

**Contemporary Interpretation of Aristotle's Concept
of Happiness and Community Perspective**



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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I have analyzed and elucidated Aristotle's, Richard Kraut's and Laura Sizer's conceptions¹ of happiness. Aristotle emphasized on the objective part of the conception of happiness. Richard Kraut made a comparison between Aristotle's conception of happiness and our conceptions of happiness, pointing out the difficulties of Aristotle's conception of happiness and modern objectivism. Laura Sizer tried to reconcile both the objective and subjective part of the conception of happiness through affect theory. After my analysis of Aristotle's, Richard Kraut's and Laura Sizer's conceptions of happiness, I will make a further point on the objective aspect of their theories and raise a "theory of community" as a possible alternative for Aristotle's conception of happiness.

KEYWORDS

Aristotle; Happiness; Objectivism; Affect Theory; Community.

Introduction

In the history of ethics, Aristotle, due to his special attention to happiness, created an approach in virtue ethics. Happiness enjoys a very important place in Aristotle's ethical theory. During the modern revival of virtue ethics, the concern for happiness regained the attention of philosophers. In some philosophical work of contemporary researchers, they inherited Aristotelian views on happiness, studied happiness in contemporary society, used new research method. Thus, the Aristotelian concept of happiness has been reinterpreted.

The first part of this article will briefly describe Aristotle's concept of happiness. The second part will make a distinction between subjective and objective aspects of the concept of happiness before contemporary theory of happiness being explained. The

¹ I would use conception and concept interchangeably in this paper.

third part focuses on the analysis of two concepts of happiness of Richard Kraut. The fourth part will be an explanation about Laura Sizer's effort to develop an affective theory trying to give a coherent understanding of the ontologically subjective and objective parts of happiness. The fifth part seeks to analyze Kraut and Sizer's theory through the lens of Aristotelian ontological objectivism. In the sixth part, I will make a summary and propose a possible modern alternative for Aristotle's axiologically objective view of happiness. The seventh part will be the furthering of this alternative community perspective.

1. Aristotle's view of happiness

Virtue ethics distinguishes itself from modern moral philosophy by its attention to happiness. It can even be said that the ethics of ancient Greece was "a kind of eudaimonism".² However in ancient Greece, happiness does not refer to some kind of subjective satisfaction or mood, but to an objective state of "live prosperously".³

Let us examine some of the important concepts in Chapters 10 of *Nicomachean Ethics* which is directly related to the issues of happiness.

"Every skill and every inquiry, and similarly every action and rational choice, is thought to aim at some good; and so the good has been aptly described as that at which everything aims." (1094a)⁴ *Nicomachean Ethics* begins with the claim that the purpose of our life is the pursuit of the good. Among them, "skill" and "inquiry" point to the "theoretical" level, while "action" and "rational choice" point to the "practical" level. Since the purpose of life is to pursue goodness, then the highest purpose of life naturally becomes the pursuit of the highest good. Aristotle wrote," let us say what we claim to be the aim of political science—that is, of all the good things to be done, what is the highest. Most people, I should think, agree about what it is called, since both the

² Yu Jiyuan, *Aristotle's Ethics*, Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2011, p. 31 .

³ *Ibid.*, p. 31 .

⁴ Roger Crisp, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics (Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy)*, Cambridge, 2014.

masses and sophisticated people call it happiness, understanding being happy as equivalent to living well and acting well." (1095a 14-20) ⁵

The word "happiness" is "eudaimonia" in ancient Greek. Regarding the word "Eudaimonia", the prefix "eu" means "good", "daimo" means "the god".⁶ So the original meaning of the word is "to be blessed by a good god". The translation of this Greek term in English includes happiness, flourishing, well-being. The most common translation is happiness. As we mentioned earlier, happiness does not refer to a certain kind of subjective mental state, but refers to an objective state of life, which can be measured by objective criteria. This kind of "happiness" refers to the excellent living conditions that people hope to achieve. The highest purpose of life is the state in which people live the best and the most prosperous, similar to what we now call "successful life". Aristotle's conception of happiness is closely linked to the ethos of Greek society. Through his empirical observations of citizens' lives, in the third chapter of Book I in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle summed up the popular types of happiness: (1) life for the pursuit of pleasure; (2) political life; (3) contemplative life. In his view, only contemplative life is not dependent on other things, it is truly self-sufficient.

