

## Happy Face or Happy Space? Expansions of Happiness in Eighteenth-century Expository Verse

Kevin L. Cope (Louisiana State University, USA)

**Abstract** Between the now nearly archaic meaning of ‘happiness’ as fit, functional, or favourable and its modern meaning as a generalized mental state stands the Enlightenment, with its investigations not only of the nature of happiness but also of its pursuit and maintenance of happiness. This article analyses the expanding meaning and practice of happiness in the verse of the ‘long’ eighteenth century. The paper begins with what might be called the ‘eruptive’ approach to happiness in which assemblies of offbeat objects such as gemstones or of startling events such as those at the battle of Blenheim sum up to a more general idea of happiness. This amalgamative approach to happiness emphasizes not only the process but the spatiality of happiness: its emergence as an epiphenomenal *je ne sais quoi* and its tendency to expand beyond its origins. This essay explores the resulting eighteenth-century association between happiness and space through a probe of poets, such as James Thomson and Mark Akenside, who specialize in the description of vast panoramas. It uncovers the textures of spatial happiness through a look at sublime poets such as Thomas Warton and Christopher Smart, who link their vivid notions of happiness with visionary ideas of space, orientation, and bearing. The article concludes with an homage to astronomer William Herschel and other happy enthusiasts for vast distances.

### Introduction

«I have no name / I am but two days old. – / What shall I call thee? / I happy am», reports the unexpectedly loquacious babe-in-arms who headlines later eighteenth-century poet William Blake’s short lyric, *Infant Joy* (Stevenson 2014, p. 60). The youngest in the cadre of under-age and under-informed speakers who populate Blake’s verse suite, *Songs of Innocence*, Blake’s forty-eight-hour-old commentator explores those not altogether innocent assumptions by which we not altogether innocently stumble through life. *Infant Joy* features two strangely disembodied voices: a rather mature infant who androgynously identifies himself or herself as ‘happy’ and another disembodied voice who responds with an intention to «sing the while» as «sweet joy befall[s]» the newborn. One voice is as particular as one set of swaddling clothes; the other voice reverberates indeterminately across the full range of human experience.

Despite his somewhat disingenuous suggestion that he sings about innocence, Blake’s stereophonic vocalizing of joy cannily recapitulates the

long cultural history of happiness. In the same way that Blake's song conjugates within one poem both a babbling baby and an omniscient narrator, 'happiness' in the post-Enlightenment world mixes abstraction with individuality. The word denotes a generalized, somewhat indefinite but presumably pleasurable state of mind that seems equally accessible to everyone but that always manifests itself concretely, variously, and experientially in particular individuals. Phrases such as 'the happy life' or 'a happy society' that suggest an intermediate level of abstraction – that describe a condition affecting a large but not unlimited number of people and that reference communal achievements such as good public health or a happily functioning metropolitan sewer system – have faded into occasional or only artful use. It is common enough to say that particular persons such as 'Fred' or 'Agatha' are 'happy' and then, conversely, to posit that their personal happiness is the same good feeling that, universally, everyone feels now and then, but to declare that 'Sweden is a happy land owing to the high quality of its sanitation systems' would be unusual, even eccentric in our times. 'Happy' and 'happiness' today refer in a polarized fashion to the presumptively generalized mental states of particular persons. In and before Blake's time, however, 'happiness' covered a wider range of particularity and abstracton. Idiomatic speech included such options as 'the happiness of mankind is... [to do X, Y, or Z]' or 'it is a great happiness, to enjoy royal favor' or 'the happiness of Pope's style is... [P, Q, or R]' or 'the archer enjoyed the happiness of a stronger-than-expected bow'. Thomas Jefferson's and John Locke's memorable but murky references to 'the pursuit of happiness' seem less puzzling when readers remember that, throughout the Enlightenment, happiness was something of an all-purpose epiphenomenon. Happiness could be an attribute of a thing; an attribute of a society or similar group; a generalized condition; an object of abstract speculation; or just about anything in-between these alternatives.

