



UNIVERSITÄT
BAYREUTH

Welfare

Ethics

University of Bayreuth, Summer 2025

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2 Today

- I. Mental-State Theories
- II. Preference-Satisfaction Theories
- III. Objective-List Theories
- IV. Combining Theories?
- V. Welfare in Economics and Happiness Research

3 What is Welfare?

- A diversity of labels: welfare, well-being, happiness, prudential value, good life, utility, eudaimonia, flourishing, meaningfulness
- **Welfare** = what makes someone's life go well for that person
 - “for that person” ≠ “from that person's perspective”
Someone's life might not be going well even if they do not know it (or inverse)
 - “what makes a life go well” ≠ what makes someone a good person
Example: the happy torturer
 - “go well” ≠ what makes someone's life upright, or morally valuable to others
Example: the unhappy altruist
- We are looking for a **general theory** of what welfare is

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Mental-State Theories

5 Mental-State Theories

Mental-state theories of welfare. Welfare is experiencing positive mental states, and not experiencing negative mental states.

The most prominent mental-state theory is

(Ethical) Hedonism. Welfare is the presence of pleasure and the absence of pain.

Hedonism is **not** an empirical claim about how people act:

Psychological Hedonism. People are (only) motivated by the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain.

Many ethical hedonists were also psychological hedonists (e.g., Bentham). But the two positions are independent.

6 Hedonism

Hedonism. Welfare is the presence of pleasure and the absence of pain.

- The hedonist need not be a **sensualist** and only care about bodily pleasure
 - Many satisfying long-term sources of pleasure might be intellectually complex endeavours
- The clever quantitative hedonist will seek the greatest amount of pleasure *over the long run*; we must not confuse hedonists with short-term pleasure seekers
 - Example: climbing Mt Everest

7 Qualitative vs Quantitative Hedonism

- **Quantitative Hedonism:** pleasures and pains are only distinguished by their duration and intensity
 - “poetry is no better than pushpin” (Bentham)
 - Intellectual pursuits could be better than non-intellectual pursuits, but this would be because of their intensity, duration, reliability etc.
- **Qualitative Hedonism** (J. S. Mill): pleasures and pains can also be distinguished by their quality
 - Informed Observer Test: informed observers would always prefer pleasures of one type (“higher” pleasures) over pleasures of another type (“lower” pleasures)
 - In particular, informed observers would always prefer exercising the intellectual capacities

8 Problems for Qualitative Hedonism

- Problems with the Observer Test
 - If “informed” = “has experienced both pleasures”: empirically, it seems there is little consensus; some people prefer exercising non-intellectual capacities
 - If “informed” = “has experienced both pleasures and fulfils important cognitive demands”: threatens to make theory elitist; general problems with idealisation
- Collapse Objection (Moore, Pritchard, Sidgwick)
 - If higher pleasures are distinguished from lower pleasures by their intensity or duration, then qualitative hedonism collapses into quantitative hedonism
 - If higher pleasures are distinguished from lower pleasures by some other factor, then qualitative hedonism is no longer a form of hedonism

9 Nozick's Experience Machine

Experience Machine/Matrix*. Neo is hooked into a sophisticated, reliable machine simulating a perfect life: it contains every pleasurable experience Neo wishes for.

Truman Show. Truman lives a happy life in an idyllic town. Unbeknownst to him, he is the protagonist of a TV show; all of his relationships and achievements are fake.

- If we only care about mental states, then both Neo and Truman live perfect lives
- Nozick objects: someone like Neo or Truman does **not** live a good life (or at least, their lives are not as good as their subjective experiences suggest)

*) In *The Matrix*, Neo's simulated life seems quite grim. But life in Nozick's experience machine is perfect.

Discussion

1. What could the hedonist say in response to the Matrix and Truman Show examples?
2. What speaks in favour of hedonism?

Preference-Satisfaction Theories

12 Preference-Satisfaction Theories of Welfare

Preference-satisfaction theories of welfare. Welfare is the fulfillment of preferences.