Besides the purpose argument, Aristotle also argues from characteristic activity so that he could demonstrate the relationship between happiness and the activities of virtues. In *Aristotle's Ethics* by Yu Jiyan, he has reconstructed this characteristic activity argument as:

- (1) Everything has a characteristic activity. People also have their own characteristic activities.
- (2) The characteristic activity of an object is unique to that object.
- (3) The unique characteristic activity of a man is the rational activity of the soul.
- (4) The goodness of a thing depends on its characteristic activity. This means that a good X is equal to the X that performs its characteristic activity well.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Aristotle's Ethics*, p. 35.

(5) Implementing a characteristic activity well means that the thing has represented or achieved its excellent state. This excellent state is the virtue of one thing.

Conclusion: Human goodness or happiness is the activity of the rational soul reflecting virtue.⁷

Yu Jiyuan's reconstruction helps us to understand Aristotle's linkage between characteristic activity and virtue. The "good" realization of characteristic activity is "virtue". In the fifth chapter of Book II of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle has written "every virtue causes that of which it is a virtue to be in a good state, and to perform its characteristic activity well." (1106a 15 -16) 【Crisp, R. (2014). *Nicomachean ethics* (Revised ed., Cambridge texts in the history of philosophy)】 It can be seen that virtue not only makes people to be in a good state, but also makes the characteristic activity perfect.⁸ In addition, the discussion of many important concepts of happiness, Aristotle has proposed "the purpose argument", "virtue", "intellectual virtue", "meditation" and alike. Given the intent of this essay is not a comprehensive interpretation of Aristotle's concepts of happiness, we will not elaborate on these issues.

2. The ontologically subjective/objective distinction and the axiologically subjective/objective distinction.⁹

After the elaboration of Aristotle's theory of happiness, it is necessary to further define the subjective and objective issues before introducing specific analysis by Kraut and Sizer. Specifically, it is the subjective and objective distinction between the ontological and the axiological perspective in the scope of the discussion of the concept of happiness. Ontological subjectivism considers happiness as a subjective mental state, emotional condition (not including human's objective living conditions in the world). The "strong version" of ontological objectivism considers, on the contrary, happiness as

⁷ *Aristotle's Ethics*, p. 50.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58 .

⁹ This distinction comes from Laura Sizer. "Good and Good For You: An Affect Theory of Happiness," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 80 , No.1 (2010): 133-63.

the objective situation of life in this world (excluding subjectivemental state , emotional condition). However, in the actual discussion of happiness, few theories persist that happiness includes nothing but the objective state of life in the world. Therefore, we generally include not only the subjective psychological state and emotional condition, but also the objective life situation of human beings. This approach could still be categorized as a type of ontological objectivism, which can be regarded as the “weak version” of objectivism. All three objectivism that are discussed in this article belong to this category.

The axiological distinction of happiness is subordinate to the ontological distinction. To put it simply, whether the standard of happiness is subjective or objective defines its axiological subjectivity or objectivity. The standard of Aristotle and the modern objectivism is objective, individual-independent, and their theory is axiologically objective. Kraut, on the contrary, argues in his analysis of “the concept of our happiness” that the standard of happiness depends on the individual. This conception is axiologically subjective. In particular, although Sizer insisted on the ontologically objective position, she did not take a stand in the choice of subjective and objective in terms of axiology. Because that was not the core issue in her research. For ontological subjectivism, it may also have this distinction. But ontological subjectivisms are all axiologically subjective, such as feeling theories, life satisfaction theory. They all consider the criteria of happiness or life satisfaction depends on personal feelings or judgments. But Stoic tradition is an exception. The Stoicism holds that happiness (eudaimonia) is a moderate and detached state of mind. Our respect to it as a psychological state is not based on personal value judgments, but on some objective (not depending on the individual) philosophy or the pursuit of certain concept about world and life. Thus, it is ontologically subjective but axiologically objective. All these distinctions between the ontologically subjective, ontologically objective, axiologically subjective and axiologically objective could be seen in the table of the appendix.

