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Abstract

While the pursuit of happiness in the present pervades popular narratives of happiness and the good life, the work of Adorno and Arendt casts doubt on the possibility of this lucrative goal. For Adorno, happiness occurs only in memory, while Arendt is sceptical about the possibility of experience between past and future and uses happiness to demonstrate her suspicion. Meanwhile, GH Mead offers an alternative that rejects these counter-intuitive perspectives by reaffirming that all experiences necessarily take place in the present. This article will assess each of these claims alongside the view that contemporary happiness discourse favours the pragmatic notion of happiness in the present. The article will then conclude by considering the potential for Simmel's transcending theory of experience - set out in his final major work *View of Life* (1918) - to resolve these tensions and support a theory of time, experience, emotion and knowledge that is capable of responding to the challenges set out by Adorno, Arendt and Mead.

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Introduction

Happiness studies rely on a diverse range of definitions for happiness, satisfaction, contentment and the good life (Diener, 2000; Hamilton, 2008; Ahuvia *et al*, 2015; McKenzie, 2016a). While a number of authors have distinguished between happiness as personal, subjective and psychological on the one hand, or intersubjective, collective and interdependent on the other, this paper will consider the role of time in experiencing specific *kinds* of happiness. By contrasting happiness as a subjective experience in the moment with happiness as a result of memories or contemplation, I will offer a much needed distinction for understanding the range of experiences that fall under the umbrella term ‘happiness’. Even a brief perusal of the literature on happiness and positive psychology will show that the notion of happiness in the moment has been highly successful at transitioning into popular discourse (Seligman, 2004; Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; For critiques see Davies, 2015; Cederström & Spicer, 2015). From proclamations of *Carpe Diem* to self-help happiness discourses that encourage people to live in the moment rather than dwell on the past, happiness *in the now* is arguably the motto of contemporary happiness narratives. While emotional states are made up of feelings and therefore exist within the present (Burkitt, 2002), the study of happiness warrants a closer analysis. Happiness is, perhaps, the one emotion that individuals spend more time thinking about than experiencing, and so the relationship between feeling an emotion and thinking about an emotion (through memory of the past or hopes for the future). This paper will examine competing theories of happiness and the role of time in each concept before reintegrating them through consideration of Simmel’s notion of transcendence.

To avoid haphazardly drawing from an untenable range of material, I have chosen to limit the theoretical perspectives to the more sociologically applicable work of Adorno, Arendt, Mead and Simmel¹. For Adorno, there is no such thing as happiness in the present; the experience classified as happiness can be found only in memory and hope. Happiness is simply a way of categorising or organising positive thoughts about emotional experience. This is because, according to Adorno (1966), periods of happiness are generally difficult and tiring at the time; they become happy memories once the individual is no longer experiencing them. Arendt ([1961] 2006) proposes an alternative version of this challenge to common sense assertions. She argues that life experience occurs in the blank space between past and future and, as we cannot properly reflect on our circumstances in the present, we are ill-equipped to comprehend its meaning. Finally, Mead ([1932] 2002) presents an argument that rejects both of these approaches. He argues that the present is all we have access to and so there is no other place where happiness can occur. This is an almost Epicurean

¹ It is important to note that definitions of happiness are not necessarily consistent between German and English. See McKenzie (2016b: 4, 22) and Zingerle (2000) for a specific discussion of German terms for happiness (i.e. *Zufriedenheit*, *Glückseligkeit* and *Glück*). Also see Levisen 2012 and Wierzbicka 2004 for a more detailed linguistic analysis of happiness definitions between English and other languages.

association with happiness and experience where memories of past happiness constitute an experience in the present and any emotional connection to the past or future are simply forms of the present. So, for Mead, the distinction between feeling and thinking is less significant. While for Mead the concept of experience in the present is relatively simple and not especially worthy of philosophical analysis, for Adorno we must know before we can feel (or we must know before we can encapsulate what feeling is) and Arendt incorporates a theory of being in the world that draws from Heideggerian phenomenology. Emotion researchers have developed detailed categories of primary and secondary (Kemper, 1987), individual and social (Thin, 2012; Burkitt, 1997) and positive and negative emotions (Solomon & Stone, 2002), yet the category of time and memory has largely been left to the philosophers and too often ignored by the sociological subdiscipline (Hyman (2014) is an exception to this claim). I will seek to reintegrate these themes and will conclude by considering the resolution set out in Simmel's notion of transcendence in *The View of Life* ([1918] 2010), which places knowledge, emotion and reason within a form of experience that is always embedded in specific cultural contexts.