- A preference is a desire that the world be in a certain way
 - E.g., I have a desire to have ice cream (i.e., a preference to possess and eat ice cream)
- The fulfillment of a preference is the world being that way
 - E.g., my desire for ice cream is fulfilled if I possess and eat ice cream
- Our preferences come in different strengths
 - E.g., my desire for vanilla ice cream is twice the strength as my desire for chocolate ice cream

13 Preference Satisfaction and the Experience Machine

- How do preference-satisfaction theories avoid Experience Machine objections?
 - Truman desires to have a friendship with Marlon; but that desire is unfulfilled, because Marlon is *not* actually his friend, but an actor pretending to be his friend
 - If Truman merely had the preference to have *the experience of* friendship, then this preference would be fulfilled. But Truman is unlikely to have (only) this preference.
 - Similar remarks apply to Neo
- On preference-satisfaction theories, it does not merely matter that we *experience* things to be a certain way, but that the world *actually is* that way

14 Objections (I): Unendorsed Preferences

- We might have a desire to do something but dislike having that desire:
ADDICT. Anthony feels an intense desire to take heroin. However, taking the drug has little impact on the rest of his life. Anthony takes little pleasure in taking the heroin, but if he stopped taking it, he would have severe withdrawal symptoms. He would prefer not to be addicted to heroin.
- On a simple preference-satisfaction theory, we would need to say that taking heroin improves Anthony's welfare
 - If taking heroin has other effects on Anthony's life that he does not desire, then that would take away from his welfare; but we have assumed this away
- A possible solution: higher-order desires
 - Anthony desires to take heroin, but he does not desire to have the desire to take heroin
 - We might then say: **Welfare is the fulfillment of preferences *that we prefer to have***

15 Objections (II): Pointless Preferences

- We might have preferences that seem odd and pointless:
 SQUIRREL NAMER. Bert finds no satisfaction in art, culture, career, socializing, food, sex, and so on. Instead, his only strong preference is to catalogue and name all the squirrels in town.
- We can imagine that the desire to count squirrels is not addictive: Bert has a higher-order desire to have this desire
- Perhaps we wish to amend the preference-satisfaction theory as follows,
 Welfare is the fulfillment of preferences that we would still have after **thorough reflection**—if we had more information, if we knew all the options open to us, etc.
- Our judgment about Squirrel Namer would then depend on whether Bert's preference to count squirrels survives thorough reflection

16 Objections (III): Unknown Preference Fulfilment

- Our preferences might be fulfilled, but we might not know about it
 - **ESTRANGED.** Cecilia is the mother of adult children. Her main wish in life is that her children do well. Unfortunately, Cecilia's children live far away, and she does not know anything about their lives. Her childrens' lives are in fact going well, but Cecilia does not know it.
- According to preference-fulfilment theory, Cecilia's welfare is increased by her children doing well, even though she does not know about this
- We might attempt to fix preference-satisfaction theories by including an accessibility criterion
 - Accessibility: we either know, or could easily come to know, whether something is the case
 - For example, we might say: **Welfare is the known fulfillment of preferences.**

Discussion

Consider the following case of **adaptive preferences**,

Patriarchy. Reza has grown up in a society with patriarchal norms which expect her to be a servant to her husband and male family members. She is not expected to have any ambitions or desires for herself. Reza has internalised these expectations: her only desire is to serve her husband and male family members.

What can the defender of the preference-satisfaction theory say about this case?

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Objective Theories

19 Objective vs Subjective Theories

- Both mental-state and preference-satisfaction theories are **subjective** theories
 - Whether something promotes my welfare is purely a function of the mental states or preferences of the individual
 - Mental states/preferences are not judged according to any external standard, or whether they are for good or bad things
- Examples
 - Egoist.** Emile does not care about other people. He only takes pleasure in his own pursuits.
 - Sadist.** Ferb takes great pleasure in, and has a strong desire for, other people suffering.
- **Important:** subjective theories do **not** say that it is morally right or good to be or act like an egoist or sadist. They merely say that the lives of the successful egoist and sadist go well *for* those people.

