

Featured on *TED talks* in 2007, D. Gilbert discussed the concepts of natural happiness and synthetic happiness throughout his presentation. He describes natural happiness as the feeling of joy one gets upon receiving exactly what he or she had hoped for, while synthetic happiness is the happiness that is created in order to compensate with not receiving what one had hoped for (Gilbert, 2007). In this presentation, Gilbert strives to convince his audience that synthetic happiness is every bit as valid as natural happiness (2007).

In order to emphasize his point, Gilbert (2007) addresses one major study in particular, known as the describes a study using the Free Choice Paradigm (2007). In this study, many participants were asked to rank Claude Monet paintings in order from their favorite to their least favorite and then informed that they could receive a free copy of either their third or fourth choice (Gilbert, 2007). Most participants went for their number three pick and, although they were not offered the choice of the painting they wanted the most, it was found that within several months the participants' preferences on the paintings had changed. On average, these subjects now preferred the painting they had received more than they had originally (Gilbert, 2007).

Since the general public would see this as the participants simply liking the painting they owned more because of their ownership status, the same study was performed on amnesiacs as a control (Gilbert, 2007). These amnesiacs had old memories but were unable to form any new memories. In the study, experimenters asked the patients to rank the Claude Monet prints much as they had asked non-amnesiac patients to do previously (Gilbert, 2007). Experimenters then offered the amnesiac patients the same choice of either their third or fourth ranked painting returned to offer the amnesiacs the ranking survey again within a few hours. Even though the patients had forgotten which painting they personally owned, they ranked the paintings in order of preference once more. The results clearly

Commented [CRR1]: Double check the APA style. This isn't quite right.

Commented [RCR2]: Instead of "discussed ... throughout" – it would be better to say "discussed the differences between natural happiness and synthetic happiness." Or even – he claims that there are two kinds of happiness, natural and synthetic.

Commented [CRR3]: This is the right way.

Commented [CRR4]: Delete extra introductory phrases like this.

Commented [CRR5]: Instead of what he is trying to do, just write what he is doing. "He claims synthetic happiness is ..."

Commented [RCR6]: Notice how much more direct the revised version is.

Commented [RCR7]: This is passive voice – try to avoid "it was found that" – This sentence is fine without that phrase – "... they wanted the most, within several months their preferences had changed"

Commented [CRR8]: This sentence is too long and tries to do too much. Split it up into two or three sentences.

Commented [CRR9]: You just need to cite once per paragraph. Go through and fix the rest of the paragraphs with this in mind.

Commented [CRR10]: Try to reframe this without the general public. "Could this be that people simply prefer paintings that they own?" What is the alternative explanation that the amnesic study is testing?

Commented [RCR11]: You only need to cite once per paragraph

displayed that even amnesiac participants had a higher preference for the paintings they already owned (Gilbert, 2007). These changes in preference depict that the brain is actually changing what does and does not make the person happy based on the person's circumstances (Gilbert, 2007).

Commented [CRR12]: Very good description of the study, but try to summarize what the study shows more clearly and directly. Overall, good job on this paragraph.

In a different study, which aimed to determine if people are happier when faced by reversible decisions as opposed to irreversible ones, Harvard students were asked to take one of two darkroom photography courses (Gilbert, 2007). In both versions of the course, students were asked to choose their two favorite shots to develop and they got to keep one but had to give the other one to the professor. However, in one version, the students had four days to change their mind and swap the chosen photograph for the other one while the opposite version did not allow students to change their choice (Gilbert, 2007). The results displayed that the students who were *not* allowed to change their choice were overall much happier with their decision than the ones that were given the four day exchange period (Gilbert, 2007). D-Gilbert (2007) states that the reason for this is because the students with a choice spend too much time wondering if they made the correct decision or not, causing their satisfaction with the photograph to drop considerably (2007).

Commented [CRR13]: Just describe the results themselves, rather than saying "results showed that..."

Gilbert uses this data in 2007 to conclude that the human mind operates at its best when it is bounded instead of unbounded. For instance, bridled ambition is joyful while unbridled ambition often leads to stealing, cheating, and many other foul deeds (Gilbert, 2007). This is a concept that can be observed in day-to-day life as well. For instance, I have noticed from my own personal experience that students who have that bounded desire to follow a certain path seem to be much happier in school than those who enter in with a boundless desire and no idea where they wish to take their life. This is a sensible and presumably valid observation because students who know what they plan on doing their life tend to see a greater purpose in schooling compared to those students that have no clue where they wish to take their education. The determined students have a greater ability to synthesize happiness

Commented [CRR14]: Be careful with "this" – always try to make it clear what "this" means. An unconnected "this" is often vague, and can lead to a confusing sentence.

Commented [CRR15]: Excellent observation. Infinite expectations can lead to disappointment, whereas clear and limited ambitions can end up making one happier. Not that you have to decide your life's course right now... but it is something to think about, isn't it?

even in their least favorite course subjects because their brains are focused on the ultimate goal and not bogged down with the mental indecisiveness of students in a situation mentally similar to that of the four-day-exchange photography students in the Harvard experiment (Gilbert, 2007).

Commented [CRR16]: Very nice idea, but try to split up this sentence to make it more clear and direct.

As D. Gilbert clearly depicts in his 2007 TED Talk, synthetic happiness is a very real and valid form of happiness and joy that develops when human beings find the need to compensate for not receiving exactly what they wanted. This mechanism is vastly important in terms of life because it provides coping mechanisms that could not be obtained by sadness.

Commented [RCR17]: Watch out for "very" – rarely needed. For example, in the previous comment I made, I could just as easily say "Nice idea"

Reference Section:

Commented [RCR18]: Notice here – just Reference – not "Bibliography," not "Reference Section" not "Sources Cited"

Gilbert, D. (2007). Why are we happy? Why aren't we happy? *TED Talks*.