Philosophical thought on the order of emotional phenomena arguably begins not with Kant or Aristotle but with William James' paper 'What is an Emotion?' [1890], which has been central to the development of the sociology and philosophy of emotion. While Kant explicitly stated that an *a priori* understanding of time is a necessary requirement of subjective experience and knowledge itself, his framework allegedly overlooks the legitimacy of emotion as an aspect of subjective or intersubjective experience. Kant's reputation as a rationalist philosopher, who seeks to overcome the limitations of an emotional mind, involves a common oversimplification. Emotion does feature in his *Critique of Judgement*, though it is noticeably absent from his work on the nature of knowledge and experience in *The Critique of Pure Reason*. The important distinction is that Kant attempts to isolate the pursuit of knowledge from the influence of emotion, seeing it as a distraction from the highest forms of human thought. It is here that William James can challenge assumptions about emotions, time and the present in a radical and perhaps unintentionally sociological way. In contrast to earlier views that presume emotion must occur prior to a physical response, he argues that perception is followed by physiological responses that then form the emotion. Therefore, individuals do not simply act out their emotions; rather, emotions become real when they are acted out. He writes:

Common sense says, we lose our fortune, are sorry and weep; we meet a bear, are frightened and run; we are insulted by a rival, are angry and strike. The hypothesis here to be defended says that this order of sequence is incorrect, that the one mental state is not immediately induced by the other, that the bodily manifestations must first be interposed between, and that the more rational statement is that we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble, and not that we cry, strike, or tremble, because we are sorry, angry, or fearful, as the case may be. (2003 [1890]: 22)

In this chronological shift, James incorporates time, knowledge, action and reflection into a theory that allows for emotion to be considered beyond the limited scopes of rational-actor theories and neurological data. He allows for emotions to be social things that are malleable, reflexive and symbolic rather than simply biological or evolutionary habits. Emotions are not simply a matter of feeling, they are also a part of thinking and reflecting. Therefore, emotions play an integral role in development of one's sense of self and social interaction.

In seeking to comprehend the gap between knowing an emotion and feeling an emotion, my point is not to contest 'happiness in the present' but to suggest that this is a problematic and potentially misleading concept. This necessarily involves structures of feeling that link the personal and structural dimensions of emotional experience, Ian Burkitt writes that "we always think of the social in this way, in the past tense as already formed 'structures', that we begin to divorce the social from the personal, which is something we regard as being lived in the present moment" (2002: 153). The discussion of emotion in social or individual terms necessitates an investigation into the role of time as Burkitt's description of emotions in context takes them out of the present and places them somewhere outside of the moment of experience. In the case of happiness, this also raises questions about intentionality, memory, and hope. If Adorno and Arendt are correct, then happiness is a specific emotion that can be distinguished from joy in the moment and is instead a form of positive reflection.

Adorno: Happiness and memory

Theodor Adorno's infrequent references to happiness are consistently cynical. While his pessimism does not extend to the extremes of Schopenhauer's claim that happiness is more or less impossible, Adorno is clear that happiness exists only in memory. This is partially due to the need for skepticism of happiness in the present – such as in his critique of leisure time in *The Culture Industry* (1991) – but also because the positive experiences that become a source of affirmation and personal satisfaction are likely to have been unpleasant in the moment. For example, a student may experience happiness after succeeding in an assessment, yet it is likely that while working on the assignment the negative emotions outweighed the positive ones. So, for Adorno, happiness exists in memory as well as in the projected hopes for the future. In *Minima Moralia* he writes, "To this day, all happiness is a pledge of what has not yet been, and the belief in its imminence obstructs its becoming" (Adorno, 1966: 352). Walter Benjamin echoes this in *Illuminations* ([1955] 1999) by arguing that happiness is ultimately tied to the notion of redemption because happiness is always a matter of what could have been. He writes, "Reflection shows us that our image of happiness is thoroughly coloured by the time to which the course of our existence has assigned us" (1999: 245). Happiness therefore exists in reflection, and reflection lies between the present emotional experience.

