to say *of* someone that he or she is happy, even though he/she would say no? That is, one view—and this is not unlike what Aristotle might say—is that happiness is actually an *objective*, not subjective, state. If you have achieved excellence, you have achieved a eudaimonic condition; you have lived out your purpose as a human being. Then, whether you are walking around with a smile on your face or not is incidental. What matters is that you have done what human beings *are supposed to do*, and that *makes* you happy, even if you would say that you were mostly depressed.

Most everybody in modern society thinks that happiness is *entirely subjective*, so that if I say, "I'm unhappy," you can't say, "No, you're not. You're happy." That just makes no sense; it seems incoherent. Instead, individually, we get to say whether we're happy or not—perhaps you get to say whether I should be happy, but you don't get to say whether I *am* happy; that's a private province.

Yet one doesn't have to think about it in that way.

Paulson: I get the sense that maybe the word *happiness* is a real problem. The more I hear you talking about it, the less I understand it . . . [*audience laughter*]

Schwartz: That's true of people who research it too . . . [*audience laughter*]

Azzarelli: That's true. I was thinking about that when we were preparing for this discussion. We need to talk about what we *mean* by happiness . . . . But we have to think about it in the context of modern life—then think about what that means for each person. What is one's *purpose* in life? If you can come up with that purpose, then one can have that larger arc in your life to which you can ascribe that larger meaning, the by-product of which is happiness. After which one might say, "I did what I was supposed to do," which leads to the ethos of happiness. The life well lived is the life where one has done what one needed to do—whatever that is, which is a subjective question. Why I am here? What should I do? That is, What is that larger arc of meaning? That is a different question that each person has to address for him/herself.

McMahon: I don't think the problem is with the word; the problem is with us: we've cheapened it. We have advertising campaigns that tell us that you can be happy by just opening a Coca-Cola or by going to Disneyland. It's symptomatic of the way in which we think of happiness as something *easy*—it's almost a natural right, we're just supposed to have it.

Most cultures, historically, as I say, haven't thought about happiness in those terms. They've thought about it in a very different way.

Paulson: Are you talking about the difficulty of being/becoming happy?

McMahon: Again, if we just equate happiness with pleasure, it's not difficult at all. One can get a back rub, have a chocolate bar, or take a shower—all those things give one pleasure, and that's fine. But if we're talking about living a flourishing life, well that *is* hard. It takes training, self-knowledge, acting, and doing in the world. It takes self-cultivation—self-realization. All those things are hard.

This is not really a tangent, but Barry and I and others who work on happiness love to point out that if, as a graduate student, someone such as Barry had told his advisor that he wanted to study happiness, he would have been laughed out of the room. Why? Because psychologists are doctors, and doctors study pathology; they study what makes people sick.

Freud said that the whole goal of psychoanalysis is to make people *ordinarily* unhappy because the human condition can't be "cured." Economics, now a huge growth industry in happiness studies, was once the dismal science. In history, when I started working on the study of happiness, people laughed because they associated happiness with something trite, something easy, something superficial.

There are deep reasons in Western culture why that is the case. There has been a tendency in both the Jewish and Christian traditions to think of suffering as somehow deeper; it's more profound than happiness, which is cheap and easy. But happiness isn't easy if you think it about it in this larger sense that we're talking about here.

Paulson: Barry, let me follow up on that. There really is a new *science* of happiness, yes?

Schwartz: There is a new science of happiness. A colleague of mine at the University of Pennsylvania, Martin Seligman, had a lot to do with giving it shape. He defined a field that's come to be called *positive psychology*. The question is not how do you move people from –6 to 0 on some well-being scale, but rather how you move them from +2 to +7, which psychology had completely ignored. When he wrote a book about this, he used the title *Authentic Happiness*, to distinguish it from the yellow smiley face kind of happiness that he assumes most people have in mind.

There is now a lot of information about what promotes well-being, and none of it is easy. It's work you care about and you feel you're actually achieving something; it's close relationships with other people, though it is not easy to develop and sustain close relationships with other people. Those (and other) things take work. The easy stuff, the stuff that puts a temporary smile on your face, doesn't produce "authentic happiness." At the same time, there are books that try to tell you that, while it's hard, there are a few shortcuts. That, unfortunately, just feeds into the notion that happiness is easily attained. There's a romantic attachment to misery and suffering.

For years, one of Seligman's main obstacles was to convince people—of Darrin's point—that to be happy does *not* mean that you are an idiot [*audience laughter*]. Look, most people have this view that every artist worth taking seriously, every novelist, every composer, every painter worth taking seriously, was miserable, and the suffering of the artist is what produced the art. As an empirical manner, this is false. Of course there are some people like that, for example, van Gogh, but there are also plenty of people who are not miserable and produce great art.

We have just assumed that if you think deeply, you can't help but see the tragedy that is the world and that is the human condition. And if you don't see that tragedy, it's because you are superficial. It takes a lot to overcome that bias, which, I would say, is baked into many cultures.

Paulson: We all know people who just seem naturally happy. Do you think people are born that way?—that they have a genetic predisposition toward it? Or is it something that they have worked at?

Schwartz: There's evidence that approximately half the variation among individuals in happiness—defined as high positive affect, low negative affect—is genetic. About 10%—this is astonishing—is a function of what happens in life. Ten percent; that's minuscule! . . .

Azzarelli: . . . .where you live, who you're married to, that kind of stuff . . . .

