

CONTENTMENT AND EDUCATION

Paul Gibbs*

Abstract: Current higher education strategies seem to concentrate on the expedient, developing skills that can secure employment in the world of work. Valuable as this may be as a way to satisfy politico-economic policy imperatives, it strays from education as an edifying process where personal development represents, through the facing up to distress and despair, an unsettling of our developing identity and a negation of our immediate desire satisfaction. What is proposed for higher education is not a dominant priority to feed happiness for others, but a mission for personal contentment revealed through realizing students' potentialities, for them, thus recognizing their limitations as part of seeking an attunement to contentment.

Introduction

The educational philosopher Dearden points out that “education may be broadly defined as the process of learning through which we come to an understanding and appreciation of what is valuable or worth pursuing in life, and happiness is no more than one among several final ends worthy of pursuit” (Dearden, 1968: 27). Dearden’s contribution follows the Aristotelian prescription of well-being (1984) that shares the focus on the distinctive human attributes of rationality and desire found in Augustine (2010), Epicurus (2013) and, more recently, Mill (2008), Russell (2006), Dewey (2012), Noddings (2003), Standish et al. (2006), Dewey (1966), Haybron (2009), White (2012) and Greve (2012). This, of course, is countered by Kant’s argument that happiness cannot be a final end in itself, hinging on the observation that, although we are naturally drawn to our own happiness, such a drive is not necessarily mediated through reason (and through reason to duty). Kant’s concept of happiness is “such an indeterminate one that even though everyone wishes to attain happiness, yet he can never say definitely and consistently what it is he really wishes and wills” (Kant, 1981: 27/418).

This paper is premised on the plausible nature of our being through Heidegger’s work on moods (Ratcliffe, 2010) and their attunement.¹ I call this, after Heidegger’s work on profound boredom (1995), profound happiness or contentment,² based on Heidegger’s passage, “other moods, are founded existentially upon us” (Heidegger, 1962: 395). Fundamental moods determine how all things appear to us; they provide

*Dr. PAUL GIBBS, Professor, Director of Research, Institute for Work Based Learning , Middlesex University, UK. Email: p.gibbs@mdx.ac.uk.

¹ Following Ratcliffe, attunement is chosen as a translation of Heidegger’s used of *Befindlichkeit*. Alternatives include ‘state of mind.’ as used by Macquarrie and Robinson (Heidegger, 1962) but this implies Moods constitute a sense of being part of a world rather than is pre-subjective and pre-objective.

²Bauman (2007) links the two by claiming assuaging boredom is a measure of a happy life. I make no such claim.

the context for temporary object-directed emotions.³ They differ from a Confucian view of our emotional reaction to a situation as well as an emotional reaction in a situation, as in the case when you are a teacher teaching brilliant students. Moods are taken in the Heideggerian sense as being the way we experience being part of our world and they set the way in which we interpret it. They are fundamental, and are more primordial than emotions. According to Ratcliffe, “moods, for Heidegger, give sense to Dasein’s world and to the manner in which Dasein finds itself relating to the world” (Ratcliffe, 2002). This distinguishes them from emotions, which have an intentionality, and are brief episodes with specific objects, whereas moods are longer-term states that either do not have objects or encompass a wide range of objects. Emotional states presuppose a world of background moods that make them possible (Ratcliffe, 2013). We have a number of fundamental moods that enable us to engage successfully (or otherwise) with our world and those within it.⁴

I. Contentment

Contentment is not the happiness we might associate with consumerism, sensual desire satisfaction or, as Ahmed (2010) has illustrated, a happiness that we are obliged to embrace but, following Heidegger, a state of being content with oneself. Profound happiness is contentment in becoming what one wills one’s being to be, in the knowledge of one’s capabilities. The approach involves an educative process of developing potential capabilities and a realistic appreciation of what this means for one, being in the world with others. It is not fanciful and it denies that one can be whatever one fantasises; replacing this with a notion of contentment with what one might feasibly be (see Gibbs, 2014). To find our potential to be and to will its realisation requires the disruption of our tranquillity, and a heightened awareness and realisation of the core structural capabilities of critical thinking, confidence and citizenship. Securing these capabilities is emotionally unsettling, distressing and creates temporary negations to contentment but, in doing so—provided we experience them as part of our understanding of ourselves through attunement to the mood of contentment rather than anxiety—these capabilities bring benefits for individual growth.