Arguably, happiness performs two unique functions in Adorno's model; it distracts people from activities that are more important than positive affect and it motivates individuals toward the future through the hope of a better life. In a reference to Schopenhauer, Adorno writes that "the state of 'satisfaction' is itself unsatisfying because 'as soon as need and danger grant a man respite, boredom is so near that amusements become an imperative need'" (1966: 175). The view that happiness is a process and not an end goal is not uncommon. In Hirschmann's *The Passions and the Interests* (1977) happiness is a transitory state from an undesirable to a desirable situation, similarly Freud (1950) describes happiness as the release of tensions that constrain the self. While Hirschmann, Freud and Schopenhauer are skeptical about the possibility of happiness as a consistent state, the latter is the most unapologetic about the impossibility of happiness. It

follows that happiness in reflection is the only possible form available, and is the practice of ordering memories into positive and negative categories such that 'To think is to identify' (Adorno 1966: 5).

In *Negative Dialectics* Adorno alludes to Hegel's notion of the 'unhappy consciousness', citing: "Happy is what we call the one who finds himself in harmony with himself" (1966: 352). For Hegel, internal tension is caused by the knowledge that there is conscious and unconscious thought, the latter inaccessible and uncontrollable to the self. This creates a disharmony that makes happiness problematic. I would add that this tension makes the experience of happiness categorically distinct from the memory of happiness as more or less free of tensions, contradictions and doubts. Hegel (cited in Adorno, 1966) continues to argue that "In history, times of happiness are empty pages. There is satisfaction in world history; but this is not what we call happiness, for it is the satisfaction of purposes standing above particular concerns" (353). Thus, it is the common good that leads to satisfaction in the long term rather than individual happiness. Although Adorno considers Hegel's 'empty pages' to be "a dubious claim" (353), happiness as a narrative that connects the self to history emerges for him as a central idea. This abstraction is present in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where Horkheimer and Adorno write that "[T]o moments of happiness laughter is foreign" (1947: 112).

In *Minima Moralia* Adorno claims that subjective experience follows – rather than precedes – attempts at happiness. Meaningful experience becomes possible once the efforts to grasp happiness have been exhausted. Adorno proclaims:

Only when satiated with false pleasure, disgusted with the goods offered, dimly aware of the inadequacy of happiness even when it is that - to say nothing of cases where it is bought by abandoning allegedly morbid resistance to its positive surrogate - can men gain an idea of what experience might be. (1971: 62)

This follows a critique of psychoanalytic attempts at resolving the unhappy consciousness. For Adorno, psychoanalytic advice fails to deliver anything more than an abandonment of reason and a commitment to oppressive ideological fallacies². The dialectical nature of experience cannot be resolved through accessing buried 'true' forms of pleasure and resolution. There is no zero sum equation, instead, "The name of dialectics says no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder, that they come to contradict the traditional norms of adequacy" (1966: 5).

Finally, Adorno draws these concepts together: "The capacity for fear and for happiness are the same, the unrestricted openness to experience amounting to self-abandonment in which the vanquished rediscovers himself" (1971: 200). This fits within his broader examination of mass culture whereby the range of life's meaningful experiences are increasingly under threat from a conformist and mind-numbing interaction between culture and the self. The contemporary infatuation with happiness-in-the-moment would be seen by Adorno as further evidence of the intellectual and creative limitations placed upon individuals by homogenised and rationalised cultures. There is an intellectual shift here that overlaps with Marcuse's (1964)

² "Psycho-analysis prides itself on restoring the capacity for pleasure, which is impaired by neurotic illness. As if the mere concept of a capacity for pleasure did not suffice gravely to devalue such a thing, if it exists. As if a happiness gained through speculation on happiness were not the opposite, a further encroachment of institutionally planned behaviour-patterns on the ever-diminishing sphere of experience." (1974: 62)

'repressive desublimation' – where individuals voluntarily trade genuine, risky and exciting forms of pleasure for happiness in safe and predictable consumer scenarios. To emphasise the significance of the present is to favour the happiness of the individual over the happiness of the collective, pleasure over fulfilment, and speed over longevity. And yet, in each trade, the possibility of happiness becomes more likely to warrant conditions of exploitation, oppression and inequality. Happiness in the present can be sought no matter how dystopian one's culture has become and, for Adorno, this is precisely the point. Happiness in reflection requires much more than a pleasant moment, it requires autonomy, intellectual freedom and justice.