Schwartz: . . . whether you get into Harvard or you don't; whether your marriage falls apart or is successful. These seemingly gigantic things/events account for only 10%. The remaining 40% is *how things/events that happen in life are interpreted*. And how interpretations are made, the argument goes, is trainable. You can't change your genes. What happens to you is as much chance as anything else. It's out of your hands. But 40% is a huge amount that one has control over. As just one example, one can, rather than be miserable, be satisfied that 80% of global warming has been eliminated. Another example, by being thrilled that you got into Brown rather that feeling crushed that you didn't get into Harvard.

So, the way in which we construe the things that happen to us—one can learn to do these construals in a helpful-to-one's-own-well-being way or a destructive way—is where most of the action is in the contemporary science of happiness. Cognitive behavior therapy for non-pathological people can move them from 0 to +6.

Paulson: Isn't there another word for this—*resilience*?

Schwartz: Resilience is a part of it . . .

Paulson: . . . .does one obsess over the things that seem to have gone wrong or does one get on with things?

Schwartz: Yes, but resilience is not so much about how one construes bad things that have happened; it's about how one responds to those bad things.

Do you pick yourself up off the mat or do you wallow in misery? Resilient people are people who can experience disappointment and failure and turn up for work the next day and try to get past their obstacles.

Azzarelli: Even resilience requires some level of training; you can train yourself to be resilient. Your point about the 40% is the key. You also have to make a plan; you have to take it seriously.

I was talking to this young kid the other day and he said, "I really gave it a couple days' thought. I'm going to be an athlete. Now I'm committed to it and every day this is what I'm going to do." The same is true with happiness. One has to be committed to a lifestyle. It's not a moment. It's committing to having a cognitive process, where you're training yourself for how you're going to react to things, how you're going to live in the world—what your expectations will be. Setting the right expectations—not thinking you alone are going to stop global warming, but that you can make a contribution. You will do what you can within your own abilities to make a difference for others, and in doing so you will be changing and making a difference for yourself. We need to be realistic about things. Happiness requires effort. It is something that is earned, as was said earlier, and is a by-product of living a life that is tied to a larger arc of meaning or purpose. We talked a little bit about this before, but the media at large is not helping us because we're exporting a vision—a definition of success and happy-face happiness—to the rest of the world. It's setting expectations.

Paulson: I want to come back to this notion that the 40% of our happiness is determined by how we interpret stuff. Is that to say that we have to learn how to tell a story in a good, positive way? Does it boil down to telling a story in a good and positive way?

Schwartz: There's a very fine line that one needs to walk between telling a story—giving an accurate narrative about what has transpired on the one hand—and lying to yourself on the other.

Azzarelli: Being delusional, right.

Schwartz: Rather, it is to tell yourself a *good true* story instead of a bad true story—not to deceive oneself. It's easy enough to imagine, however, that the recipe here is to put positive spin—everybody's favorite word—on stuff no matter how bad the stuff is. But that would be a terrible lesson to draw from what I've said.

Among other things, there are two different kinds of work for people to do in order to be happy. One is the work you do *on yourself*, which is about how you construe. That's important. Much more important, however, is the work that you do *in the world*. That is, are you, in fact, being successful? Are you achieving excellence? Are you cultivating the virtues? And I don't think one gets that on the cheap by telling oneself pretty stories about what a virtuous person one is. You have to *be* virtuous in the world. That's even harder than learning how to construe ambiguous events.

McMahon: There are a lot of virtues that one can learn. Kim mentioned resilience. Optimism can be learned. One can learn to look at the glass as half full rather than half empty. One can learn to be grateful. It's cognitive behavioral training: remind yourself what you have to be thankful for. One can change the frame. Speaking of frames, I love the following study, which looks at the subjective well-being of Olympian athletes who have won a medal. The gold medal members are really happy. The bronze medal winners are really happy. But those poor silver medalists . . . [*audience laughter*]. So reframing how one looks at the world can be helpful.

I will say one more thing. When Barry mentioned the idea of 50% variation based on genetics, he's talking about mood. Some people wake up happy in the morning; others don't. If one has really low affect, there's nothing that virtue can do. For people who've struggled with depression and so forth, this is a horrible thing—none of us here mean to make light of that experience at all. Rather, our message is optimistic, that is, one's happiness is in one's hands! None of us are controlled by our genes entirely. None of us are determined by the fate of our circumstances, either. We can change. But again, it requires a radical rethinking of how we think of happiness: *happiness is not easy*.

Paulson: Isn't happiness ultimately a subjective experience?

Azzarelli: . . . It's a personal, interpretive experience . . . .

Paulson: . . . . I understand that a lot of research has gone into trying to understand what makes people happy. But I'm wondering how far science can go to unpack what makes someone happy.

Schwartz: Subjective experience can be measured in a couple of ways. One way is to ask people, "All things considered, how happy are you?" If enough people are asked enough times, it turns out that, while there's a lot of noise in the data, there's also signal that can be extracted. People answer with many things; for example, income affects happiness. Or one finds difference in happiness of people in different countries, or across history. Even though the measure is full of error, if the question is asked enough times to enough people, the error washes out.

The second way subjective experience can be measured, which is better in a way, is to give people little beepers to walk around with, and every now and then, at random intervals, the beeper beeps and there's a questionnaire asking the person how he/she feels at this minute—say, on a 7-point scale. The data are collected 10 to 12 times a day over weeks and weeks, and a cumulative picture develops of the subjective states of people who are asked the question moment by moment by moment.

These are attempts to tap subjective states with objective measurements that are remarkably reliable. So I do think it makes sense to talk of determining what makes people happy.

But I also want to suggest that if you have Aristotle's notion of *eudaimonia* as the cultivation of excellence, that's not subjective. Are you an excellent flutist? The answer to that question is yes or no. It's not about how you feel about your playing the flute. Rather, it's about whether you are good at it. Or are you a good

basketball player? Are you a good academic? Are you a good teacher? If what determines whether one is in this state of Aristotle's sense of happiness is whether you have cultivated excellence successfully, then you're in just as good a position to judge my excellence as I am—maybe in a better position.

