

Happiness, utility, responsibility
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Recent scientific developments suggest that it has become possible to measure the subjective feelings of “satisfaction with life” in a reasonably reliable way. While this is a significant step forward from a positive point of view, more and more economists have also succumbed to the temptation of using these measures in a (quasi-) utilitarian normative analysis. We revisit the ethical case against utilitarianism in the light of the recent advances in the measurement of happiness. We propose an alternative (non-welfarist) procedure to think about the trade-offs between different dimensions of well-being: this procedure integrates willingness-to-pay considerations with equity issues in a coherent way. We then show how the happiness regressions offer one possible survey technique to make this alternative procedure operational. However, this requires that the simple happiness measures are corrected and that the ethical questions with respect to responsibility and personal privacy are taken up explicitly.