3. Kraut's analysis of two concepts of happiness

Richard Kraut in his essay *Two Conceptions of Happiness* compares the modern conception of happiness with Aristotelian eudaimonia, gives his own conceptual analysis for happiness, and compares these two views so that he could propose his own argument. In the comparison between these two views, Kraut first pointed out some commonalities in the form / structure between eudaimonia and happiness. They all have two parts:

- (1) People's attitude towards life and specific psychological state;
- (2) A certain standard that people need to achieve in their lives.

Part 1 refers to the subjective aspects of mental state, that is, “feeling happy”. Part 2 refers to the objective conditions of life. The difference between modern conception and the Aristotelian concept of happiness lies only in Part 2. That is to say, what standard do we want to achieve, what is the measuring standard of life. Kraut’s analysis shows that Aristotle's standard of happiness is objective and rigorous, while the modern concept of happiness is relatively subjective and flexible. Because Aristotle’s standard of happiness is too strict, and modern people do not have the metaphysical foundation that Aristotle has. So we have been unable to apply his standard of happiness to our practices in life.

Let's get into the details of Kraut's argument to see his further views on this issue.

Before focusing on the modern concept of happiness and Aristotle's eudaimonia, Kraut first discussed one concept of happiness that he called extreme subjectivism. This kind of extreme subjectivism considers happiness as nothing but a pleasant state of mind, nothing else. Is this concept of happiness feasible? Kraut analyzed it by one case:

Imagine a person being deceived by his “so-called” friends, so that he can't doubt that these “friends” really love him and praise him, even though it is not the truth. This

person has been blinded by this illusion.¹⁰

If he has been living like this, will it be a happy life? Is he a happy person? Extreme subjectivist who will believe, because happiness is just a pleasant state of mind and nothing else. According to this standard, he is happy. Here, extreme subjectivist seems too naive to understand happiness. They ignore the content of Part 2 of the concept of happiness that we have mentioned before, that is, certain standards that people need to achieve in life. Kraut pointed out a core issue. Extreme subjectivism actually accepted the following assumption: when a person's perception of the world is completely wrong, this fact is not enough to deny that he is happy. Although this person may very much expect his perception of the world to be correct, his cognition about this life does not have to be true to make him happy.¹¹ Kraut, for example, said that when we ask a person "what will make you feel happy" or "what is your idea of happiness," we are not asking the respondent to know what kind of mental state he will be. It is different when we are asking "what makes you angry." Instead, the question of happiness is a question about the standards he has set and the goals he wants to achieve.¹² Through linguistic analysis, Kraut made a further clarification on happiness.

After ruled out such extreme subjectivism, Kraut discusses three conceptions of happiness.

1) Aristotle's concept of happiness: to achieve your own "characteristic activity" or "function" (ergon). For most people, whether they realize it or not, they can never achieve Aristotle's sense of happiness (eudaimonia). The highest happiness is the life of contemplation.

2) "Our concept of happiness"¹³: A person reaches or is close enough to the standard of

¹⁰ *Two Conceptions of Happiness*, p. 178.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 178.

¹³ Here Kraut refers to the modern people's understanding of happiness, see *Ibid.*, p.180 .

happiness he sets for himself, whether or not his standard is appreciated or endorsed by others, as long as the things he values are indeed rewarding, then he is happy. Thus, we can infer that even people with mental disabilities could be happy.¹⁴

3) Modern objectivism: A person must fully realize his abilities under ideal conditions. Therefore, even if a person reaches his or her own standards, he is not necessarily happy. One person cannot autonomously set up the criteria of happy life. The ideal life of each person has been determined by the nature of each person, each person has to do his best to achieve this ideal life. This kind of objectivism is also known as the revised version of Aristotelianism.¹⁵