Paulson: I'm wondering if our fellow panelists will agree that there's an objective standard to excellence?

McMahon: One of the reasons that we are driving this so hard is that our culture, for some time now, has moved very far away from that way of thinking. Instead, most people would say, "Yeah, happiness is whatever makes you feel good." John Locke might have put it this way. Some people like lobster. Some people like cheese. Happiness is a warm puppy or a warm gun; it all depends on how you feel. On some level, of course, that's true, and there's tremendous variation between individual temperament and taste.

And yet, what's so exciting about the work that Marty Seligman and Barry and other positive psychologists have done is that they show there are correlations between people who feel happy and the kinds of lives they lead—the kinds of virtues they practice. That notion was thrown out in the 19th century in schools. [*Speaking ironically*] . . . God forbid that I would do character education in my classroom, or tell my students how to live. That's for parents, rabbis, or priests! The only person who does character education in a modern university is the football coach! I'm dead serious. They teach people how to be men . . . .

Paulson: Why is that? That's an interesting question.

McMahon: Well, in part because character education or virtue education got a bad name for good reasons . . . , you can think of eminent Victorian public schools.

But what is exciting is what the scientists are saying. Or, to put it another way, the Buddha got a few things right; and all those rabbis over the years were not talking nonsense. Even Aristotle, who's been written off even though he exerted a profound influence for 2000 years of Western culture, had important things to say about happiness.

To me, this is exciting. In some ways, it's a revolutionary message—that one has to act a particular way in order to be happy.

Azzarelli: I agree 100% with what you're saying—that is our problem. The popular-culture view of happiness is the "happy face." But Darrin and Barry are talking about deep or authentic happiness, which is earned happiness. The only place that I would be careful is when talking about excellence. The word *excellence* in our culture means something like "being great at something." But then we're back to the definition of happiness being tied to "success."

The practice of virtue in daily life—going out and being virtuous—that is where you're going to find the happiness that we're talking about. If popular culture uses the excellence standard, then they're likely to say that I'm not ever going to be excellent at anything. Then it's back to the curse of high expectations—where I could never be a philharmonic flutist.

We have to be careful, too, about what we're saying about the pursuit of happiness. It is more about lived virtues, as you're talking about. *Virtue* is a word that's not used that much in our culture right now. Maybe you want to expound on what that means—the concept of going out and becoming the best version of oneself—of helping others, for example. In Buddhism, Christianity, and Judaism, everyone thinks that's a good idea. Knowing that this concept has been empirically tied to a happier, well-lived life is something that our culture needs to hear. We're so focused on self, self, self—it's not because we're selfish, it's because that's how the culture has evolved, and that's what we're being sold. We're being sold happiness as need reduction, but my point is that it's empirical that need reduction is not going to bring lasting happiness. The well-lived life probably will.

Schwatz: It's interesting. You said that *virtue* is a term that is not in common usage these days. I think that's right. When Seligman was developing his framework for studying positive psychology, he avoided the use of virtue and he talked instead about *strengths.* The reason he did is because *strength* is morally neutral. *Virtue* is morally laden.

The idea is that if one is *doing* science, it must be value neutral, which is to say, neutral of moral content. For example, you can talk about the *strength* of altruism without necessarily arguing that people *should* be altruistic. One can't be quite so neutral about it if one describes altruism *as a virtue* rather than as a *strength*.

It was a very deliberate decision to demoralize virtues to make them more palatable to the tastes of modern social scientists.

Azzarelli: Not to demoralize them, but change the language so that people wouldn't reject it.

Schwartz: I mean literally "demoralize," in the sense of taking the moral content out. So one is left with just a description, not an evaluation.

Paulson: Does money make us happier?

McMahon: The Latin term for *poor* is *miser*. That gives us *miserable*. The Romans knew that to be poor sucks. Money *does* make us happier, it turns out. People can romanticize it, but, as Barry will tell you, you need money to be happy. Aristotle recognized this as well. Happiness is a luxury. You only can worry about your happiness when you've taken care of the basics.

And yet, it turns out you don't need as much money as you might think to be happy. There are diminishing returns after about $75,000 a year. Is that the way it turns out [*speaking to Schwartz*]?

Schwartz: Yes, the definitive study on that was done by Daniel Kahneman and a colleague named Angus Deaton. It was published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences U.S.A.* in 2010. If you divide happiness into emotional well-being—smiley faces versus frowny faces—on the one hand, and life evaluation on the other hand, what they find is that when it comes to *emotional well-being*, once one makes $70,000 a year, there's no additional bang for the additional bucks.

Paulson: You're talking about Americans . . .

Schwartz: Americans, yes. But it's a very low number for Americans. I would certainly have thought that it didn't plateau at $70,000. You can barely live in a cardboard box in New York on $70,000 a year.

But, when you're talking about *life evaluation*, it does not plateau. How is my life going overall? Richer is better, and the curve doesn't flatten out completely. This is significant because the story used to be told that money doesn't buy happiness, and that looks like maybe that's not totally true. Money seems to buy happiness.

One possible explanation for this is the way we evaluate how life is going. It seems that there is a lack of standards for evaluating how life is going. The gold standard today, the proxy that helps one answer the question How is my life going?, is how much money I am making. It may be that the reason that more money earned brings a more positive evaluation is that the only way we currently have to *know* how one's life is going is by looking at what one's checkbook balance is.

