Happiness and Virtue Ethics in Business: The Ultimate Value Proposition by Alejo José G. Sison. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 318 pp. ISBN: 9781107044630

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Professor Sison's book is an important contribution to understanding the intricate contours of happiness and how Aristotelian virtue ethics can contribute to modern happiness studies. This book contains a broad survey and rich discussions of this literature; thus, I cannot do the book justice by reviewing all of the discussions. A primary thesis of the book, however, is that various happiness measures developed by modern happiness scientists do not adequately correspond to what they aim to measure—that is, happiness. Sison proposes that Aristotelian virtue tradition can provide a solution to the problem. Let me explain why I read Sison's book this way.

The book begins with a quote from Pope Francis (xv):

> Are you happy? And why? Absolutely, absolutely. I'm happy. And it's a tranquil happiness because at this age one no longer has the same happiness of a young person, there's a difference. There is a certain interior peace, a strong sense of peace, of happiness, that comes with age. But it's a road that has always had problems. Even now there are problems but this happiness doesn't go away because of the problems. No, it sees the problems, suffers because of them and then goes forward, it does something to resolve them and goes ahead. But in the depth of my heart there is this peace and happiness.

It seems intuitive and compelling that Pope Francis is happy, and truly happy. Therefore, if the various measures developed in modern happiness studies cannot address Pope Francis's happiness, it follows that the measures are measuring something other than true happiness—or at least they are only partially measuring the target. As such, they have a construct validity problem. Sison does not explicitly make this argument in the book, but it seems to me that he intentionally begins the book with this quote. The seven chapters of the book discuss in detail why modern scientific approaches do not adequately explain the type of happiness expressed by Pope Francis.

In chapter one ("Modern Happiness Studies and Individual Subjective Wellbeing") Sison broadly introduces modern happiness studies, which he characterizes as modern in two ways. First, modern studies endorse a subjective account of well-being—that is, whatever individuals take happiness to be. This turn toward subjective well-being departs from philosophical debates about what defines happiness and rejects the classical welfare economists' objective conception of well-being, defined by measures like gross domestic product and national income. Second, modern happiness studies are modern in the sense that subjects' own reports about their happiness are numerically quantified, like scales in course evaluations.

In chapter two ("Happiness and Income") Sison discusses how much happiness money can buy. His answer, based on recent research, is that money can typically

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have a strong effect on those who are poor or in jeopardy, but beyond the absolute poverty line, money has less and less impact on people's happiness. As the so-called "Easterlin Paradox" shows, an increase in salary does not always entail an increase in subjective well-being, which is the operational construct for happiness in modern happiness studies. Thus, money and income do not adequately capture Pope Francis's genuine happiness. Of course, Pope Francis has authority and power to allocate a lot of money, but obviously he is not happy because of the amount of money he controls. He is happy because of something else.

In chapter three ("Choice, Desire, and Pleasure") Sison discusses how individual consumer behavior—how one spends money rather than how much one has—can impact happiness. According to research, Sison points out that how money is spent is more important than how much one has; but how to spend money is much less important than how to accept what is spent. For instance, even though the best portfolio manager helps you spend your money in an optimal manner, you cannot be happy unless you gladly accept it and are satisfied with—and grateful for—it. Sison emphasizes that such an attitude of contentment can be raised by (early) education that helps people achieve true joys and satisfaction in their choices and consumer behavior throughout their lifetime. It is likely that many trained professionals help the Pope maintain his health, clothing, diet, etc. But unlike some celebrities who are helped by similar professionals but are dissatisfied with their lives, Pope Francis is happy. The difference is that Pope Francis has the attitude of contentment. As Sison discusses later, it is an important virtue that one should have in order to be happy. Any happiness measures based on consumer behavior would not adequately address Pope Francis's happiness.