20 Objective Theories of Welfare

Objective theories of welfare. Welfare is the possession of objectively, intrinsically valuable goods.

- These theories are also often called **objective list theories**, because we might think the objective goods come as a list
- Intrinsically valuable = Valuable for its own sake
- Some of the goods could be mental states or the fulfilment of preferences!

21 Nussbaum's List of Capabilities

1. **Life** – Able to live to the end of a normal length human life, and to not have one's life reduced to not worth living.

2. **Bodily Health** – Able to have a good life which includes (but is not limited to) reproductive health, nourishment and shelter.

3. **Bodily Integrity** – Able to change locations freely, in addition to, having sovereignty over one's body which includes being secure against assault (for example, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, domestic violence and the opportunity for sexual satisfaction).

4. **Senses, Imagination and Thought** – Able to use one's senses to imagine, think and reason in a 'truly human way'—informed by an adequate education. Furthermore, the ability to produce self-expressive works and engage in religious rituals without fear of political ramifications. The ability to have pleasurable experiences and avoid unnecessary pain. Finally, the ability to seek the meaning of life.

5. **Emotions** – Able to have attachments to things outside of ourselves; this includes being able to love others, grieve at the loss of loved ones and be angry when it is justified.

6. **Practical Reason** – Able to form a conception of the good and critically reflect on it.

7. Affiliation

A. Able to live with and show concern for others, empathize with (and show compassion for) others and the capability of justice and friendship. Institutions help develop and protect forms of affiliation.

B. Able to have self-respect and not be humiliated by others, that is, being treated with dignity and equal worth. This entails (at the very least) protections of being discriminated on the basis of race, sex, sexuality, religion, caste, ethnicity and nationality. In work, this means entering relationships of mutual recognition.

8. **Other Species** – Able to have concern for and live with other animals, plants and the environment at large.

9. **Play** – Able to laugh, play and enjoy recreational activities.

10. Control over One's Environment

A. Political – Able to effectively participate in the political life which includes having the right to free speech and association.

B. Material – Able to own property, not just formally, but materially (that is, as a real opportunity). Furthermore, having the ability to seek employment on an equal basis as others, and the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure

22 Problems for Objective-List Theories

- We need a list which is not ad hoc
- General problem of identifying objective goods
 - More on this on lectures on metaethics
- Objections from cultural imperialism
- Lack of connection
 - Example: Having objective goods but not appreciating them

Combining Theories

24 Overview

	What the theory gets right	What the theory gets wrong
Mental State Theories	We experience our lives, and how it subjectively feels is important to our welfare	Welfare is not only “in the mind”—what happens in the world also matters
Preference Satisfaction Theories	Individuals are active choosers of their lives—they determine what makes their life go well	Not everything you want is good for you
Objective List Theories	There are some objective goods out there, whether we acknowledge them or not	For something to make your life better, it must engage you: it must have some impact on you