These conceptions are all ontologically objective, but it is only different in the subjective and objective aspects of axiology. (1)(3) are axiologically objective concepts of happiness, and (2) is axiologically subjective concept of happiness due to the standard of happiness being set by ourselves. Kraut's concept of happiness is axiologically subjective but ontologically objective. It is different from "feeling theory" "life satisfaction theories" and other ontologically subjective theory.¹⁶

About axiological subjectivism and axiological objectivism, Kraut demonstrates an example to show our usage of happiness subtly swing between the two:

When we bless a child a happy life, we are actually adopting an objectivism concept. We do not wish to say that the child lives a happy life in the case of misfortune. We wish that this child can live an ideal life upon which everyone generally agrees. But when we judge whether an adult is happy, we think that as long as he feels happy and

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.180.

¹⁵ *Two Conceptions of Happiness*, pp.180-83. Although we mainly emphasize the second part of happiness "the standard of achieving happiness". In fact, these three concepts of happiness naturally include the first part, "feeling happy".

¹⁶ The "feeling theories" in the concept of happiness refers to the fact that if a person has a pleasant feeling, then she is happy. The "Life Satisfaction Theories" means that if a person holds the belief: her important desire of the majority have been satisfied or she felt she was a good life, and that she is happy. In addition ontological subjectivist theory of happiness as well as Hedonism. See *Good and Good For You: An Affect Theory of Happiness*, p. 139.

has reached the requirements for his or her own life, this adult is happy.¹⁷

In this case, it is not the meaning of happiness that changes, but our criteria for happiness.¹⁸

Kraut also dealt with the issue of modern objectivism. The difficulty of modern objectivism is that it cannot determine what each person's ideal life is. And "we have no defensible method for discovering each person's distance from his ideal live."¹⁹

The author concluded that because of modern objectivism cannot provide an effective way to help us find the ideal life for everyone, Aristotle's concept of happiness cannot adequately be used for contemporary practice. So, we can only be aware of its shortcomings while maintaining our current concept of happiness. Of course, the biggest problem with our subjectivism of happiness is that we say too little about how we should live our lives. Subjectivism on happiness does not require as much philosophical foundation as Aristotle's conception of happiness and modern objectivism, but it cannot serve as a strict ethical guiding principle. Despite adhering to "our concept of happiness", Kraut did not give up the attention to the axiologically objective concept of happiness in spite of the unworkable situation of all the axiologically objective proposals.

4 Sizer uses the affect theory to connect two parts of the concept of happiness²⁰

Earlier we mentioned that the concept of happiness consists of two parts: (1) the attitude of people towards life and specific state of mind; (2) certain criteria that people need to achieve in their lives. Laura Sizer in her paper *Good and Good for You: An Affect Theory of Happiness*, took the approach of affect theory so that she might give a more coherent explanation. Aiming at the current popular view: defining happiness as a state

¹⁷ *Two Conceptions of Happiness*, pp. 187-89.

¹⁸ In the part concerning "community perspective", I will analyze this case again.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 192.

²⁰ *Good and Good For You: An Affect Theory of Happiness*, pp. 133-63.

of mind (emotion, modality or a series of judgments) or a situation of life - how a person's life is going on. Sizer believes that these two views (1) subjective “good feelings” (2) objective "good life" reflects our intuition about the nature of happiness. These two ways of understanding happiness have captured our different, but important, intuitional characteristics of happiness, making it impossible for us to accept only one of them. Through the affect theory of happiness, Sizer allows us to reconcile our intuition about the objective and subjective aspects of happiness.²¹

We must first pay attention to the problem that Sizer's theory aims to solve. The reason why Sizer raises the affect theory is due to Robert Nozick’s “experience machine problem”. This problem raises our concerns about the objective and subjective aspects of happiness, such as on the one hand the emotional state, feeling and on the other hand objective living conditions of human in the world. Are these two aspects separate?