In chapter four ("The Biotechnology of Happiness") Sison discusses what has been known as "brain science." A fundamental principle of brain science is that happiness belongs to brain functioning, so a positive change in the brain can make one happy. An example is "betablockers" (beta-adrenergic receptor antagonists), which help to erase unhappy memories. Drugs such as Prozac or Ecstasy can also help people experience pleasure. But Sison asks whether they provide genuine happiness. Prozac can change brain functioning, but it is not a mechanism to produce authentic happiness. It does not change the circumstances of one's life. In addition, pain or sorrowful emotions are not necessarily incompatible with happiness. As Sison points out, experiencing emotional hardship and discontent is often a constitutive element of a worthy enterprise and a happy life. As Pope Francis confesses above, he has problems and suffers, but nonetheless he professes that he is happy. The peace and happiness that the Pope has is fundamentally different from the Prozac-induced changes in the brain. The quick-fix measures, thus, cannot produce the Pope's deeper level of happiness.

In chapter five ("Working on Happiness") Sison discusses how working life can impact happiness. Research shows that those who are employed typically feel happier than those who are not, while controlling for income levels and education and across almost all kinds of positions. However, Sison points out, more important than having a job is how intrinsically one is motivated to do that job. Those who do not like their jobs but who have to work for money must be less happy than

those who are intrinsically motivated and love their jobs. Obviously, in the case of Pope Francis, his job is not an instrumental tool for earning a salary. He seems to be intrinsically motivated to do what he has been called to do. Thus, any happiness measures that are based on employment but that do not consider what motivations drive working life, are not adequate to account for the type of happiness experienced by those whose work is also a calling.

In chapter six ("Happiness, Politics, and Religion") Sison discusses the importance of society, community, and institutions upon happiness. Sison says that happiness is never truly achieved in isolation. Since how one is happy depends on others and society, how to organize a society is a crucial factor for happiness. Democratic institutions provide important constitutive elements of happiness, participation, autonomy and solidarity. Religious institutions also provide happiness, Sison explains. People are happier when they find themselves in a supportive environment, and healthy religious activities generally provide such an environment. According to research, when people have firm beliefs and an orientation in life, they are happier than those who do not have such an attitude. It is no wonder then, that Pope Francis is happy. He finds himself in a place where many people love, admire, and respect him. Through his religious practices, he cultivates and strengthens his firm convictions about what is important in life.

In chapter seven ("Aristotelian Virtue Ethics: The Forgotten Philosophical Tradition on Happiness") Sison maintains that Aristotle's notion of virtue expresses many of the lessons that we have learned throughout the previous chapters of the book. Sison writes, "It is to show how much Aristotelian virtue has to offer by way of explanatory power to a great number of issues that continue to befuddle even the best of modern happiness research." Sison makes a detailed and philosophically deep explanation to support his thesis. But let us first go back to Pope Francis. He proclaims to be deeply happy. Why? Not because of his income, consumer behavior, Prozac, or the instrumental usefulness or power of his job. He is happy, rather, because he is content with his life and his intrinsic motivation toward his calling and vocation. Moreover, his religious practices provide a supportive environment, with positive and even graceful relationships among others of his faith, helping to secure his beliefs about what is important in life. In short, he is happy because he has cultivated what Aristotle calls virtue.

Sison's suggestion about how to fix the approaches of modern happiness studies is to use virtue or important character traits as proxies for happiness instead of income or other subjective measures of well-being. Virtue is not itself happiness, but as Pope Francis's happiness shows, virtue can be a proxy for happiness, and this is an insight that the Aristotelian thought can provide to modern happiness studies.

How to measure virtue, however, remains an important question. Most modern-happiness studies use numerically quantified scientific measures, but Sison believes that the inherent nature of virtue cannot be well captured by such an approach. Sison's proposal for assessing the degree of virtue in one's life is a narrative-based approach. Critics will note that a coherent life narrative cannot be a rigorous way of evaluating one's happiness and virtue. But if happiness and virtue are inherently

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non-quantifiable, then any attempt to quantify it would be a serious mistake. Still, a narrative-based approach is already a well-respected method in sociology and ethnography. Perhaps some qualitative methods can be used to provide more structure to measure virtue, if we can ethnographically describe a person's happiness in terms of the virtues that they possess or have cultivated. Experimental methods or quantifiable methods are not necessarily inconsistent with virtue if understood in this manner. Some recent experimental studies attempt to rigorously measure virtue and character. If those attempts are successful, then one promising avenue for future work in happiness studies, which Sison does not develop in his book, is to connect the recent experimental studies about virtue and character to happiness studies and develop a virtue-based happiness measure. Such an approach would be scientifically rigorous as well as normatively enlightened.

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