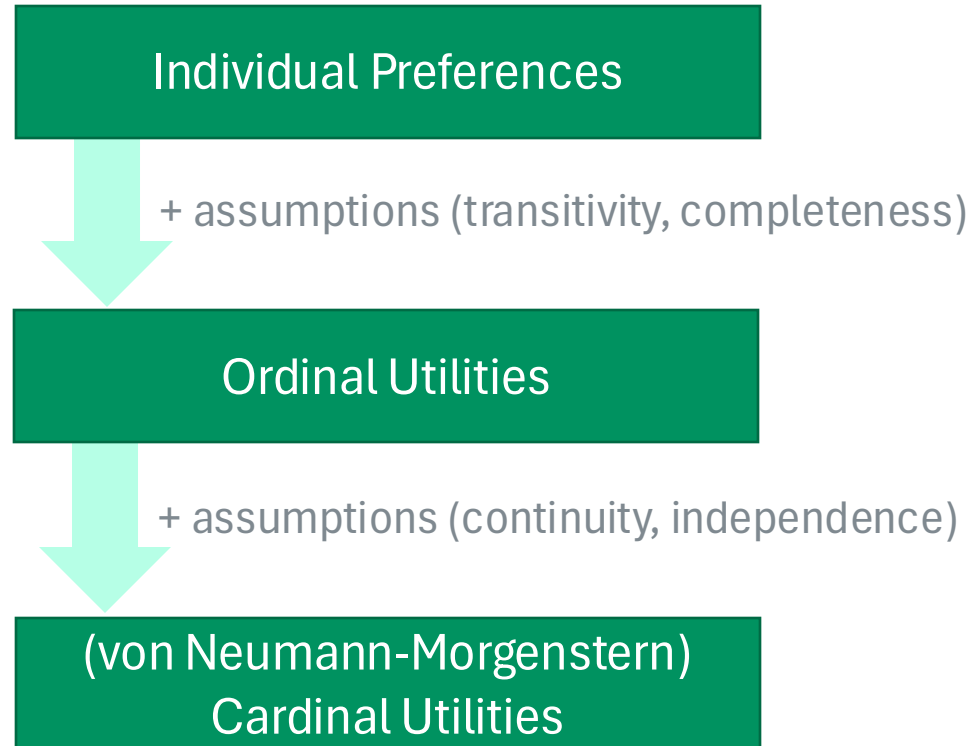
25 Combining Theories?

- We could insist that welfare is a combination of the factors that each theory highlights (Kagan)
 - Example for combining a mental-state theory with an objective theory: **Welfare is the enjoyment of intrinsically valuable goods.**

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Welfare in Economics and Happiness Research

27 Utility in Orthodox (Micro-)Economics



- Utility is a **representation of** preferences if those preferences fulfil certain mathematical conditions
- Insofar as mainstream economics talks of utilities, it is thus committed to (some version of) a preference-satisfaction theory of welfare!
- Sidenote: unless we make further assumptions, there is no limitation of what the object of our preferences might be: they need not be self-interested

28 Welfare in Different Branches of Economics (Angner)

Preference-Satisfaction Theories	Mainstream (micro-)economics Decision/Game Theory Cost-Benefit analysis Behavioral economics
Mental-State Theories	Happiness research Economics of happiness
Objective-List Theories	Social indicators (HDI etc.) Development economics