In *Minima Moralia*, he summarises this point:

But for this reason no-one who is happy can know that he is so. To see happiness, he would have to pass out of it: to be as if already born. He who says he is happy lies, and in invoking happiness sins against it. He alone keeps faith who says: I was happy. The only relation of consciousness to happiness is gratitude: in which lies its incomparable dignity. (112)

There is little doubt of Adorno's contempt for happiness as a feeling in the present. It is little more than a myth offered to individuals foolish enough to be tempted by such an absurd promise. Happiness is the carrot dangled ahead of the donkey that convinces it to keep walking, while the knowledge of the stick that will strike it from behind is buried from its conscious thought under a layer of consumer desire.

Arendt: Past and Future

Arendt and Adorno represent similar critiques of the common-sense view of happiness-in-the-present, though it must be noted that there are significant differences in their approaches that stem from their divergent understandings of Marx, ideology, the state of philosophy and the Enlightenment itself. While Gandesha (2004) attributes the common ground between Arendt and Adorno to the mutual influence of Walter Benjamin and Martin Heidegger, I would add that Kant ought to be included in that list – a point that will be returned to later in this paper. Arendt casts doubt on the possibility of happiness in the present, claiming that the standpoint of experience is reducible to the present – the space between past and future. In the preface to *Between Past and Future* she writes:

Seen from the viewpoint of man, who always lives in the interval between past and future, time is not a continuum, a flow of uninterrupted succession; it is broken in the middle, at the point where "he" stands; and "his" standpoint is not the present as we usually understand it but rather a gap in time which "his" constant fighting, "his" making a stand against past and future, keeps in existence (1961: 10).

Experience, therefore, lies between memory and premonition, between regret and hope, between history and the future. The breaking of time into categories of past, present and future are contradictory concepts in theoretical analyses of time yet, in *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt presents an alternative view (1971: 205). Here she argues that while these categories are distinct, the passing of time and the experience of the present are unproblematic; only from the vantage point of observation is it clear that the present is not as simple as it seems. This is significant because it demonstrates that experiencing time and thinking about time result in different comprehensions of the phenomena, a characteristic it shares with happiness.

While experience and action can occur ‘in the moment’, comprehension of the moment is only possible after the fact. Consequently, the recognition of happiness is therefore an acknowledgement of happiness in *that* moment rather than in *this* moment. Further, experience and knowledge are intimately tied together such that experience only becomes possible when knowledge and, ultimately, reflection come into play. Arendt’s interest in time and experience was first detailed in her dissertation, which was eventually published as *Love and St Augustine* ([1929] 1996). Here she develops a theory of knowledge, time and experience through a focus on love and desire and makes a number of references to the possibility of happiness in the present. She explains, “I can only seek that thing of whose existence I have some kind of knowledge” (1929: 46) and puts forward the rather unique Augustinian claim that the desire for the ‘good life’ must exist prior to experience. Arendt’s claims reaffirm her position that the relation of happiness to intentionality makes it unique within the spectrum of emotions. We must have some sense of happiness in order to recognise it when it occurs, which suggests that, without this knowledge, happiness would not be experienced as such. Here, we see a similar shift to that proposed by William James. For James, an emotion exists because it is acted upon, while for Augustine it is because the self is able to recognise it as such. Arendt’s examination of Augustine indicates that recognition of an emotion, its meanings and interpretations go hand in hand; when an individual feels something they have never felt before, their immediate response tends to be confusion rather than recognition. The notion of happiness in the future is “guaranteed by a kind of absolute past, since the knowledge of it, which is present in us, cannot possibly be explained by any experiences in this world” (1929: 47). There is a larger question looming in Arendt’s work, namely, how can the ‘happy life’ serve as a guiding principle for ‘human endeavours’ when prior knowledge for the recognition of one’s experiences? Inevitably, hopes of future happiness are anchored in our limited knowledge of the past and happiness is more a matter of reflection than experience in the present.