Happiness, whether accessed through tangible objects or understood as a 'pursuit' or other process or relegated to an inventory of abstracted mental states, was only one of several possible ultimate goods considered by the long eighteenth century. Competing with happiness for primacy of purpose were salvation; prosperity; health; fame; renown; wealth; and 'place', whether understood as a lofty position at court or as localization in an amenable, soothing landscape. Happiness could emerge from, be correlated with, or jar against any of these candidate achievements. Earning, or at least receiving, divine grace and salvation might or might not have involved living a happy life. The story of secularization that runs through the eighteenth century is also the story of the colonization of these other top-level goods by happiness: of an intensifying expectation that any possible good either triggers happiness or is recognized as good owing to the happiness accruing to its possessor. This essay will examine a selection of verse compositions that epitomize this nervous relation between particular

experiences and the happiness with which they are associated. This, by way of opening a window on the long process by which happiness became both increasingly abstract and preeminent among human goals: by which happiness diverged from particular happy things and by which it metamorphosed into not only a general state of mind but also into an indicator of right, merit, and other, sometimes curious forms of success.

## 1

As is known to anyone who has read an eighteenth-century novel and has thereby witnessed a hero or heroine arriving at a state of hard-earned felicity following multitudinous chapters full of vacillating fortunes, happiness is at its best when positioned at the *end*. To understand the revision of happiness during the long eighteenth century, it is helpful to open our study at the end of the period, if only to see what had survived of the older, more particular and substantive version of happiness. At the very far end of the Enlightenment and also down at its lower stylistic reaches, John Scafe, a member of a very small fraternity of mineralogical poets, produced a whimsically abbreviated epic, much in the vein of John Philips's *The Splendid Shilling*, in which the heroic tropes and conventions that enoble Homer's and Virgil's sagas are deployed to describe an assembly of personified gems and stones gathered at the titular *King Coal's Levee* (Scafe 1819).<sup>1</sup> All but free of plot, Scafe's versified panorama reviews all the minerals, precious or otherwise, marching them one-by-one before their bituminous monarch while describing their properties, merits, behaviors, and occasional interactions. Among those in the queue is the omnipresent Sandstone, who might be described as England's one-man building block.

Next came the elder SANDSTONE, jolly fellow!  
 In good society was ever mellow:  
 Which spread – as oft it will in such a case –  
 A rubicund diffusion o'er its face.  
 He was a staid old toper; one who sat  
 Firm on his chair, though blind as any bat (ll. 223–228).

On the brink of the age of caricature that gave us the all the amusing figures in Charles Dickens's novels, Scafe delivers, in the person of Sandstone, a standard jolly old English fellow who happens to be composed of crumbling crystals. Sandstone himself, like the happiness he enjoys, is an extended inventory: a list of specific properties, from rubicund complexion to suitability

1 Subsequent quotations are cited by line number.

for standing with stability in piles. The comic effect of Scafe's poem emerges in part from the ease with which something like stone can legitimately be declared happy as measured by Enlightenment-era standard operating procedures: by tallying up specific properties or attributes or behaviors until, at some point, they sum to happiness. More generally, Scafe reveals the happiness of the mineral kingdom by assembling a vast number of happy rocks, celebrating several dozen minerals one-by-one until the whole seems happy.

Scafe's whimsical review of the crystalline kingdom might seem an odd place to open the pursuit of happiness. Scafe's bagatelle might seem an even less likely place to commence a probe into a poem about, of all things, the Battle of Blenheim, the Duke of Marlborough's complicated, partly heroic and partly lucky attempt to diminish France by securing Austria against Francophilic Bavarians. Yet the War of the Spanish Succession, in which the Battle of Blenheim was the English highlight, provided an unlikely, peace-loving, feckless poet such as John Philips, who is remembered today primarily for his ingenious mock-heroic poem *The Splendid Shilling*, with an occasion to demonstrate not only that he could write seriously, straightforwardly, and without comic contrast in his uniquely mixed idiom – his blend of Homeric heroism, Miltonic grandeur, and local quaintness – but also that he understood the early eighteenth-century expectation that happiness, far from being a transcendent good, would emerge in a very direct way from clusters of specific favorable events. Like John Scafe in the early nineteenth century, John Philips celebrates the eruption of happiness from a few choice events. As opera composers such as Henry Purcell or George Friedrich Handel crowned their operas with vast concluding choruses in which felicity spreads through the land owing to victory in some or other battle or return of a hero or simple turn of good fortune, so Philips, in his poem *Blenheim*, studies the eruptive nature of happiness (or its opposite, unhappiness) by presenting the Battle of Blenheim as the one-stop shop for causes of elevated (or depressed) moods.