McMahon: And that's cross-cultural. If you look at breakdowns country by country, the wealthier people in a given culture tend to be the happiest. When you look at lists—you've all seen them—the happiest countries in the world tend to be prosperous first world nations—for example, the Scandinavian countries, Canada, and the United States.

Schwartz: Everyone but France . . . [*audience laughter*]

Azzarelli: Again, the nuance of what you're saying is so important, because the takeaway is not that having more money makes you happy. There are diminishing returns after a certain point. It's one's *evaluation* of

what's making one happy that is monetarily based at this point in our culture. It's how we're framing the question.

Paulson: Partly, one of the values of success in America, in particular, is that you're more successful if you make more money.

Azzarelli: But it's being challenged. Recently, there was a challenge as to how Webster's dictionary defines *success*, which according to Webster's is measured in fortune and fame. And people are saying, "No, no, it's life satisfaction—it's contribution; it's how much time I spend with my family." Barry's recent book talks about that.

This is the basis of our research: What brings you satisfaction in your work? What brings you satisfaction in your life? Guess what? It's not just about making more money. It's making a contribution—having impact, having meaning, ascribing something bigger to your life. The research that we came across focused mainly on women, although we interviewed over 70 male and female leaders. What we found is that women tend to want purpose in their work. But it's not just women, but millennials—60% of them—surveyed said that they want their work to have purpose. They're not going to take a job that doesn't have impact.

Paulson: Are you suggesting that purpose is—and we're generalizing wildly here—more important for women than men?

Azzarelli: Between the ages of 35 and 55, the research shows that women want purpose in their work. Sixty-eight percent of Americans feel disengaged from their work—71% of millennials, men and women. It's not just women; men and women want purpose in their work.

It could be also how we're defining success. Sheryl Sandberg put out a great study last week with McKinsey that talks about this 17% stall that women are at. We know that, across the world, women are basically stalled at 16% leadership. This is the case even though women are 50% of the population, graduate more from college—more with graduate degrees, and hold 50% of all management jobs at this point—except the very top. Some call it a glass ceiling; others call it a thick layer of men [*audience laughter*]. But there is the 16%–17% issue. What Sheryl reported last week is that women are not that happy when they get there.

What we're finding is that if women can use their power for purpose, they get more job satisfaction.

Schwartz: I certainly don't know whether there's a gender difference. I can't speak to whether there's a generational difference. My impression is that, at least for now, millennials will not tolerate work that's pointless, even if they are well paid to do it. If you want to hire talented millennials, you're going to have to find a way of making the work they do important—or pointing out if it is important, taking pains to point out why it's important, and how it's important, because these people want to have an impact in the world. They seem willing—as long as mom and dad are going to pay their college loans off—to sacrifice material success for the psychological and moral success that comes with knowing the world is a better place because of something that they did yesterday.

Whether this will last as they accumulate the responsibilities of middle age, like mortgages and kids, remains to be seen. At least at the moment, they won't settle for the things their parents were more than happy to settle for. That bodes very well for the collective well-being of the generation as it moves into middle age. If they hang onto this value, they will be happier people than their parents.

Paulson: Do we have a sense of whether all the technology that's at our fingertips now, especially our electronic screens, is making us happier or less happy?

McMahon: There's quite a lot of research on this now. We know that people who describe themselves as happy or very happy have good social networks—they have friends, good marriages, and good relationships. Again, not so surprising, but it's true. And so one might think that having 1000 friends on Facebook would increase well-being. It turns out, however, that it doesn't at all. That should tell you something.

Schwartz: I think all the technology is bad [*audience laughter*]—for a couple of reasons.

One is that people don't post on Facebook such things as, "I got up. I brushed my teeth. I made myself coffee. Some coffee grounds got stuck in the cup. I went to work. The subway was late. It was crowded. I couldn't get a seat. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah . . . , I went through the day and I came home." This is not what people put on their walls, at least I don't think that's what most people do. Instead, they put up on their walls the best days they have. And when you look at their walls and you compare your average day to their day, you can't help but conclude, "My life sucks. What's wrong with me?" [*audience laughter*]. In other words, we have an insistent comparison to a social standard that's completely nonrepresentative—except that you don't know that it's nonrepresentative unless you talk yourself through it. That's one problem.

The second problem is, I think—and Aristotle thought and I believe my co-panelists think—it takes work, persistence, and struggling through difficulties to achieve the kind of excellence that will lead one to judge oneself to be happy. In contrast, ours is a culture, thanks in no small part to digital media, that expects instant gratification. People get bored after 15 seconds looking at a screen. This is not the sort of thing that will encourage people to persist in the face of real difficulties and push their way through the difficulties to reach a different level of achievement in academic work, music, their relations to other people, whatever it is. We're basically creating people who lack the discipline to stay with it through hard times. I could be wrong about that.

Paulson: Does anyone want to take issue with Barry's assessment?

Azzarelli: I do. But I agree with what he's saying about the assembled, perfect life—we celebrate success in our society; that's all we celebrate. We don't see failure. Everything negative is edited out of our "white picket fence" world. On Facebook, you see pictures of everyone looking rosy and happy.

However, we need to start celebrating failure—we need to have failure parties . . . . Instead, we are always celebrating successes. As a result, people feel bad about themselves, because they're failing—they're not succeeding.

Frankly, most of life is about failure and learning—fail, succeed, fail. People in technology fields are those who want to fail the fastest. Because they know if they fail fast, they're going to learn fast, and then they're going to beat the competition. So having these failure parties is a great idea.

Second, I don't think technology is the problem. Indeed, technology is freeing us—I can speak for the half of the population that I have done research on, women. Technology is a great thing because in the hands of women it creates huge opportunity around the world. It's creating opportunity to partner across socioeconomic strata, across geographies. Women leaders are doing incredible things, and the only way we can get that done is through technology. I love technology if put to the right use.