This approach differs from the two main thrusts of literature concerned with happiness studies: well-being, leading to the Aristotelian *Phronimos* or the Confucian *Junzi*, and the hedonism of *Epicurus* and *Mencius*. It differs from judgements of well-being made retrospectively about an accumulation of satisfied lifelong desires, and from the explicit and normative directives of what is prudently good for one. In this sense, contentment is not strictly the Aristotelian *eudaimonia* that prioritises well-

³Heidegger alludes to a number of profound moods but develops an analysis of two; anxiety (in *Being and Time* and boredom in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. It is in the *Metaphysics* that Heidegger talks of a range of fundamental moods, but does not pursue more than boredom.

⁴There is a potential linkage with the notion of *xi* 喜, *le* 樂 and *you* 憂, as discussed by Shun (2014).

being based on moral, wealth or health imperatives, although it does retain notions of agentic directed growth, meaning and purpose informed by societal norms, whilst not being restricted to them. I can be content and virtuous, but I do not need to be virtuous to be content.⁵

Hedonism also differs from contentment as the sustainable notion of happiness. Although contentment certainly finds a place for the presence of joy and momentary outbreaks of expression of delight and pleasure, it is not reliant on extrinsically directed and generated pleasures, and is an intrinsic state of awareness. Contentment, then, is a blend of both these traditional forms of happiness theory, realized through one's temporal being, and interpreted and understood from a mood of contentment with the living of a willed life plan revealed through attunement. It is one's mood that becomes attuned to one's being within the consequences of one's agentic capabilities. It is being able to strive realistically to know the best one can be, and not the best anyone else might want one to be.

Significantly, for Heidegger the affectiveness of our being "has already disclosed, in every case, Being-in-the-world as a whole, and makes it possible first of all to direct oneself towards something" (Heidegger, 1962: 176). These fundamental attunements shape how we experience the world and things within it and, together with discourse and understanding, determine how we make ourselves meaningful and grasp our world (Heidegger calls this "care"). The objects that the joy, happiness or sadness trigger are revealed because of a mood that determines the way of making one's way in the world. These outbursts last for the duration of the stimulus and, once gone, depending on our fundamental attunement, leave us somewhere between distress and contentment. However, we are not at the mercy of moods. Heidegger asserts that we "should and must, through knowledge and will, become master of its moods; in certain possible ways of existing, this may signify a priority of volition and cognition" (Ibid: 175).

This structure of emotions and moods might have reasoned with Shun's interpretation of the Confucian invulnerable ethical person. Here the "primacy of the ethical" Shun (2014) determines the way in which the world presents itself to the *Junzi* not as a disruptive way of being in the world but as a way of being-in-the-world. It is a fundamental attunement to the contentment of the ethical. The invulnerability comes from taking a stance and living that in the way of the ethical. Shun evokes *Mencius'* unmoved mind to establish this stance. Indeed, it could be suggested that the struggle to achieve such a position would see the contentment proposed here as invulnerable. However, the model of contentment developed here allows for a less demanding form of resilience that might claim an ideological rather than an ethical state of mind. If allowed within a Confucian analysis, this type of contentment might be considered vulnerable. Such a distinction helps in allowing the notion of contentment to be a fundamental attunement to one's life without requiring the practice of a *Phrónimos* or a *Junzi* to be contingent upon it.

⁵This is opposite to Rousseau who, in his letter to D'Offreville (1997), wrote that you can only be content if you are honest, yet you can be honest and not content, and is supported by Tatarkiewicz's analysis (1976).

II. Temporality of Contentment

Moods, along with other aspects of care, are to be analysed in terms of temporality, according to Heidegger. The tripartite structure of time utilised (Gibbs, 2010) identifies temporality of being in the world in three senses. In the first, ordinary time—the time of emotion—is calculative or experienced as a present extended in time, in external measurable time. In this state of temporal isolation our past and our future operate with ‘in-the-moment’ joy or despair. We risk violating our being if we do not reconnect with the primordial temporary of Care, the temporal form of contentment. The second form of temporality, world time, is spatial-time. Here, events are located with respect to other events; not by their duration as measured in clock time, but in terms of their temporal juxtaposition. Past, present and future all play a role in the location, but not the experience, of present time. Last, the temporality of mood (originary temporality) is that of the integration of past, present and future in the moment of being: “The primordial unity of the structure of care lies in temporality” (Heidegger, 1962: 375). As Gibbs suggests, “all three modes of time are bound together degeneratively and dependently; ordinary time is a degenerative form of world time, and world time is a degenerative form of originary temporality” (Gibbs, 2010: 392).