The “experience machine problem” can be described as follows: If there is such a machine, it can give people all their desired experience (including the belief in experience). Once we enter this machine, we will no longer remember having entering it, this Faustian deal. And our life in the experience machine will be impossible to distinguish from the real world. In addition, our life in the experience machine will be guaranteed to be very happy on any subjective standards. Will we make this Faustian deal and enter this machine? According to the above conditions, it seems that the experience machine should be a good choice for everyone. However, Nozick pointed out that most of us intuitively will hesitate in front of this machine. Nozick aims to demonstrate with this example that certain type of desires or feeling of fulfillment of certain goals could not defines happiness. Rather, the experience of the real world could. Thus, Nozick deduced that it is not purely subjective contents, but our experience of objective facts in the real world could define happiness.²²

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 140.

But Nozick still faces such a problem: If he thinks that most people will hesitate before the experience machine, he must explain why people hesitate. Nozick explains that this is because people will be eager to have a kind of “actual connection with reality.”²³ However, such an explanation is quite weak. If we deemed that such “connection” would give us some additional experience, this would undoubtedly fall into the trap of experience machine because it can satisfy any need in terms of experience. Nozick persists that this “connection” is an essential part of happiness, namely some “things” outside of our experience would define happiness. This explanation is far from satisfactory.²⁴

In response to this, Sizer pointed out that the core of the problem is how to construct an argument in which the two main aspects of happiness could be related to each other in deep principles. This will not fall into the trap of experience machine problem. Sizer believes that affect theory can solve this problem.²⁵

Sizer’s affect theory consists of two parts: the “emotion” part and the “mood” part. According to Sizer, “an emotion state is embodied and ‘embedded’ in the real world, and functions to mediate our interactions with that world.”²⁶ Mood has these characteristics as well. Mood is only more objectless and more diffuse and pervasive than emotion. It affects the characteristics of our thinking and behavior in a nonspecific way. “Positive affective states are embodied and embedded; they are complex dynamic processes that involve both subjective psychological states and objective states of the body and environment.”²⁷ “So that happiness can be seen as shaped by and reflective of the objective conditions of our lives”.²⁸ There are coordinated interactions between the body, the mind, and the environment.²⁹ In the argumentation, Sizer cited a lot of psychology and cognitive science research as demonstrative tools. For example, while

²³ Robert Nozick (1989) p.106, cited in Sizer, *Good and Good For You: An Affect Theory of Happiness*, p.141.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Good and Good For You: An Affect Theory of Happiness*, p. 147.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

arguing for the characteristics of positive moods, Sizer has cited many psychological and cognitive science research results. People with positive emotions are easier and faster to think of positive thoughts and memories rather than negative ones; it is easier for them to view things with a positive attitude; they will get more information from outside and focus on the “bigger picture” rather than details; their attention is outward, namely towards other people, not like people with negative emotion who pay attention only to themselves.³⁰ In this way, Sizer has integrated our intuitions about the subjective and objective aspects of happiness.

The difference between Sizer and Kraut lies in axiological level of the concept of happiness. Sizer distinguished between the axiologically objective and the axiologically subjective. If a theory “allow that the subject's own standards and values provide the criteria for determining whether the life is a good one”³¹ is axiologically subjective. If not, it is axiologically objective. This distinction is consistent with Kraut's distinction in his own essay, and it is clear that Kraut's theory is axiologically subjective. However, Sizer herself did not have an attitude on this issue, because that is beyond the scope of the essential concern of her article.

It can be said that although Sizer did not make an axiological choice just as Kraut did, she still tried to achieve reconciliation between the two categories of the concept of happiness given by Kraut.

From Sizer's point of view, she wants to solve a difficulty Kraut and other philosophers left behind, namely the dichotomy of the subjective and objective aspects of happiness. However, I think that Kraut has actually connected two aspects of the concept of happiness while dealing with this issue. As we have mentioned before,

(1) Have a pleasant feeling (feeling happy);

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

(2) Complete or close to the standards of your ideal life.

These two parts are mentioned by Kraut in “our concept of happiness”. If we complete (2), naturally we can also reach (1).³² Therefore, Kraut in fact has already justified the connection between these two parts when discussing “our concept of happiness” despite the weakness of this connection. The risk here is that when (2) is satisfied, does not necessarily get (1), because it is possible that one person is too demanding on himself. So even if he actually lived a very good life, because he was too demanding, he still could not have a happy feeling.