In *Blenheim* (see Philips s.d.),<sup>2</sup> one of Philips's signature short, micro-epics (with fewer than 500 lines), some form of the word 'happy' (or 'unhappy') occurs five times, in each of these cases setting the theme for the verse paragraph that follows it. Happiness thus plays an unusually prominent role in a poem putatively concerning a grave topic such as military leadership. Indeed, Philips allows the theme to distract him from his quest for epic gravity. Words from the lexicon of eighteenth-century moods and passions are uncommon among object-oriented ancients.<sup>3</sup> Even the

2 Subsequent quotations are cited by line number.

3 *Blenheim* is the least memorable and least cited of John Philips's handful of otherwise consistently famous and enduring, if sometimes trivial, compositions. As Dustin Griffin notes, its confusing effect, if not its failure, results from its emphatically literary character: its tendency to congregate in too small a space too many conflicting allusions and too many references to

surprisingly empirical John Milton, Philips's English role model, seldom mentions the passions or any other abstractions from the emotions. Three occurrences of the root-word 'happy' pertain to *unhappiness* not so much as a mental state but rather as a function of a reversal of fortune or of a sudden injection into an undesirable situation. In the first of these (l. 321), Philips develops an elaborate, inside-out analogy or typological comparison in which the promise of succession felicitates the son of the Prussian king, who, by comparison, enjoys a better fate than that which ancient Evander gave to his son, Pallas, who perished in battle. The second instance, referencing an «unhappy prince» (l. 351), alludes to the post-Blenheim ejection of the defeated Bavarian potentate; and the third occurrence, referencing an «unhappy nation» (l. 451), alludes to a dispute over the Polish throne. In these instances, unhappiness emerges through a process comparable to the rhetorical device of synecdoche. One event occurs or one situation arises and, lo and behold, the whole of the nation falls into unhappiness. Whatever happiness might be, determining whether a nation is happy or unhappy involves formidable gap-spanning: making conceptual leaps in which the imagination quickly moves from a single incident to the mental state of a nation of millions. The remaining occurrences of 'happy' are likewise matters of enumeration. «Thrice happy Albion» (l. 375) expresses triplicate happiness over the «happy days» (l. 472) that have been restored by Queen Anne. As in so many other militarily inspired poems, the restoration of happiness is the central theme and main conception of *Blenheim*. Nevertheless, *Blenheim*, which belonged to a veritable legion of verse ovals written for the Duke of Marlborough, showcases one bloody scene after another. Even the aforementioned peaceful reign of a virtuous queen appears in a strangely brutal rendition:

Auspicious Queen, since in thy realms secure  
 Of peace, thou reign'st, and victory attends  
 Thy distant ensigns, with compassion view  
 Europe embroil'd; still thou (for thou alone  
 Sufficient art) the jarring kingdoms' ire,  
 Reciprocally ruinous; say who  
 Shall wield th' Hesperian, who the Polish sword,  
 By thy decree; the trembling lands shall hear  
 Thy voice, obedient, lest thy scourge should bruise  
 Their stubborn necks, and Churchill in his wrath  
 Make them remember Bleinheim with regret (ll. 451-461).

past idioms and styles. It is thus possible but not laudable for Philips to mix the eighteenth-century vocabulary of passions and other mental states with the more austere lexicon of Homer, Virgil, and Milton (Griffin 1984, pp. 449-450; also Cope 1992).

That is hardly the kind of happiness that we encounter in a pastoral poem or in a verse description of a noble estate or virtuous realm. Philips's poem has remained in memory longer than those of his rivals precisely because of his astounding aptitude at drawing out happiness from *any* set of incidents, whether pleasing or repelling. Philips's remarkable talent, in poems such as *The Splendid Shilling* and *Cyder*, for extracting impressions of both heroism and comedy from the same set of experiences is part of an overall strategy of *conversion*, whether of the ridiculous to the grand, the comic to the epic, or the horrific to the happy.