Like Heidegger’s profound boredom, the phenomenon of contentment may take three distinctive forms, I suggest, reflecting their temporality. The first is emotional eruptions of joy, pleasure, gratification, bliss, lust or ecstasy, when there is a specific focus for the explicit show of happiness in an episodic fashion; a happiness directed towards something. The second manifestation of underlying happiness is a feeling akin to a shallow cheeriness, without substance; a cheeriness or musing that is empty, not evoked by any specific external event but by a state of limbo, a temporal standing (Heidegger, 1995: 122). This might be called “whatever” happiness. It is a satisfied state that is a reproduction of exciting norms of society and is specific to each epoch, currently consumerism.

The third is ontological and is an attunement to our own being’s happiness, the fundamental happiness of willing and then enacting one’s being. This is represented as contentment and is revealed in one’s engagement with one’s being through taking a stance on fitting into that being, “being happily me”. Willing such a being is neither constant nor stable, but enduring. Normally, our attunements are appropriate to our willed becoming within the world of action and, if we become dysfunctional if in our dominant way of dealing with the world we are not able to experience other appropriate attunements (anxiety) and emotions (fear). This is through a discourse; a hermeneutic reading of the world foregrounded in our mood. Heidegger also maintains that modes of interpretation enabled by discourse may serve to determine the range of possible moods. Attunement creates an engagement with others and, in this sense, it is a “kinesthetic and emotional sensing of others knowing their rhythm, affect and experience” (Erskine, 1998). As Heidegger observed, the effect is to create an atmosphere that can change the disposition of everyone in the vicinity.

Each of these three realisations of happiness is accompanied by a dominant notion of temporality⁶ (see Table 1).

Table 1 Contrasting forms of happiness⁷

	Directed Happiness	'Whatever' Happiness	Contentment
General distinction	Conspicuous expression of a happy emotional state of joy, bliss or ecstasy. A loss in the moment, anticipated present and then gone.	Inconspicuous occurrence of passing time, hidden from oneself and taken as a disposition—he is a cheery soul. Directed at the public-ness of others.	An attunement to one's existential being. A feeling of fitting with oneself regardless of others around one— informed contentment.
Notion of time	Datable time, that is, events located in relation to others. It is the shaping of separated notions of past, present and future.	Time is linear and progressive. It is the shaping of separated notions of past, present and future.	Originary or primordial time, the time in which we make sense of ourselves, temporality temporalized in the present.
The range of resonance	Being forced between particularly happy events.	Dissipation of happiness as a cheeriness throughout the whole situation.	Contentment with agentic being.
Happiness in relation to a situation	Bounded in a situation, limited by extrinsic circumstances.	Not bound to a particular situation, but a way of acting for others in their world.	All-embracing.

Contentment is the freedom of self-determination within the context of a chosen world view. Fundamental happiness, as distinct from episodic happiness—whether intense joy, eruptions of trivial pleasure or scrutinised notions of what is good for one—is not restricted to what others think and attempt to determine, but to one's own stance. It is not the satisfaction of exciting preferences, but the securing of one's action in a life plan of one's being. This position allows for happiness to be cross-

⁷Evidence to support the temporal and emotional structures of happiness and contentment can be found in recent works in the study of happiness (e.g. Diener, 1984; Shmotkin, 2005). They differ from Heidegger mainly in the temporal modes of a distinct past, present and future. While they do not reflect his notion of being's fundamental attunement realized in a state of "originary" or primordial temporality, they accord with the notion of contentment as an enduring temporal notion, Şimşek (2009) has proposed a construct of subjective well-being as "one's evaluation of life in both past and future time perspectives in addition to the present" (Şimşek, 2009: 505), and as a life project created and maintained in a temporal perspective (Şimşek and Kocayörük, 2012). By evoking Heidegger, Şimşek (2009) argues that time, "when considered as a basic ontological category, transforms the concept of 'life as a personal project' into one more abstract: 'life as a project of becoming', which is the chief good as the indicator of a happy life." (Ibid: 511)

cultural and embraces faith as well as pragmatism, all in a non-economic stoic form of willed intention. It is about one's fit within one's being, so as to flourish in the world of, but not resolved by, others.