29 Survey Instruments in Happiness Research

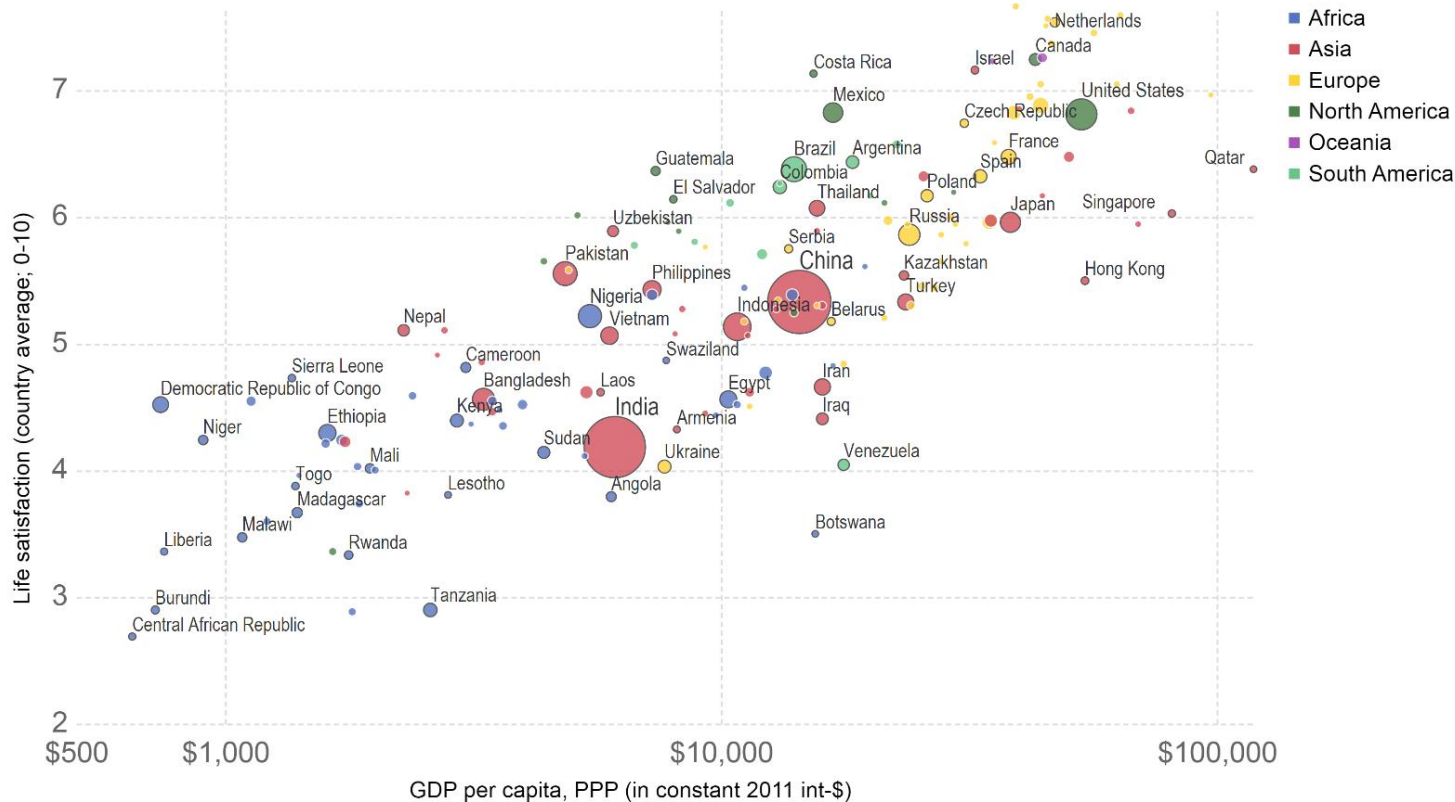
- **Happiness or Emotional Well-Being** (or positive affect): the frequency and intensity of positive and negative emotions (e.g., joy, anxiety, sadness)
 - Characteristic survey question: how happy do you feel on a scale of 1-10?
- **Life Satisfaction**: a person's thoughts about their overall life
 - Characteristic survey question: how satisfied are you with your life?
- **Best Possible Life** (Cantril Ladder Scale)
 - Characteristic survey question: how far do you come to the best possible life you can imagine?

30 Example Findings: Happiness vs GDP

GDP per capita vs Self-reported Life Satisfaction, 2016

Vertical axis shows national average self-reported life satisfaction in the Cantril Ladder (a scale ranging from 0-10 where 10 is the highest possible life satisfaction). Horizontal axis shows GDP per capita based on purchasing power parity (i.e. GDP per head after adjusting for inflation and cross-country price differences).