## 2

The lesson to take away from Philips's tonally bewildering poem is that, in the ferociously as well as philosophically empiricist world of early eighteenth-century thought and poetry, happiness involved action. A thing, an experience, or a person could be happy in the old sense of being pleasing or handy, but happiness in the more extensive, more modern sense sprang up from either a panoply of happy things or from the interaction of persons, things, and events in an emergently happy way. A puckish philosopher such as Bernard Mandeville, for example, can speak of the 'national happiness' (Mandeville 1720) in the way that today we talk about the gross national product: as if we could, from an Olympian perspective, see prosperity emerging from the actions of the millions.

Not only this elevated perspective, but also the notion that happiness is a kind of energetic parcel – that happiness is a large-scale process that flows freely from the interplay of diverse phenomena – could characterize eighteenth-century conceptions of verse as readily as it could characterize the ethical philosophy of happiness enthusiasts such as the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, or the political science of prophets of economic happiness such as Adam Smith or Thomas Jefferson. Alexander Pope all but militarizes happiness, deploying occasional references to happiness as if invocations of felicity were warheads. The highly kinetic Pope, who has an even greater talent than John Philips when it comes to drawing action out of inertia,<sup>4</sup> uses happiness in a deflective way, to impart a charge to or to increase the emotional momentum of related phenomena.

Pope's *Essay on Criticism* probably qualifies as his happiest work insofar as it delivers affirmative precepts for the production of pleasing art rather than satirically condemning deviations from the ideal. Happiness plays a role in Pope's famous analysis of the *je ne sais quoi* that shimmers atop great verse:

4 Think of his astounding ability to build an epic poem around 'Dulness', or of his renderings of all the hubbub surrounding the stupefying landscape revisions of Capability Brown and his employers.

Some beauties yet, no precepts can declare,  
 For there's a happiness as well as care.  
 Music resembles art, in each  
 Are nameless graces which no methods teach,  
 And which a master-hand alone can reach (ll. 141-144; Butt 1963, pp. 148-149).

The formulation «happiness as well as care» turns on the motile character of happiness, which, through the 'as well as' phraseology, seems to push itself away from and to rise above the other diligences that a poet can exert. The passage as a whole gives the impression that this undefinable happiness is setting the pace for as well as outrunning the other virtues, that it is pushing away from particular happy excerpts on its way to becoming something more profound and more general. So it is that Pope lauds ancient authors who were «born in happier days» (l. 189, p. 150), whose felicity as writers pushes into the present even while they and their happier days push farther back in time and even as Pope's happy but intimidating idea of talent repels anyone other than those few writers who can conjure up visions of futuristic worlds where, despite their modernity, the residuum of the classical tradition animates artistic production.

In Pope's intensely polarized world, the introduction of 'happy' or any of its forms into a poem signals the imminent butting of a fool. Thus, in the *Essay on Criticism*, we find a 'happy' author who wishes to enlarge a stage so that the preposterous introduction of «Knights, squires, and steeds» (l. 282, p. 152) onto the crowded scene would not lead to a violation of the Aristotelian unity of place; we learn that otherwise lousy lines can qualify as 'happy' when they spill from the pen of a noble lord surrounded by sycophants (ll. 414-423, p. 156); and we discover that mediocre, unhappy wit can trigger envy but not atone for it (ll. 494-495, p. 159). Happiness is so volatile a chemical in Pope's poetical laboratory that its sheer presence triggers an explosive reaction driving happiness out of the field of vision and into some unattainable world. Thus the 'happy few' who belonged to the cadre of Greek and Roman critics (ll. 643-644, p. 164) observe Aristotle sailing away into a remote world of poets who will neither live up to his expectations nor reap praise for implementing an aesthetic manifesto, the realization of which remains permanently beyond their talents.

### 3

Pope's rendering of happiness as an emergent but also deflective attribute of especially good artistic or social productions, although not altogether optimistic, marked the emergence of a productive restlessness in English verse. In Pope's satire-charged universe, the appearance of any laudable

performance, be it in art or science, immediately leads to polarization. The new talent and his or her works diverge from the everyday productions of less happy scribblers, who in turn wax envious. More happily, Pope's productively restless discontent – his notion that one performance is never enough to generate multifaceted happiness and his conviction that happiness always runs away from its manifestations – encourages the tradition of roving description that gave us poets such as Thomson, Goldsmith, and Cowper, who, in describing vast swaths of experience, found problems and unhappiness everywhere that they looked.