III. Soft and Hard Authenticity

The contentment envisioned here requires personal awareness and taking a stance on what is feasible for one to be, but it requires neither virtuous living⁸ (although it might be aided by it) nor dependency on a joyous life after death, although it may include both. It is no easy task to will one's being, to take a stance on one's being, that is existentially sustainable and brings contentment. It is a role that higher education should facilitate through bringing an awareness of attunement to moods to its presentation of emotional as well as propositional knowledge. Understanding and interpreting one's potential to be within one's world requires education, vision, courage and tenacity. These are necessary if one is to ascertain how one's being fits best alongside others, without compromising one's being for the sake of merely fitting-in for the fleeting benefit of others' comfort.

According to Heidegger, this process of taking a stance is the ownership of our own choices, and ownership leads to authenticity. These choices are dependent upon specifics open to each of us in our average, everyday existence. For Heidegger, Dasein should not be "interpreted with the differentiated character [Differenz] of some definite way of existing, but that it should be uncovered" (Dasein, 1962: 69); it is not prescribed, but unfolds in how we engage with the world. In it revealed by being in the world and is a form of being that is a condition of one's socio-historical context. Guignon points to the constancy of this authenticity that leads to "the 'sober joy' of an authentic existence: when one seizes hold of one's life with deceive-ness and clarity" (Guignon, 1993: 233). Moreover, for Heidegger, making choices on one's being cannot be based only on any external value judgement of what the authentic ought to be; neither is it a rejection of the inauthentic as a "bad" way of being. Here, self-understanding implies a form of interpretation that is Heidegger's hermeneutic circle; it is ontological, not ethical—"our own Interpretation is purely ontological in its aims, and is far removed from any moralizing critique of everyday Dasein" (Ibid: 211). This soft interpretation of authenticity does not try to reject tradition, but seeks to understand the heritage of tradition in how these choices are revealed and made available. In this sense, eudemonic calls for personal well-being as some form of good form of happiness is done from the inauthentic position of authority, "oppressing other diverse ways-of-being" (Trubody, 2015: 29). It is here that a value base of a worthy and moral state of authentic happiness differs both from the contentment proposed here and from the argument made by Chen (2013). In the former, a formalised notion of authenticity and happiness assumes external standards that one has to match—being excellent, being a better person, and so on. This is not my reading of Heidegger and it leads Trubody to talk of a "cult of the authentic"

(2015). This authenticity is prescriptive in attributing value to authenticity, as opposed to inauthenticity, and sees contentment as *poiesis*.

For Heidegger, authenticity is embedded in “*das Man*”: our need to conform (at least in the development of a discourse) to the traditions and practices that make our world intelligible to us. If conformity becomes conformism, however, the need for conformity may also deprive us of an originality of purpose. Often, it is only when we are forced to question what we take as the way to be, for instance when inconspicuous acts reveal themselves in failure, that our conformity is revealed and we question our own stance and that of others. King has argued from a Heideggerian perspective that this corresponds to a sense of fitting in, in that “we can ascribe fittingness to our lives (or elements of our lives, such as our careers, our family arrangements, or our desires and aspiration) when our lives are somehow appropriate to us” (King, 2009: 10).