Geena Davis has an institute called SeeJane.org. She studies the media as it relates to gender—it turns out that in crowd scenes in movies, even though women are 50% of the population, they are only 17% of crowd scenes in films. So we're used to seeing 17% as normal. We know that girls, when they watch TV, get less confident and boys get more confident. The content that we are consuming or being fed through technology is the issue, not the technology itself. One of the keys to having a successful happy life is to have a discipline about what one lets into one's thinking and what shapes expectations, to exclude thoughts such as, "Wait a second. I don't have a white picket fence. I don't have two dogs, so I'm definitely a failure." Instead, one should say, "Wait a second. What is my definition of success? What is my purpose?"

That is what I found through our research and through my life experience. It's not the technology that's bad, it's what we are consuming *through* the technology. And it's up to each of us to be vigilant every single moment to protect our thinking, otherwise we're just going to fall into the negative-thinking trap that is so prevalent.

McMahon: There's one other aspect of this, too, that may be troubling. The pursuit of happiness emerges in Western, and indeed in world, history as the attainable goal of increasing numbers of human beings. For example, discussion occurs of a *right to happiness.* I love to point out that even though the U.S. Declaration of Independence only talks about a right to *pursue* happiness, a number of the state constitutions—Virginia,

Vermont, and others—have a right to *obtain* happiness, which led to all kinds of legal trouble in the 19th century—for example, suing the government because you're not happy.

So, there was a dramatic shift in what people expected from life. On the one hand, they're taught they don't have to suffer as a matter of course; they're not inherent sinners. Happiness is within our capacity, we can realize it, and we can make a better world. What begins to happen in the 18th century, and our technology has only accelerated this, is that happiness becomes *equated* with a successful life; thus, if you're not happy, you've somehow failed. This adds a further dimension to misery: the unhappiness of not being happy. I see this with my students. It's not just Facebook—magazines at the grocery store only show movie stars smiling, for example. And while deep down we might truly believe that these people are actually miserable, they *seem* happy in the pictures. We're bombarded with similar images on a global scale. That can make anyone feel less than average.

Azzarelli: Didn't you [*motioning toward Schwartz*] use the phrase, "keeping up with the Gateses"?

Schwartz: I don't remember using that phrase, but the joke here is that a high salary is $100 more a year than your wife's brother-in-law makes.

Yeah, we're always trying to keep up with something. It's very hard to maintain internal standards of what counts as excellent. What we rely on is comparing ourselves to other people. That's not intrinsically unfortunate, actually. For example, if you compare yourself to other people who have it better than you, it may give you something to aspire to; and if you compare yourself to other people who have it worse than you, it'll give you something to be grateful for. It looks like people are built mostly to do *upward* comparisons and focus on what other people have that they don't. The downward comparisons—what they have that other people don't—doesn't have the impact on them that the upward comparisons do. The more we compare ourselves to other people, the more we focus on the ways in which we're falling short, and that's not a recipe for satisfaction.

Paulson: In a couple of minutes, I want to throw our discussion to the audience, but before I do that, I have a personal question for each of you. All of you have been looking at these questions for years: What makes people happy? What makes you happy? Have you changed anything in your own life, given what you have learned? Darrin?

McMahon: First of all, people who write books about happiness aren't usually very happy. [*Joking*] This is a trade secret. When people say, "I have the secret to happiness," run away.

However, I feel that, over time, I got happiness out of my system, as it were. What I mean by that is that despite what we have been saying about the merits of cultivating virtues in order to be happy, dwelling on happiness, or possible ways of being happy all the time, is a little bit like lying in bed at night saying, "I've got to fall asleep. I've got to fall asleep. I've got to fall asleep." It eludes you. There are all kinds of parables about this.

And so I found that the best way to pursue happiness is to pursue other things. Cultivating those things is a way to have happiness by the by, or indirectly. That's my nugget of wisdom.

Paulson: Kim?

Azzarelli: I would go back to what has been said about Aristotle. In my experience, it's about having a larger arc of purpose, and that includes making a contribution and getting outside of yourself. You can transform your life; happiness is not, however, a simple thing. As you said, it requires work; you have to think about it—you need to have a cognitive approach to it, and then you need to act on it.

Paulson: Was there a moment or an experience that pushed you in that direction?

Azzarelli: Yes, briefly, when I was in college, I felt that if I was going to be in this world, I wanted to be useful in some way—it was something that haunted me. I *knew* that there had to be something more. It couldn't just be about hanging out at parties, and shopping, and getting a great job . . . . I thought, "Really? Is this it?" I thought there had to be something more.

What I have found since college is that the push comes from having a larger arc of purpose. There's great quote in my book from Dr. Ebby Elahi, along the lines of, "If you view your life through the lens of a larger purpose, you create a larger arc for your life, where the day-to-day ups and downs of life become dusty storms on the road of your larger journey." It's been about trying to have active thinking—reframing your thinking every day. It takes work, as Barry was saying. But what we have heard today is that it is what distinguishes a life well lived. What I find is that the more you work at it, the more you develop the tools and the skills. I stay away from the word *happiness*—I thought about it a lot for this panel. The construct of *meaning* is more appropriate for our culture—having meaning and having a larger purpose. It's asking Why am I here?, How should I spend my time?, and How is my life best lived? Whether it's helping other people or taking care of your family—this approach has changed my whole way of living. I have given up lots of things that others might have thought would equate to "success" because I knew those things weren't going to do it for me. This is how I've been trying to define and live my life, and it's an everyday practice.

Paulson: Barry, what about you?

Schwartz: No one's going to believe what I'm about to say, but it's true nonetheless.