Our World
in Data

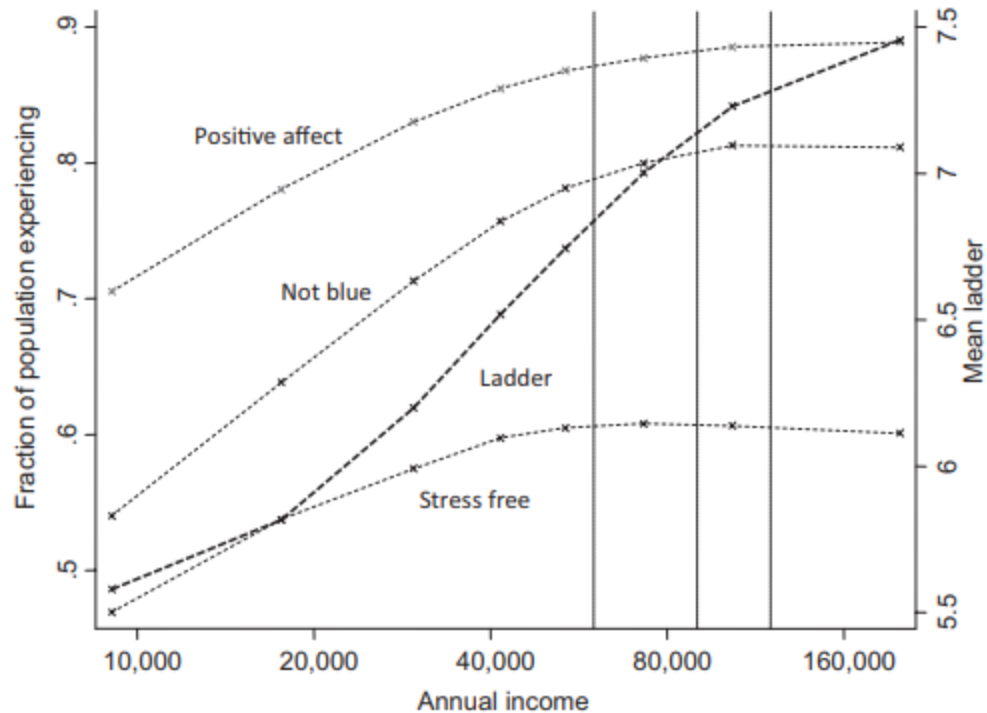


Source: World Bank – WDI, World Happiness Report (2018)

OurWorldInData.org/happiness-and-life-satisfaction/ • CC BY-SA

- There is a roughly logarithmic (note x-axis) relation between GDP and (avg. national) life satisfaction
 - I.e., there are decreasing happiness returns to increasing GDP
- In older research, some authors claimed that this relationship levels off after a certain income level (“Easterlin paradox”)
 - Newer research suggests that this is not the case (Deaton; Stevenson/Wolfers)

31 Measurement Dependence



- Kahnemann & Deaton: It makes a big difference what we ask people
 - There are no further increases in feeling “stress-free” after ca. \$40,000 yearly income
 - “Positive affect” levels off at around \$75,000
 - But Cantril Ladder Scores still increase!
- This raises a conceptual question: which of these measures should be identified with welfare?

32 The Hedonic Treadmill?

The effect of life events on life satisfaction

In each individual plot, the red line marks the estimated effect of the corresponding event at a given point in time.

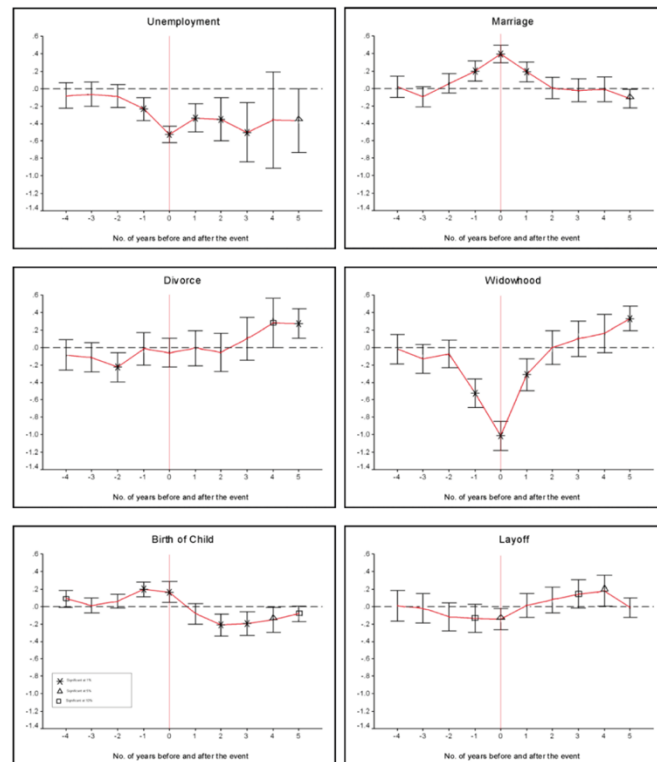
'Whiskers' denote the range of confidence around estimates.