IV. Contentment within Higher Education

Contentment, then, is necessarily neither a consequence of well-being nor the suffering for some sense of eternal contentment after mortal life. It is about finding and knowing one’s place in the world; fitting in through self-meaningful ways. It comes about by engagement and questioning, and requires the development of capabilities upon which these questions might be based and responses interpreted. Higher education, I propose, ought to give students the privileged space to pursue what they want themselves to be. By making this proposal I am asserting that a purpose of higher education surely must be the development of a criticality in students, both of the circumstances in which one finds oneself and of one’s own action within these circumstances. Providing such a context for reflection ought to be a responsibility of higher education institutions, and taking such time to step aside from the totalizing consumerism of our everydayness is the obligation of the student to this gifted time. To misuse the privilege by busying oneself with what is, rather than what might be, I would suggest, is an abuse of privilege (see Gibbs, 2009). Indeed, many strive for it, while some succeed, but it is not something higher education can gift. It requires personal engagement from students. I am not, of course, proposing that higher education ought to have no economic purpose, but that this has become an overpowering discourse. Nor am I suggesting that contentment is not evident in higher education, alongside satisfaction (although they are not the same thing (Gibbs and Dean, 2014). Rather, contentment should be considered as a goal for higher education alongside other goals, to be set against the needs of the institution in measuring student satisfaction.

Certainly, the central measure of a balance of desire and power, of self-determination and of the need for education to prepare one for the knocks of life in order to be happy, has resonance with Heidegger’s famous pronouncement to teachers to “let students learn”.

V. Troubling Students to Encourage Contentment

The notion that education is the provision of intellectual and emotional desire satisfaction has tended to become a driver of university strategy, reflecting how institutionalized education (in some but by no means all cases) has been interpreted in this consumerist epoch. Roberts (2013) writes that education now seems actually to be about promoting desire satisfaction, often in ways that are not implicit for contentment but that create pleasurable and measurable experiences. The fetish of unquestioned metrics prompts comparisons that lead to the invasion of pedagogical policy and practice. Satisfaction indicators are used to build reputation, inform educational policy and create conformity. Moreover, they represent an agenda for desire satisfaction that is an extravagant, imagined sea of opportunity (favoured by advocates of education for jobs and strong authenticity) and not one where a tempered desire for happiness is achieved through balancing capabilities and potentiality. Indeed, the current context of education seems to emphasize anxiety and fear for one's future.

Contemporary interpretations of higher education institutions tend to position themselves as service providers to satisfied customers, enforcing a consumerist notion of a single future. By interpreting education as a consumable good, students are encouraged to feel that they will miss out in life if they do not consume the best brands, obtain the best marks and make the most money. This does not induce a mood of contentment when engaging in transformative study, instead deliberately induces a mood of anxiety and a fear of missing out. Students are put in a position to judge how satisfied they are with educational practice, not in terms of the practice's essential edifying consequences (for they have limited knowledge or patience to assess this), but in terms with which they are familiar as consumers: brands, entertainment and excitement. Where the experience falls short of the standard of other consumer activities, they are fearful they are missing out on something and, in response to their fears, service providers seek evermore to satisfy this consumer demand. Fear is also induced by governments, whose educational discourse is damning for future life chances, should one not achieve a higher education experience and a certain level of qualification. Equally problematic is whether, once a qualification is obtained, the promised job does not materialize. Bauman talks of those who do not have the resources necessary for socially approved activities as "collateral victims of consumption" (Bauman, 2007: 25). Being in a world and afraid of missing out encourages a mood of anxiety in both those excluded from higher education and those who struggle to find the elusive status it is meant to provide.

Rather than an economic acquisition agenda that has resulted in practices that deny students potentially valuable educational experiences, a university should challenge students to develop the capabilities to optimize their potential to make responsible, or at least informed, choices. This may often be achieved through more space in the curriculum to "potter about", to follow the byways of their curiosity and not to worry about learning outcomes or assessment criteria—all designed to fill up time, to create the urgency of immediate demand and to induce a fear of forgetting

who you are. Such adventures may often be painfully uncomfortable yet, in and of itself, this does not diminish the mood of contentment but strengthens students' resolve and resilience to create personal identity within the context of being a member of society. As Heidegger claims, "real education lays hold of the soul itself and transforms it in its entirety by first of all leading us to the place of our essential being and accustoming us to it" (Heidegger, 1998: 167).