Arendt’s position is clarified and expanded in *The Human Condition* (1958) which develops a theory of action/appearances (*vita activa*) and contemplation (*vita contemplativa*) under the categories of human activity: labour, work and action. This text aims to set out the most elemental dimensions of being human while making explicit assertions regarding the unavoidably social dimensions of the human condition. In this setting, ‘labour’ refers to acts of basic survival, ‘work’ refers to labour that is not natural and typically involves employment, and ‘action’ to activities that contribute to politics (in a general sense), culture and history (1958: 8). Arendt makes several references to happiness, although the application of the term varies between the three kinds of activity. In the section on labour, her comments about happiness and pleasure resemble Schopenhauer’s: “There is no lasting happiness outside the prescribed cycle of painful exhaustion and pleasurable regeneration, and whatever throws this cycle out of balance... ruins the elemental happiness that comes from being alive” (1958: 108). Here, happiness is understood in a somewhat animalistic way – it has no bearing on the realm of the social, nor does the social have any real influence over it. In contrast, the section on action aligns more closely with the perspectives in *Between Past and Future*. When relating action with contemplation, Arendt critiques the pursuit of individualised renditions of happiness that place greater value on good fortune rather than something closer to Aristotle’s *Eudaimonia* is a source of great unhappiness, and this is more or less a matter of timing. By focusing on happiness in the present, individuals

effectively make it impossible. Happiness, she argues, is only possible when the present is removed from the equation: “To be *eudaimon* and to have been *eudaimon*, according to Aristotle, are the same, just as to “live well” (*eu dzen*) and to have “lived well” are the same as long as life lasts” (1958: 193). Meaningful happiness is therefore less about the moment of an experience and more about the extent to which these moments form a ‘life story’, which is unavoidably social in nature. A life story is a necessary element of the human condition (which is not reducible to human nature) and the narrative process is an act of sense-making through reflection on experience.

In her critique of happiness as pleasure, Arendt echoes Marx’s criticisms of Epicurean philosophy (see Kotakowski, 1976), which rejects the notion that happiness can be found in a retreat from emotional fluctuations and, therefore, from social interaction. Instead, happiness can only be found in the realm of the social. The ‘absence of pain’ utterly fails to provide a useful definition of the ‘happy life’ and again this point highlights the significance of time in the knowledge of happiness. We should not deduce from this that pleasure and pain are irrelevant, but rather that, for Arendt, they would satisfy only aspects ‘labour’, the most animalistic characteristic of the human condition. Criticising Jeremy Bentham’s hedonistic notion of happiness, Arendt writes that “What pain and pleasure, fear and desire, are actually supposed to achieve in all these systems is not happiness at all but the promotion of individual life or a guarantee of the survival of mankind” (1958: 311). Here it is clear that happiness-in-the-moment is inadequate for a being with the potential for the human activities she classes as ‘action’, and Arendt adds that the lack of critical reflection in pleasure is the source of its undoing. It is the happiness found in reflection that satisfies ‘action’, which also brings together social, cultural and political dimensions of human experience.

This view aligns neatly with Arendt’s distinction between love and desire in *Love and St Augustine*. While desire projects into the future, love for the self and the other in the present are ‘bypassed’ (1929: 45). Meanwhile, happiness necessitates memory and reflection, and is negated by attempts to experience it in the present. Arendt captures this position in the claim that “the whole question in this context does not turn about goals and *whither* I shall go, but about origins and *whence* I come, and not about the faculty of desire but the faculty of remembrance” (1929: 48). Meaningful happiness, therefore, exists in the story of the past and not the moment of the present, while expectations of future detract from the possibility of happiness itself. In this sense, Arendt agrees with Adorno, despite the different paths they take to reach this point.