Kraut’s discussion about “Our concept of happiness” and Sizer’s affect theory share a shortcoming. It is that they failed to give sufficient guidance for a person in their lives about which goal to pursue.³³ This shows that they are not enough to become strict ethical principles. Through the help of psychology and neuroscience, Sizer portrays the outline of an objective view of happiness. In the meantime, we can also consider it as a defense of Aristotle's view of happiness and Kraut’s “our concept of happiness” when facing of other subjective theories of happiness.

5. Kraut and Sizer through the lens of Aristotelian ontological objectivism

The concept of happiness concept by Kraut and Sizer have inherited Aristotelian ontological objectivism. To put it simply, both of their theories consist of two parts. One is the psychological state on the subjective level, that is, “feeling happy”, and the second is on the objective level, that is, “living a good life”. On this objective level, Kraut and Aristotle are closer. They both insisted that people should achieve a certain standard of living to be qualified as being happy. But the difference is that Aristotle believes that the standard is the full development of virtue, is “living well” and “doing well”. This points to a good condition of full development. The basis of it is its

³² Kraut mentioned earlier that “. It is to be emotionally engaged in that activity, and to feel pleasure in its performance.” *Two Conceptions of Happiness*, p.180.

³³ *Good and Good For You: An Affect Theory of Happiness*, p. 158.

metaphysical teleology and characteristic activity argument. In particular, Aristotle also argued that “contemplative life” as a “self-sufficient” life is the highest happiness. This measure of happiness is external to human. It is objective. According to Kraut, although he also believes that people must reach certain standards of living in order to be qualified as being happy, the standard of happiness is set by everyone. He differs from Aristotle on this point. This distinction is an axiological one. Aristotle insisted an axiologically objective view, namely the qualification of happiness has an objective standard. While Kraut adopts an axiologically subjective view, namely the qualification of happiness has a subjective standard. This distinction determines that Kraut's “our concept of happiness” does not have the rigor to serve as ethical guiding principles as Aristotle's view of happiness does. Unlike Aristotle, Kraut's theory also suffers from a lack of metaphysics. Because it is not rigorous enough, it is flexible enough. It might be especially suitable for our current era of value diversity. Of course, Kraut as a philosopher with Aristotelian tendencies, he would not be satisfied with our current concept of happiness theory of axiological subjectivism. He would still bear hope for axiological objectivism.

Sizer inherited Aristotle's objective stance. However, she differs with Kraut quite obviously. Although she had made such a distinction between axiologically subjective and axiologically objective, she didn't take a stand. This is due to her theoretical ambitions. Her concern is how to unite our two main intuitions about happiness, namely ontologically subjective and ontologically objective view of happiness. This union should be done in a plausible way. In her affect theory about happiness, the objective part is life conditions without further distinction in axiology. This differs from the objective or subjective standard of happiness which Aristotle and Kraut are interested in. Sizer committed to unite the subjective mental state and objective life condition or the external environment by her affect theory (emotions and moods)

The main purpose of adhering to the objective aspect of the concept of happiness is to deal with Nozick's “experience machine problem”. In the third part of this article, we

also argued that the subjective theory of happiness cannot meet the challenge of this problem. And when we insist that happiness must include an objective dimension, the problem of the separation between experience and the real world is no longer there. For the “experience machine problem”, the attitudes of Kraut and Sizer are different. Like Aristotle, Kraut proposed an objective external standard that must be achieved so that this external requirement solves the separation between subjective experience and objective reality. This eliminates the theoretical threat of “experience machine problem”. On the other hand, Sizer integrates subjective emotions, feelings, and objective real world through affect theory. It makes them a more closely connected whole. Finally, it could achieve happiness as one way we interact with the world. “The states of our bodies and minds both reflect this world, and help shape it.”³⁴