I don't think I have asked myself whether I was happy once in my entire life. I ask myself many questions about what is worth doing and not, but I never queried my happiness. It wasn't on my radar screen until my kids reached adolescence, and then they suddenly became similar to the students I was teaching. I saw lots of college students who had every imaginable privilege and yet they were miserable. And I came to realize that you can't take happiness for granted. My kids, who also had every possible privilege, could also be miserable. I started being obsessed with what we, my wife and I, could do to make it so when they hit adulthood they could be happy.

Until that period in their lives, I don't think I had a single personal thought about happiness. It just was not relevant about any decisions I made about anything.

Paulson: Did you change anything with that realization?

Schwartz: No, because what was there to change? I thought that what I was doing was worthwhile . . .

McMahon: You were miserable . . .

Schwartz: . . . I wasn't miserable—I wasn't [*panelist laughter*]. I was good at what I did. I thought it was worthwhile. I thought that I impacted lives in a positive way. Why would I change it? If I would go through weeks and months where I had a frown on my face, who cared? What does that have to do with anything? Really, it was the concern for the well-being of my children that made this a salient thing, because I didn't think it was so important for me, but they sure as hell thought it was important for them. I wanted to do what I could to enable them to find happiness.

As I say, it's almost impossible even for me to believe as I say it, even though it's true.

Paulson: Okay, let's throw it open to the audience for questions.

Audience member 1: It seems that happiness is a by-product of other things and not a goal in itself. But what about unhappiness—is it just the opposite of happiness?

Schwartz: We mostly agree with you about happiness being a by-product of something else. That's what we've been trying to suggest. Although we may not totally agree with one another about what the something else is, there is a something else.

The one thing I can tell you about looking at happiness through the lens of unhappiness is that, oddly enough, positive emotion and negative emotion are not negatively correlated. They're independent. What that means is that it's not the case that if you have a lot of positive emotion, you don't have a lot of negative emotion. You can have a lot of both. What that suggests is that they aren't flip sides of one another. I can cultivate positive emotion without moving the needle at all on negative emotion. That's the only thing I can think of that speaks to the question of whether they're in some ways mirror images.

Paulson: Can you explain that? How do we have both of those at the same time?

Schwartz: This comes from experience sampling, when asking people how much positive emotion they are experiencing and how much negative emotion. People are capable of simultaneously being happy and miserable. "I'm happy because I'm on vacation on the beach and it's a beautiful sunny day; and I'm miserable because I tried to pick up a woman and she rebuffed me." So the person is simultaneously happy and unhappy. That's not an uncommon state.

My intuition is that, the more you increase people's positive emotion, automatically the more you would be decreasing their negative emotion. That seems not to be the case, however. Other than that, I have nothing else to contribute to answering that question.

McMahon: Historically, happiness and unhappiness are bound up with one another. That's always part of the frame. There's a longer explanation there.

It took me six years of writing a book for me to understand what you just told me [*looking at Barry Schwartz*] .... [*laughter*]

Audience member 2: One research study showed that after a few months, lottery winners weren't any happier than people who had been paralyzed by an accident. Can you comment on "manufactured happiness?"

Schwartz: That's a famous study that was done a long time ago. It isn't quite as dramatic as you described it. For the sake of accuracy, the study included people who had won $50,000 prizes or more, which in those days was real money; the people were ecstatic immediately after they had won the lottery. These folks were compared to people who were miserable immediately after they had become paralyzed. What happened is that both groups adapted to their circumstances. They adapted to the good stuff—the money—and then moved back to baseline, the emotional state before winning; or they adapted to the bad stuff—the paralysis—and they moved back to their baseline. A few months out, the lottery winners were only a tiny bit happier than a control group, and the paralyzed people were only a tiny bit unhappier than a control group. So, basically, the good or bad difference had almost completely gone away.

One thing this tells us is that whatever it is that winning the lottery is doing, it's not making people happy indefinitely.

Paulson: Haven't we often heard that if you track that out after a few more years, people who win lotteries are often considerably unhappy?

Schwartz: Yes, because winning the lottery has an effect on social relationships. All of a sudden everybody's your best friend and everybody wants something from you. It screws up lives. In addition to getting used to having the money, it wrecks close relationships, or many of the close relationships one has with other people.

Azzarelli: I'm trying to think of another way to express happiness. Maybe *life satisfaction* is better. One can talk about being unhappy and being happy, these are emotional states—we may be constantly in flux. I

think about the bar exam, the least happy period of my life, but I was willing to do it because I had a larger goal. And I would do it again, because of the life satisfaction it brought.

I don't want to leave people thinking that achievement and success necessarily equal happiness. What I'm trying to say is that the definition of true happiness is different from the smiley face. It's more about life satisfaction. And to get that, it's not necessarily about achievement and success; it's about the journey and experiencing life.

McMahon: That word *success* means a lot of things in our culture, and I don't think we've been talking about conventional success. I absolutely take your point that we live in a world of manufactured happiness. We have an entertainment industry that's designed to entertain us. Disneyland is the place where happiness lives. There you find images of happy people bought on the cheap. Our culture sends that message all the time—that it's easy to get happiness.

Schwartz: Just to sound one small note of disagreement. I do think that happiness is a success term. It's not just about the journey; it's also about the destination. There can be more than one definition of what counts as success. There's a saying, "God loveth adverbs." It doesn't matter where you get to, it's the spirit with which you engage in whatever you're engaging in.

People want to make progress toward some meaningful end point. If all one does is love the journey and go round in circles, then that's certainly not a life well lived.