GH Mead: Reality and the Present

Mead’s most clearly articulated overview of experience and time is in a series of lectures given at Berkley in 1930 and published in 1932 as *The Philosophy of the Present*. In this work, Mead presents a line of argument that stands in stark contrast to Arendt and Adorno. In line with his background in pragmatism, he describes a predictably unproblematic set of assertions about time and experience. For Mead, “Reality exists in the present” (1932: 35) and, ultimately, “a reality that transcends the present must exhibit itself in the present” (43). While Adorno and Arendt demonstrate that the present is somewhat vacant as the self has not yet had the opportunity to process or comprehend experience, Mead argues that all comprehension – whether this be

in the form of memories of the past or hopes for the future – takes place in the present. Therefore, the relationship between experience, emotion and knowledge, which is complex and problematic for Adorno and Arendt, is uncontroversial to Mead.

While Mead's distinction between *Me* and *I* is seen as a foundational concept in the sociology of emotion (Denzin, 1980), the concept of emotion itself is not specifically explored in his work. Mead has little to say about happiness, yet his work on time and experience offers useful contributions to the present discussion. Mead acknowledges that emotions occur in experience, but his primary interest is to transcend rationalist and empiricist perspectives and debunk claims that either approach is capable of providing an explanation of knowledge and experience. Mead implies that emotional aspects of experience are distinct from traditional analyses of perception and knowledge, as the importance of truth, or accuracy, is notably absent from perception. Happiness in the present need not rely on truth to be called happiness. The threat of distortions of knowledge clearly play a much larger role than reflection for Adorno. What is significant in Mead is the development of a theory of emergence in the experience of past, present and future and, I would claim, it is the influence of Kant that serves as a common ground for all three thinkers.

As it was for Kant, the incremental and linear progression of time is important for Mead, yet he sees questions of the true nature of experience as social rather than ontological or metaphysical. He describes the progression of time as moments that must end in order for the next moment to begin. Further, Mead frequently refers to *a* present rather than *the* present, indicating skepticism about temporality that we might find in Kant. Mead describes “presents sliding into each other, each with a past which is referable to itself, each past taking up into itself those back of it, and in some degree reconstructing them from its own standpoint” (1932: 41). In Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, the *a priori* experience of time progressing is a prerequisite for all human subjectivity, it is mental space where the self comprehends the self (1929: 133). He shows no interest in periods of time demarcated through reflection and he pays little attention to emotion in the matter of experience. Rather, the linear progression of time is a necessary form of knowledge that cannot be explained or taught. Yet, Mead provides an interpretation of time and experience that recognises the importance of the social self in the individual's perception of the self as an object (1982: 177). Mead takes this point a step further by claiming that the progression of time from one block of experience to another is only possible because the individual is able to understand the self as an object distinct from other selves and other objects. To do this, Mead differentiates between the immediate experience of the perception of objects and the reconstruction from memory that also takes place in immediate experience. The knowledge of the self as an object is integral to both.

A parallel position is held by another American pragmatist, John Dewey. In *Art as Experience* (1934) Dewey develops a more nuanced theory by highlighting the importance of ‘conscious intent’ in emotional experience. He distinguishes ‘things that are experienced’ from ‘an experience’ (1934: 35) whereby the former occurs in an undeveloped or rudimentary way, while the latter occurs when “the material experienced runs its course to fulfilment” (35). Therefore, a circular argument could easily form where an experience in the present requires reflection after the completion of an experience (not unlike Mead's notion of blocks of

time). For Dewey, an experience can only become so after the fact and this is because *an* experience contains a self-contained unity. He argues that an experience is not reducible to being “emotional, practical, nor intellectual” (37) as these are only ingredients that make up *an* experience, while unified experience is only possible through reflection. Through reflection, experiences become *that* experience – specific instances that have a start and end point in time and in consciousness.

While for Arendt and Adorno reflection or sense-making intertwines emotion with knowledge to create understanding of experience, for Mead sense-making occurs within blocks of *a* present experience. The pressing question is, perhaps, not about happiness in the present, but about the relationship between feeling and knowing (or between emotion and reflection), a relationship that is somewhat unproblematic for Mead, but fraught with misinterpretations for Adorno and Arendt. The order of these phenomena brings the discussion back to William James’s claim about the series of events that result in the experience of an emotion. Yet, Mead does not exclude the practice of reflection or reconstruction from his understanding of the present. For him, the present is only comprehensible through an understanding of the past and social change requires more than a change in actions in the present, it also involves a change in the context provided by an understanding of the past. He writes:

Yet we look forward with vivid interest to the reconstruction, in the world that will be, of the world that has been, for we realise that the world that will be cannot differ from the world that is without rewriting the past to which we now look back (1932: 37).