6. Community perspective: the possibility of the revival of Aristotelianism

Both Kraut and Sizer took ontological objectivism under the influence of Aristotle's concept of happiness, but they did not adhere to Aristotle's axiological objectivism. Because of the difficulties of axiological objectivism, Kraut retreats back to axiological subjectivism. Meanwhile, Sizer did not take a stand in terms of axiology. She tried to connect the ontologically subjective and objective aspects of the concept of happiness through affect theory. I was pondering whether we can go further and explore axiologically subjective / objective issues. In Kraut's essay, he accepted “our concept happiness” because of the implausibility of Aristotle's view of happiness and its revised version of modern objectivism, namely the axiological subjectivism. Axiological subjectivism holds that the standard of ideal life is set up by individuals themselves. But I found that “our concept of happiness” is not exactly as what Kraut analyzed. “Our concept of happiness” contains a weaker version of axiological objectivism.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

When we set up the standard of happiness, we do not act entirely like Kraut described (set up standard for oneself). On the contrary, we would be heavily influenced by our community. For example, when Chinese people set up their own standards of happy life, they will take into account many family factors: whether the family is happy, whether the children are living happily, and whether the parents and elders are healthy. This is the manifestation of the profound influence of the community. This influence is so subtle and omnipresent that one tends to be unaware of the influence of the community. This influence by the community is external to us and objective. As another example mentioned in the third part of this article, Kraut's example of blessing a child: Our blessing to the child adopts an axiologically objective position, and we hope that the child will live the ideals that everyone expects. And when we judge whether an adult is happy, we will think that as long as he feels happy and reaches his own standard of happiness, he is happy. We find that the standard of attributing happiness has changed in this process, from axiological objectivism to subjectivism. Kraut did not make further explanations on this contradiction, but we can resolve this problem by community perspective. Kraut is trying to portray a modern understanding of happiness, but in fact this understanding is already a product of interaction in community, and it will inevitably be marked by axiological objectivism. Our taking an axiologically objective stance when blessing a child is due to the influence of community: social interaction between people forms such a pattern of behavior. You're unlikely to wish the child bear the bad fortune he suffered while still live a happy life.³⁵ You will only wish him or her to live an ideal life that everyone expects to live. The shift from axiological objectivism to subjectivism when we judge the happiness of an adult is also due to the influence of the community. We are less likely to adhere to an ideal living standard that is not applicable to most adults or an objective but over-demanding ideal. In this case, there is nothing but the changes of criteria on the surface, but deep in reality it reflects the consistent influence of community to its members' judgements about happiness.

³⁵ I apply Kraut's example, see Kraut, *Two Conceptions of Happiness*, pp. 187-88.

Such objectivism is different from Aristotle's objectivism. His axiological objectivism means that each person has its "characteristic activity" that its "intrinsic activity". It is a strong version of objectivism. But our axiological objectivism means that our criteria for happiness and the changes in criteria have been deeply influenced by the community. This influence stems from the interaction between individuals in community. It is external to each individual. Thus, there is no doubt that it is an axiologically objective theory that could be qualified as a weak version of objectivism.

We might notice that this axiological objectivism derived from the community better explain the change of the standards of happiness that Kraut encountered before. To some extent we can see it as a revival of Aristotle 's axiological objectivism, namely a modern solution. In modern time, metaphysical foundations of Aristotle's concept of happiness are no longer recognized by most people, while this weaker version of axiological objectivism derived from the community could be better received by people comparing to other versions of axiological objectivism. It is a better alternative to Aristotle's concept of happiness. In this sense, it can be regarded as a possible revival of axiological objectivism in Aristotle's view of happiness.

7. A clearer investigation of community perspective.

7.1, Definition of community perspective:

People all live and interact with others in a community. That is the fact. What I want to emphasize here is not the fact rather the perspective. The perspective is that we have to consider every actions under the influence of the community which people live in. That means we would never omit the fact that we live in a community and we interact with other people. Therefore we can understand a lot of facts and theories better through this perspective.

The concept of community can be big or small. It can refer to the small one such as a block, a 'real community', a university accommodation such as a single building of Student Union. Or it can refer to the big one as the globe, the earth, or even the cosmos if there are any conscious aliens which can interact with us. But we should always bear in mind that the small, medium or big communities will always be in an interactive status.