Azzarelli: I agree with you. Again, I'm focused on *power* and *purpose*, the subtitle of my book [*laughter*]. One needs to have a goal. It's not just about traveling this endless journey and exploring things.

Paulson: Isn't there something even more specific than that, which often makes us feel good and happy, that is a sense of *mastery*?

Azzarelli: That's a different question. What I was getting at was a definition of purpose and having success. And I am bringing the discussion back to gender for a second. As women are getting into positions of power, they are redefining what success means. And in a way, the millennials are demanding this of us. The American definition of success needs to be evolving.

There's a pleasure in mastery too, yes. But this can't be pinned to just one experience. It's about going toward a goal, a worthy goal, and doing work on the journey to that goal. Sometimes you're happy and sometimes you're not happy, but you can have life satisfaction if you are moving toward your goal.

Schwartz: But notice, *worthy* is an adjective. That means it's not mastery, per se, it's mastery of things *that are worth mastering.* Being the best tic-tac-toe player in the world—really putting all your heart and soul into playing perfect tic-tac-toe—that seems to me to be a kind of mastery that is not worth pursuing.

McMahon: But that's you, right? . . . I agree with what you're saying, but that is your personal view, right? . . .

Schwartz: I think *objectively*, this is a life misspent.

McMahon: I'm going to push back a little bit because of Marty Seligman's PERMA . . . What was the acronym? . . . .

Schwartz: Positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment/achievement.

McMahon: This is from Marty Seligman, the godfather of positive psychology. I've heard Marty argue that, by his own criteria, Osama bin Laden was a happy man. He had purpose. He had a huge social network.

He had meaning in his life, and so forth. We laugh at that, but by those criteria, bin Laden may have been happy.

Azzarelli: I like Marty's definition where he says to use your signature strengths for something larger than yourself. That, to me, makes sense.

Schwartz: There are two different issues. One is the pursuit of the trivial and the other is the pursuit of evil. The pursuit of the trivial, I have an easier time defending as a life misspent. The pursuit of evil is more challenging. People ask, Could Hitler have been a happy person? Was he pursuing excellence? Aristotle would have said *no,* unequivocally, because Hitler wasn't cultivating all of the virtues; he was cultivating only some of them, and he was deforming others. By Seligman's criteria, I'm not sure you could come to the conclusion that Hitler's life was a failure or that Osama bin Laden's life was a failure. That raises real problems, since mostly we like to believe that you can't be happy doing miserable things to the world. If you can, then we have the wrong understanding of what happiness means.

Azzarelli: Or the person might be delusional. That's a whole other question . . .

Schwartz: Then we say, "You think you're happy but you're really not." People have a lot of trouble with that . . .

Audience member 3: Does it make sense to look at the pursuit of happiness as a progression from satisfying basic carnal desires to higher needs like self-fulfillment?

Schwartz: It does, and the Utilitarians acknowledged, although it didn't quite fit into their formal notions about what Utilitarianism was, that there are higher and lower pleasures. Far be it for me to tell you what to do, but some pleasures are better than others.

McMahon: The Utilitarians didn't, Barry . . .

Schwartz: They didn't? Mill didn't? . . .

McMahon: John Stuart Mill did, yes . . . sorry, historical banter . . .

Schwartz: Mill certainly had the notion that some pleasures were better than others—in other words, that some things were worth pursuing more than others. He would say, probably, that this spiral you're talking about isn't automatic, but, to the extent that it happens, what it's doing is enabling people to pursue the things that are worth pursuing by virtue of our humanness.

Azzarelli: Maybe you can talk about Maslow [*looking toward McMahon*].

Schwartz: This was Maslow's view. There's no evidence that Maslow was right, but it's so deeply penetrated into our self-understanding. Maslow was a psychologist in the 1950s. He created a hierarchy; we all think in those terms without necessarily ever having heard of Maslow. It's permeated the culture in the absence of any evidence. It's so plausible.

Audience member 4: Do we need to reconstrue the commonly accepted definition of happiness (bad faith happiness) in order to achieve a more authentic happiness?

Schwartz: That's a terrific question. The person who wrote about this, the person who's done the most along these lines, is a psychologist named Sonya Lyubomirsky. She's got a book called *The How of Happiness*,

and her next book was *The Myths of Happiness*. She's got the 50%/10%/40% formula. She thinks people should use tools to make themselves as happy as possible. The notion of bad faith happiness that you're talking about has no place in her framework. There's just happiness—a subjective state. Use the tools and you'll be happier. Maybe this is not the right way to think about this—the construal process could become an act of self-deception, which may make you walk around with a smile on your face, and not make you happy in the sense that the three of us have been trying to articulate tonight.

Azzarelli: I may have understood your question a little bit differently. I do think it's that personal, interpretive process. We need to challenge what we accept as the definition of happiness and success. The 40% is, from what I understand, to be self-actualization and development, physical health, and then helping others. Those are three things that you can, for the most part, control. The whole idea of your own development is within your ability. Developing your frame of reference yourself, and the self-actualization concept that you were talking about is really important.

Audience member 5: If it's true that you're only as happy as your unhappiest child, then don't we have less control over our happiness than has been suggested?

Schwartz: In my experience, an unhappy child is like a toothache. When you have a bad toothache, the entire universe has now concentrated itself on your tooth. My experience when our kids were unhappy was that nothing else in the world mattered.

McMahon: I'm glad you brought this up. There are wonderful data. As we mentioned, Dan Gilbert is a great psychologist at Harvard. Dan and others have done work to show that people's self-reported happiness goes down when children come into the picture, and only goes back to baseline when children leave [*significant audience laughter*]. I have two young kids and that makes some sense to me! This ties in perfectly with what Kim says. Not everything you do in life has to give you pleasure to give you meaning, to give you purpose, to give you satisfaction. Just as athletes train, train, train and then suffer in order to achieve goals, having children entails a lot of suffering, but, boy, there's a big payoff. We shouldn't stop having children just because it doesn't make us happy all the time.