Mead further complicates the relationship between time, experience and knowledge beyond the arguably reductionist description above by rejecting the notion that the past is apparent to us while the future remains a mystery. Mead argues that the historian knows less about human history than the astronomer knows about the movements of the stars over the next million years. He writes: “The long and the short of it is that the past (or the meaningful structure the past) is as hypothetical as the future” (1932: 44).

Conclusion

There is a practical and lived difference between experiencing an emotion in the moment and reflecting on it after the fact. Emotions are often out of our control in the moment. This does not mean people are erratically emotional in the moment, rather that they often experience emotions they would prefer to avoid. Emotions cannot simply be summoned at will, nevertheless memories of emotions are more amenable to control. I can recall or try to summon an emotion, but there is no guarantee that it will match the experience of the emotion –it seems unlikely that memory would accurately represent it. I have argued elsewhere (McKenzie, 2015) that one’s knowledge of emotional experience is subject to distortion and this can result in ‘decentered’ understandings of both the self and social relations. However, this paper has sought to interrogate the case for a categorical difference between feeling an emotion and thinking an emotion. It seems reasonable to conclude that such a distinction is warranted at a theoretical/philosophical level as well as at a practical or common-sense level. Thus, the definitions of emotions may need to adjust to fit this claim. In the case of happiness, there are a number of scenarios. For example, perhaps there is something in the moment that we

call happiness and something in reflection that we also call happiness, but inconsistencies between these experiences warrant the application of separate terms. The answer to the question “is there happiness in the present?” is wholly dependent on the definition of happiness. It is reasonable to say that happiness as joy *only* exists in the present, while happiness as contentment or fulfilment *primarily* takes place in reflection. Adorno is right if we think of happiness as the enrichment that creates a ‘good life’. Mead is right if we think of it as joy. Arendt is right if we think of happiness as a way of relating to the world and being in it, as a point on a map from which we can navigate through the rich complexity of life. The distinction is focused primarily on individual versus social experiences of happiness, while the introduction of time into this matter demands new lines of thought.

The question of happiness in the present, and the objections posed by Adorno and Arendt, points to significant challenges in the present day. The view that happiness must be pursued, and even fought for, in the moment contradicts the notion that fulfilment is found in the contextualising and reflexive act of remembering. If happiness in the present should be abandoned in favour of more long-term projects that will on reflection provide a sense of satisfaction, then the entire contemporary discourse around happiness needs to change. Meanwhile, if happiness is only possible from a vantage point somewhere in the future, then why should we bother serving the interests of the embodied self that exists in the present? In this sense Mead offers a way of valuing both happiness in the present as well as one’s memories of the past without resorting to some form of hedonism that overlooks the reconstructive dimensions of meaning, authenticity and virtue. Yet, he fails to recognise that conflating thinking/memory with feeling/emotion is highly problematic and practically unsustainable.

Adorno treats the temptation of happiness in the present as a source of false hope that only contributes to greater and greater threats to one’s autonomy. Similarly, Arendt’s approach overlaps with Hegel’s notion of the ‘unhappy consciousness’ to demonstrate how a feeling of incompleteness is an unavoidable dimension of the human condition. Yet, efforts to overcome these inconsistencies are integral to social life. While Augustine insists that “It is memory and not expectation ... that gives unity and wholeness to human existence” (Cited in Arendt, 1929: 184), Arendt reminds us that “The task of the mind is to understand what happened, and this understanding, according to Hegel, is man’s way of reconciling himself with reality; its actual end is to be at peace with the world” (1961: 7). This reconciliation inevitably fails, leaving the individual in a kind of conflict with the self, constantly hoping to feel whole and free of contradictions but never able to completely overcome this internal tension.