I think that Sizer's affect theory can connect the ontologically objective and subjective part quite well though there could be some problems. And community perspective can revise our standard of happiness when we interact with other people in the community. There also could be a connection between affect theory and community perspective. The process that people interact with others in the community also includes their 'emotion interaction'. For example, a person can be motivated by other people's positive emotion.

Sumner introduces the idea of 'autonomous' and 'informed' when he discusses the concept of happiness. Or we can consider it as a life-satisfaction (or as his jargon 'subjective well-being' theory).³⁶

I would also argue that 'autonomous' and 'informed' can be developed better in a community. For instance, people can be informed better in a community from their interactions with others. And people can be better autonomous since they could communicate well with other people in a community. I would argue that the good communication in the community is an essential requirement for both 'informed' and 'autonomous'.

There are two extremes for the understanding of 'autonomous'. The first is that being autonomous means that a person could avoid anyone's influence. The second extreme

³⁶ Check Sumner, W., 1996, *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

is that there is no such a state as autonomous and we are always under others' influence or control. But those understandings do not make sense under the community perspective. 'Autonomous' refers to neither of those two extremes above. It is actually a balanced status in the community. Therefore it includes both subjective and objective parts in the ontological way.

If we don't consider community perspective, we might misunderstand 'informed' and 'autonomous'. If a person doesn't live in a community, he could not be well informed and autonomous. Our community should be tolerant. Therefore, the outliers such as the grass counter should not be compelled from the community.(the grass counter example comes from Rawls, John 1971. A Theory of Justice, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press) In general, community perspective is a perspective: it shows that people live in a community and they are influenced by the community.

From Haybron's interpretation: "L. W. Sumner recently revived happiness in the literature on well-being by arguing that welfare consists in authentic happiness: being happy, where this is adequately grounded in the conditions of your life - i.e., informed - and in values that are truly yours and not, say, the result of resignation to oppressive circumstances." "This is what he calls the autonomy constraint. He lays out this view in Sumner 1996" "Sumner handles familiar worries about radical deception and happy slaves by arguing that such happiness is not authentic: it isn't a response to your life, or it doesn't reflect values that are truly yours"³⁷

7.2, Applications of community perspective

We could find that the community perspective is already involved in a lot of philosophers or psychologists' work. For instance, a leader in the field, Martin Seligman has recently suggested that, rather than happiness, positive psychology

³⁷ Haybron, Daniel M. (2005). On being happy or unhappy. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 71 (2):287-317.

should concern itself with positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment ('Perma') (Seligman 2011).' (from Crisp, Roger, "Well-Being", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/well-being/>>.) We should consider 'Perma' in the perspective of community.

Another example is that Martha Nussbaum concludes the central human capabilities (Nussbaum, M. (2008). Who Is the Happy Warrior? Philosophy Poses Questions to Psychology. *The Journal of Legal Studies*, 37(S2), S81-S113.), which also should be considered under the perspective of community.

7.3 The relation between community and happiness/well-being

The relation between community and happiness/well-being could be both valid. But they refer to different meanings. For example, as to happiness, community refers to the happy feeling constructed in the community. That is, exactly as Haybron and Sizer suggested, an emotional (mostly positive emotion) state interacted with other people in the community.

As to well-being, the situation could be more complicated. It does not only include our happy feeling (the emotion interaction with other people) but also include our gathering with other people, our communication with others, the good life constructed with others. For example, having good communication with your work partner, finishing a group project and so on. Therefore, it includes more ontologically objective things.

Appendix

The subjective and objective distinction between the ontology of happiness and axiology of happiness:³⁸

Ontology \ Axiology	Subjective	Objective
Subjective	Feeling theories Life satisfaction Theories	Stoic conceptions of happiness
Affect theory Objective	Kraut's "Our concept of happiness"	Aristotelian happiness Modern objectivism Community perspective

Note: Sizer 's affect theory intends to better reconcile the ontologically subjective and objective aspects of happiness. However, she did not make a choice in terms of axiological subjectivity or objectivity.

³⁸ This table is mainly based on the distinction made by Sizer in *Good and Good For You: An Affect Theory of Happiness*, pp. 136-38.

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