Audience member 6: How reliable are self-reports of happiness? Do they correlate with third-person assessments?

Schwartz: That's a great question. I mentioned some of this before. First, there's a lot of noise in first-person subjective reports, a lot of variability that's unexplainable. If you ask a lot of people, and you ask the same people over and over again, you can reduce the noise and extract the real answer (signal). Second, the judgments of happiness you get from self-reports, looking back on some period in the past, correlate highly with the judgments of happiness you get when people get beeped and asked, "How do you feel right now?" Third, they correlate highly with third-person reports about how happy your friend is, or your sibling or your spouse.

So these three sources of data are difficult to interpret unambiguously, but they seem to converge on a common picture for any given individual, suggesting that we can measure something real and even that we're measuring the thing we think we're measuring. But can we get it better? Probably. People keep trying to refine measurement techniques because it's not easy to get objective measurements of subjective states.

Audience member 7: What are some practical steps I can take to increase my happiness?

Schwartz: One, do more stuff for other people; there's no question that the payoff for the things you do for other people is much greater than the things you do for yourself. Two, spend your time and resources on *doing* things rather than *owning* things. This didn't come up in our discussion, but there's a fair amount of evidence to show that we get much more satisfaction out of activities than we do out of possessions. The

reason, almost certainly, is that activities tend to occur as part of social groups in a way that possessions don't. It's the social nature of activities that gives them the extra bang for the buck. Do stuff, don't buy stuff. This is very un-American. I apologize [*audience laughter*].

McMahon: [*joking*] Well, you can buy stuff to do stuff, right? [*laughter*]

Schwartz: [*smiling*] Yes you can buy stuff to do stuff. And again, there is not a clear bright line between having and doing—it's fuzzy.

Third, see how you can invest the work you do—which is half of your waking life—with meaning and purpose. You want to feel eager to go to work every day, not reluctant to go to work every day. To some degree, you may have to change the work or change the way you *construe* and *think* about the work. You may have some power to turn a bad job into a good one without the job changing its character at all. It's possible. That's my quick and dirty list.

Paulson: Okay, practical tips from either of our other panelists?

Azzarelli: I agree with number one, certainly. Go help—back to Gilbert, volunteer at a homeless shelter; you may not help the homeless but you're definitely going to help yourself. That, for one, definitely helps other people.

What Barry said about finding meaning in your work is what my whole book is about—trying to infuse your work with purpose. The third thing, which is important, is framing your own perspective—recognizing what you're valuing and what you're comparing yourself to, and expanding that perspective to be objective about the world and objective about yourself. We talk about the concept that each of us has individual strengths. We may not feel we're powerful. We may not be the CEO, but you don't need to be the CEO to have power. You have to understand your own strengths and your own unique combination of strengths. You can use that for something bigger than yourself; that is what Marty Seligman says is the meaningful life. Fighting every day, training every day to reframe your perspective in such a way that you become that "marathon runner" and shape your reality. You can choose to be a more grateful person; you choose to have a more meaningful life. That's the 40%—the 40% is within your power, so why not choose to be happy?

Paulson: Darrin?

McMahon: Barry and Kim have taken all the good ones from the list, but there are a couple left. I teach a big course on happiness, and I have the students act out some of these things. They perform random acts of kindness. One of my students put change in people's parking meters, for example, which is great. All these things work.

I would add to the list, express *thanks*, *forgive*, express *gratitude*. Those are all good things for you. Whether the person deserves forgiveness or not—doesn't matter. It will help you. Cultivate hope—not fantasy, but hope. It gives one power. Do all those things as often as you can *with* other people. The terrible thing about depression is that, when you're depressed, you withdrawal from the world, which just exacerbates the problem. Other people are a huge resource to encourage happiness. Robert Putnam at Harvard has written about the character of modern American life, particularly for men and high-achieving men. They don't have bowling clubs anymore; they don't do things in groups in the way they once did. But, having a day out with the guys can be such a powerful thing. The effects of that can last for a week or two, or three. If you weave being with people more into the fabric of your life, it will increase your happiness.

Paulson: We could go on but we are out of time. Thank you so much and thanks to our wonderful panelists.

Acknowledgments

Steve Paulson, executive producer and one of the founders of *To the Best of Our Knowledge*, moderated the panel of experts. The preceding is an edited transcript of the discussion from October 8, 2015, 7:00 PM–8:30 PM, at the New York Academy of Sciences in New York City.

References for further reading

Haidt, J. 2006. *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom*. New York: Basic Books.

Lyubomirsky, S. 2014. *The Myths of Happiness: What Should Make You Happy, but Doesn't, What Shouldn't Make You Happy, but Does.* New York: Penguin Books.

Lyubomirsky, S. 2008. *The How of Happiness: A New Approach to Getting the Life You Want*. New York: Penguin Books.

McMahon, D.M. 2013. *Divine Fury: A History of Genius.* New York: Basic Books.

McMahon, D.M. 2005. *Happiness: A History.* New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.

Schwartz, B. 2015. *Why We Work.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Schwartz, B. 2004. *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less.* New York: Harper Perennial.

Schwartz, B. & K. Sharpe. 2011. *Practical Wisdom: The Right Way to Do the Right Thing.* New York: Riverhead Books.

Seligman, M.E.P. 2004. *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment*. New York: Atria Books.

Verveer, M. & K. Azzarelli. 2015. *Fast Forward: How Women Can Achieve Power and Purpose.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.