Drawing from a Kantian notion of time and the subject, Georg Simmel develops a transcending self capable of overcoming the dualisms that have allowed the above-mentioned positions to stagnate. In *View of Life*, he provides an alternative proposal of time, reality and the present capable of merging the strongest aspects of each of the above arguments. For Simmel, the present demands that the past is ‘no more’ and the future is ‘not yet’ (2010: 6) and this is the space where experience occurs. Yet, the present contains ‘bits’ of the past and future in ways that do not clearly separate then, now and when. The idea that happiness occurs in the present or in reflection, alongside the notion that these differing experiences must be categorised and

demarcated by individuals, would be unnecessary and unconvincing to Simmel. Instead, “The principle of the excluded middle exists only between contents or results of thought. It finds no application to the life process itself” as the contents of experiences that are made up of “logically independent sequences: aesthetic, intellectual, ethical”, are experienced in coherence and something “entirely different... is constructed” (2010: 192). In the *Lebensphilosophie* described by Simmel, social experience is characterised by the phenomena of living between an unending list of possible boundaries: “an ‘over us’ and an ‘under us,’ to a right and a left, to a more or less, a tighter or looser, a better or worse” (2010: 1). Yet, awareness of these boundaries is evidence of the subject’s ability to transcend them, “For only someone who stands outside his boundary in some sense knows that he stands within it; that is, knows it as a boundary at all” (2010: 2). In becoming aware of the challenge of reconciling happiness in the present with happiness in reflection, evidence of the possibility of its own transcendence comes to the fore. However, this does not mean that the problem proposed in this paper was never a problem at all; rather, the knowledge necessary for resolution lies within the problem itself.

In a more applied sense, Simmel proposes that recognition of the contradiction is the first step in overcoming it. There is a hint of a Hegelian dialectic here, though I suspect Simmel would not choose this terminology. The key is that once the boundary has been acknowledged the potential to transcend it becomes real – irrespective of whether this is the intention of the subject (Joas, 2000: 77). In this theoretical shift, Simmel inverts a key aspect of Adorno’s claims about happiness-in-the-present. While Adorno might suggest that reflection is necessary to recognise the moments that were truly happy, Simmel argues that memories of the past and hopes of the future give meaning to experiences in the present. The work one endures to reach a future goal therefore forms a source of happiness, as it is contextualised by what has not yet occurred. Meanwhile, the decision to pursue a particular path is necessarily driven by the knowledge collected from memories. Regarding the problem raised earlier between thinking and feeling, Simmel’s application of transcendence forms a powerful means to overcome such dualisms. Simmel jovially makes this point in a short article written for *Jugend* in 1901 where, referring to an overheard debate over whether money can buy happiness, he insists that such simplistic arguments “demand that you must be wrong when your opponent is right” (Simmel 2013: 29). While there are important intellectual distinctions between dialectical claims about happiness and experience, the self does not necessarily experience them as such. Nevertheless, knowledge of this needless separation is a step toward overcoming the problems created by it. As described by Joas, “Simmel is no longer searching for something valuable that encompasses competing conceptions of value; instead, he elevates life itself, in so far as it is always more than mere life, to the status of the valuable” (2000: 77).

In sum, Adorno is skeptical about the possibility of authentic joy capable of standing up to analysis or reflection. The result, in Western modernity, is not a more critical and cautious cultural narrative of happiness but, rather, an uncritical and sublimated image of the ‘good life’ that closely aligns with consumer goals and politically neutral social values. Arendt shares some of his concerns ‘happiness’ and its links to a manipulative mass culture (1958: 134) and insists that happiness in the present can amount to little more than an absence of pain. Arendt claims that the cultural facilitator of the gap between past and present (namely

tradition) is increasingly elusive and impossible to grasp, leaving us ambivalent, lost and meandering. This is indicative of her critique of modernisation where the role of labour comes to dominate human life and, as a result, the promise of happiness in the present turns out to be a road to nowhere. Mead claims that all reflection takes place in the present and, in doing so, underestimates the disjuncture between thinking and feeling. Yet, Mead's approach should not be automatically discarded as simplistic or atheoretical. The remaining question is whether Simmel's transcending self can overcome these contradictions. Simmel's contribution does not nullify the legitimacy of the question "is there such a thing as happiness in the present?"; rather, it claims that the potential for resolution becomes apparent the moment the contradiction is identified.

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