Education ought to provide an arena for the development of our potential and a place to be unsettled—unhappy, if you will—in the realization that one has yet more to learn, and in this way to discuss the realistic potentials rather than any ungrounded imaginary choices about which one might fantasize. To do this, one must be in the "right" mood: a mood of contentment. In order to be plausible, the choices we make need to be adapted to and tested against personal circumstances, not to predetermine or to truncate options but to allow the development of feasible ways to plan to be. We need to evade the impositions of others' moods and to learn to find for ourselves the right mood with which to replace them (Heidegger, 1962: 175). This can be unpleasant, creating short-term dissatisfaction. It may create a state of despair (see Roberts, 2013) from which we cannot find happiness either through solitude or immersed citizenship. Both can be facilitated by education, but neither can achieve it by a totalizing type of public education that matters more to the state than the individual (accompanied by intense surveillance), or a solitary kind of study that renders one isolated in a world of social activity to the extent that it renders real solitude impossible. Where this analysis leads us is to consider that discomfort is fearful only when is it interpreted as such from an attunement to anxiety and, since moods constitute the way in which things matter to us, if we change the mood we change the way they matter.

Moreover, if we crudely follow Rorty (1999) in that higher education's duty is to encourage irony from the socialization of compulsory education, then higher education and its institutions represent a space for this questioning to take place. Further, it might be claimed that higher education has a duty to offer such a space and not to close it out with the business of service delivery based on pleasure, entertainment and job grooming. It is in the Heideggerian sense of a fundamental attunement⁹ to the world through the mood of contentment that we find ourselves disposed to be in the world with others; open to them and not constrained by the consumerism entrapment of a notion of belonging by consuming. Heidegger talks damningly and directly about how consumerism is abandoning Being through letting one's "will be unconditionally equated with the process [consumerism] and thus becomes at the same time the 'object' of the abandonment of Being" (Heidegger, 1973: 107, author's brackets). He continues in a prophetic attack on consumerism as the totalising power held by a few globalised leaders to negate our understanding of our being: the "circularity of consumption for the sake of consumption is the sole

⁹"It is clear that attunements are not something merely at hand. They themselves are precisely a fundamental manner and fundamental way of being, indeed of being-there [*Da-sein*], and this always directly includes being with one another" (Heidegger, 1995: 67).

procedure which distinctively characterizes the history of a world which has become an unworld” (Ibid: 107).

For example, if learning is consumption and consuming is a never-ending requirement of consumerism, then failing to learn fast is a failure of consumption and to be feared. However, if failure to learn quickly reveals issues about oneself that can be explored over time, it might bring deeper understanding or even acceptance that something is personally unlearn-able. Either way, one is content with the educational struggle when one accepts its reality. Such contentment does not seek an end to learning. It is a moving and ceaseless state of learning, ready to face the unanticipated future resolutely as oneself.

It is a mode of practice where the poles of action and holding back form a mode of disclosing and affirming within oneself what is understood to be practised. Such disclosing is through our attunement to a mood. When this is contentment, it brings a sense of hope (Rorty, 1999). To manage this issue requires expertise in the teacher and openness in the student, for “true happiness consists in decreasing the difference between our desires and our powers, in establishing a perfect equilibrium between power and the will” (Rousseau, 2013: 39).

Conclusion

How, then, should higher education provide an educative environment for the development of contentment in the face of the anxiety of consumer demands? It first needs to take its own stance on what is an edifying experience, one where the economic imperative of improved human capital is not allowed to become a quest to make learning just pleasurable, painless and easy to consume. For Heidegger, teaching and learning is about putting “oneself on a journey, to experience, means to learn” (Heidegger, 1971: 143). The teaching of philosophy as exemplified in the Socratic dialogues with Theaetetus would be a good example, as would the contemporary teaching of literature and drama, through which students become engaged with human contexts and emotions. Learning is about thinking and addressing that which confronts us and may be painful, frustrating and negative. It is about dealing with the world and being prepared to act. Education should not be to hide the uncomfortable or the despair of unrealisable goals behind a consumer imperative, and breaking away from this enframement of the anxiety supports and embraces an openness to the world. An attunement to contentment rather than anxiety, of course, applies as well to staff as students, in order that what truly matters in education may be revealed.

Roberts suggests that to be “educated is, in part, to be aware of one’s despair, accepting of it, and able to work productively with it” (Roberts, 2013: 464). This, I have argued, is not found in an attunement of anxiety where notions of consumer satisfaction are directed at education, but in a pre-existing mood of contentment, where things that matter are not viewed as fearful or fearless. Rather, they are viewed as contributing, either positively or negatively, to one’s explored sense of being oneself open to, but not enslaved by, others. This, I believe, is at the core of the common good that many still suggest is a function of higher education.

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