One of the most happiness-soaked poems in the English language is surely the first (1730) version of James Thomson's *The Seasons*, where some variation of 'happy' or 'happiness' occurs forty-two times in a 5400-line composition. While that is admittedly less than a one percent incidence, Thomson's sprawling, post-Miltonic verse paragraphing limits the total number of discrete topics that even a long poem may contain. When any topic absorbs a minimum of fifty to one-hundred lines, only so many discussions will fit into even a long composition. These forty-odd glances at and discussions of happiness thus rise to a high level of prominence and visibility. Thomson's poetry describes a double retrograde motion that begins with an initial retrospective reference to the post-Miltonic, mock-heroic writings of John Philips, John Gay, and their many imitators but then quickly diverts from the comic habits of those burlesquing wits in order to glance back to Milton, there to recapture a secular, ideologically reduced version of the divine grandeur and the high seriousness of the great Puritan bard. For Thomson, poetry itself is about allusive process, about weaving between a variety of mentors, prototypes, and precedents that seem to contradict one another but that Thomson somehow reconciles in the verse equivalent of a very long retrospective view.

This 'long view' allows Thomson to correlate the contradictions in happiness and its poetry by recasting happiness itself as a shorthand term for descriptive processes. Happiness is salient in Thomson's verse because happiness, by oscillating between objects of attention and processes of evaluation, mimics verse, which oscillates between imitation and improvement. At any time and in any season, happiness is most easily discovered by those with a talent for scanning expansive landscapes and great scenes. Those who seek felicity should

With earnest eye anticipate those scenes  
Of happiness and wonder, where the mind,  
In endless growth and infinite ascent,  
Rises from state to state, and world to world.  
But, when with these the serious thought is foiled,  
We, shifting for relief, would play the shapes  
Of frolic fancy; and incessant form



Those rapid pictures, that assembled train  
 Of fleet ideas, never joined before,  
 Whence lively wit excites to gay surprise,  
 Or folly-painting humour, grave himself,  
 Calls laughter forth, deep-shaking every nerve (*Winter*, ll. 605-616; Sam-  
 brook 1972, p. 145).

Happiness for cheerfully retired poets arises from the continuous dis-  
 sociation of somewhat abstracted 'shapes' from parochial reality and the  
 assembly of fanciful trains of ideas that run on vertical rather than horizon-  
 hugging tracks.<sup>5</sup> In spring, for example, we fly all the way to the top of the  
 universe, there to imagine «The joy of God to see a happy world» (*Spring*,  
 l. 903, p. 27). That happy world, by Thomson's admission, derives its felic-  
 ity partly from the abundance of prey available to god's hungry but not  
 always merciful creatures. Thomson's emphasis falls less on the ease with  
 which god overlooks the shortcomings in this best of all possible worlds  
 than on god's active if only spectatorial effort to see happiness springing  
 from the multiplicity of the creation.

The happy citizens of Thomson's world have a special knack for perceiv-  
 ing themselves as small components at the end of the long view of Thom-  
 son's cosmological landscape. A happily married rural couple, for example,  
 abides in a small cottage that is seemingly at the end of a very long tele-  
 scope. «The Seasons thus, / As ceaseless round a jarring world they roll, /  
 Still find them happy» (*Spring*, ll. 1166-1168, p. 34): happiness arises when  
 this rural couple experiences life at the steady focal point of a global, even  
 astronomical drama, as the global tumbler of seasons, orbits, and related  
 large-scale gyrations spins around them. The work of such happy pairs  
 echoes across multiple social and geographical configurations that extend  
 into an unending, unfurling series of far-away localities: «Heard from dale  
 to dale, / Waking the breeze, resounds the blended voice / Of happy labour,  
 love, and social glee» (*Summer*, ll. 368-370, p. 47). The individual voice  
 here dissolves into a dispersed symphony of voices that, in the amalgam,  
 create a perpetual, quasi-musical round of reiterating rustic settlements.  
 Happiness for Thomson is a matter of geographical imagination and social  
 process: of the ability to blend a highly artificial picture of one's place in  
 the physical and the human environment, or at least to induce some clev-  
 erer person – a poet rather than a farmer – to undertake the assembly of  
 that happy image. The eyes of the poet, after all, have a long focal length