Time is labeled so that 0 marks the point when the event took place. Negative and positive values denote years before and after the event.

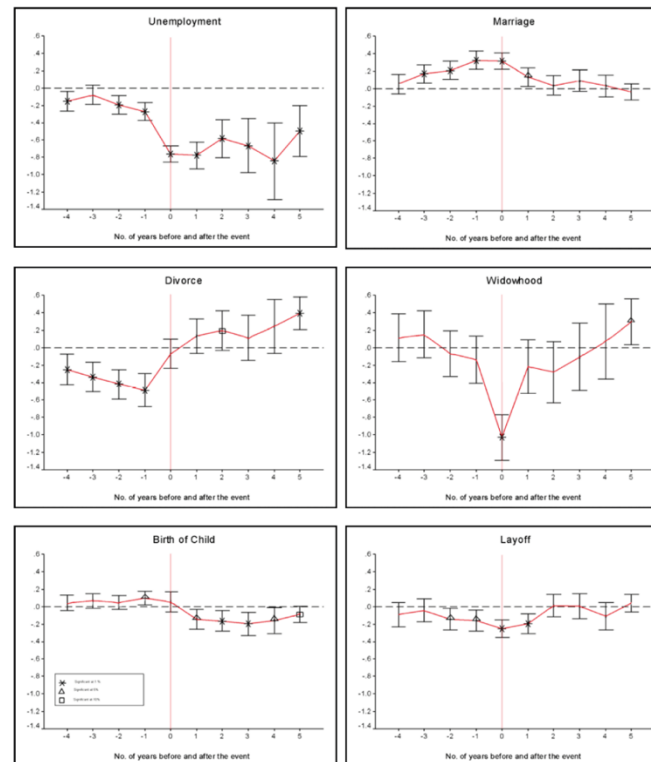
All estimates control for individual characteristics, so the figures show the effect of the event after controlling for other factors, such as changes in income etc.



on women



on men



- Many life events have little lasting impact on happiness
- People often adjust quickly to their situation
 - New paraplegics often return to previous happiness levels
 - ... and so do lottery winners!

Visualisation from Clark, Diener, Georgellis, & Lucas (2008) – Lags and leads in life satisfaction: A test of the baseline hypothesis. The Economic Journal, 118(529). The visualization is adapted by [OurWorldinData.org](https://ourworldindata.org). There you find more research and data visualizations on happiness and development.

33 Summary

- **Welfare** is how well someone's life is going for a person
- There are three main families of theories of what welfare is: the mental-state theories, preference-satisfaction theories, and objective theories
- Each theory faces shortcomings, which more sophisticated versions or combinations of theories might be able to overcome
- Welfare plays a role in other empirical disciplines (such as economics and happiness research) which can complement philosophical reflection

34 Tutorials / Next Week

- Materials of **this** lecture start being exam-relevant!
- As a background read, have a look at **Kagan** (on ELearning)
- In the tutorials
 - You will discuss the assigned texts by **Nozick** (on the experience machine) and **Angner** (on welfare in economics)
 - Discuss further examples/thought experiments and apply the theories of welfare we discussed in class
- Next week: utilitarianism
 - **Utilitarianism** claims that only welfare matters, and that we should maximise it across everyone