5 For Thomson, landscape description is not only a matter of identifying and verbally tran-  
 scribing static scenes, but rather of *continuously* following a landscape that not only is itself  
 dynamic but that varies with the influence of the sun, moon, wind, seasons, and a thousand  
 other factors. Vacillating human moods contribute to the dynamism of landscape description  
 (Kinsley 2005, p. 6).

and peer through a flexible periscope, as is demonstrated by a remarkable image in which Thomson zooms in and focuses his vast analysis of happiness on a single child enjoying a single plaything: «Happiest of all the train [of humanity]! the raptured boy / Lashes the whirling top» (*Winter*, ll. 764-765, p. 149). That spinning top may be a fun toy, but Thomson magnifies its value by treating it as a turning point in the representation if not understanding of human happiness as a whole.

In Thomson, then, happiness is procedurally paradoxical. On one hand, it is experienced primarily in the long view, from a position so detached that very little is happening; on the other hand, that long view must not only be of something but must also show that particular occasion of happiness interacting with Thomson's panoramic presentation of the seasons. Retirement, the quiet and seclusion of a particular party who enjoys the luxury of leisurely and remotely viewing the world, leads Thomson's list of happy conditions:

Oh! knew he but his happiness, of men  
The happiest he! who far from public rage  
Deep in the vale, with a choice few retired;  
Drinks the pure pleasures of the rural life (*Autumn*, ll. 1235-1238, p. 122)

Rural retirement falls far short of full seclusion and simple rest. It is defined rather more by the distance of its viewpoint and its provision of an assortment of non-intrusive 'pleasures' that allow for glancing engagement and for the counterpointing of social engagement with reposed philosophizing, «[f]or happiness and true philosophy/Are of the social still and smiling kind» (*Autumn*, ll. 1346-1347, p. 125). Happiness is a comparatively low-energy phenomenon. Too much action, too much engagement, undercuts the calm, reclining posture of the serene distant observer, yet action, if only a rural walk or an inquisitive scan of the horizon, is required in order to discover scenes of bliss, scenes in which strife is minimal and therefore demand for energy is low.

In the recipe for happiness, the mixing of activity with inactivity and of observation with engagement results in a keen interest in the animal kingdom. Although eighteenth-century authors almost universally believed that animals lacked reason and therefore experienced emotions imperfectly, it was that very deficiency that nominated them as perfect instances of Thomson's low-energy version of happiness. Thomson reports that his muse feels most cheerful «when she social sees / The whole mixed animal creation round / Alive and happy» (*Autumn*, ll. 381-382, p. 99): when the greatest number of unobtrusive scenes of easygoing animal action spread before the eye. From his outlook in England, far-seeing Thomson is able to view horrid avalanches tumbling down Alpine heights, yet can look through and past the havoc to perceive «the peaceful vales» where «happy Grisons dwell»

(*Winter*, l. 415, p. 139), detecting the low life amidst the high terrain and linking happiness to a kind of Alpine entropy. In another, more gruesome scene, Thomson unveils a fallen stag surrounded by «blood-happy» (*Autumn*, l. 456, p. 101) hounds who have concluded their hunt, hounds who, although allegedly standing still, remain active in the otherwise bizarrely quiet scene by reveling, rejoicing, and roaring at their victory, albeit in a stationary manner. A view of a laboring elephant in the equatorial tropics likewise passively suggests the possibility of an eventual happy scene. Perhaps, Thomson speculates, this elephant may eventually escape the tasks and the scenes that ambitious mankind imposes (*Summer*, ll. 716-732, p. 56). Even busy bees enjoy a quietly blissful unawareness that correlates with a distant view of happy hives, at least until more active beekeepers smoke them out of their hives (*Autumn*, ll. 1172-1183, p. 121).

Thomson's *The Seasons* sets the standard for verse conjurations of happiness during the last two-thirds of the eighteenth century. William Cowper's *The Task*, for example, features almost exactly the same level of saturation with regard to the topic of happiness and addresses all the same issues, from the happiness of distant seclusion to the panoptical happiness of the all-seeing creator, to the comparative happiness of competing animal species, and to the happiness of the British nation. Oliver Goldsmith's somewhat darker *The Deserted Village* takes a meta-analytical approach to happiness by considering happiness not as a thing in itself but rather as seen from disparate perspectives or considered under miscellaneous headings. Among Enlightenment writers, dreamers, spectators, and wits as much happiness is discovered in the act of categorizing happiness as is found in happiness itself.

#### 4

'The act of categorizing happiness' points up the processional nature of happiness: its status as a property or consequence of other conditions or experiences. Of all the prepositions, 'of', which signals ownership, affiliation, or even aristocratic grandeur (e.g. Otto von Bismarck), is not only the most emotionally powerful of prepositions, pointing up as it does the fundamental connections among persons, places, or things, but also the most ontological insofar as it suggests the contents of things (e.g. 'a glass of wine', 'glass is made of silicon'). 'Of' is also a slightly bewildering preposition, for it suggests connecting both a bond and a diverging proceeding. Diamonds are made 'of' carbon but have changed with respect to the usual intuition of that murky material; a piece 'of' the puzzle latches into but is also severed from the big picture. 'Happiness', in eighteenth-century usage, often occurred alongside this provocative preposition, whether, say, as the 'happiness of liberty' or the perdurable 'pursuit of happiness'. The

eighteenth century hosted numerous ‘of’ poems pertaining to happiness, two of the most salient being Mark Akenside’s *The Pleasures of Imagination* and Thomas Warton the Younger’s *The Pleasures of Melancholy*. Although any occupant of an eighteenth-century sponging house or any beneficiary of an eighteenth-century mercury cure for socially transmitted diseases would surely question the linkage between immediate pleasure and long-term happiness, pleasure at least occasionally provides the groundwork of happiness.

Akenside’s *The Pleasures of Imagination* associates an assortment of pleasures with the transforming process by which ordinary experience becomes into imaginative poetry (see Aldridge 1944). ‘Pleasures of imagination’ are not exactly particular pleasures grounded in particular things or events, but rather pleasures keyed to the coalescing of these phenomena into an artistic composition. These pleasures ‘of’ imagination relate to the transfiguring of experience, which inevitably involves the distancing of the tangible sources of pleasure. It is not altogether surprising that happiness is a frequent topic within Akenside’s wide-ranging poem, for happiness as a generalized condition involves a balanced, cumulative, and somewhat distanced response to happy events. Through his poem, Akenside represents even modest happiness in the context of immense frameworks, some of them of astronomical dimensions. Dr. Samuel Johnson may have searched for happiness across the vast expanse between China and Peru, but Akenside asks the «high-born soul» to undertake more than a world cruise in order to find the happy valley:

The high-born soul  
 Disdains to rest her heaven-aspiring wing  
 Beneath its native quarry. Tired of earth  
 And this diurnal scene, she springs aloft  
 Through fields of air; pursues the flying storm;  
 Rides on the vollied lightning through the heavens;  
 Or, yoked with whirlwinds and the northern blast,  
 Sweeps the long tract of day. Then high she soars  
 The blue profound, and hovering round the sun  
 Beholds him pouring the redundant stream  
 Of light; beholds his unrelenting sway  
 Bend the reluctant planets to absolve  
 The fated rounds of Time. Thence far effus’d  
 She darts her swiftness up the long career  
 Of devious comets; through its burning signs  
 Exulting measures the perennial wheel  
 Of Nature, and looks back on all the stars,  
 Whose blended light, as with a milky zone,  
 Invests the orient. Now amaz’d she views

The empyreal waste, where happy spirits hold,  
Beyond this concave heaven, their calm abode  
(book 1, ll. 183-203; Dyce 1835, p. 10).

A few lines later, Akenside estimates the distance to this happy zone as what we would now call six-thousand light-years, suggesting collaterally that distance and distancing are part and parcel of the kind of the high-flown happiness that this poet cultivates. More philosophically but no less metrically, we later learn that god has «adorn'd» «[t]he vast harmonious frame» with «happiness and virtue» (book 2, ll. 342-343, p. 33), and that happiness is a sort of colossal window-treatment draped over our the tiny but wide-angle lenses through which human beings behold the vastness of creation. The simple pleasures and artless happiness that we in post-Romantic culture prize is not for Akenside, who, again and again, stresses the effort required to monitor the emergence of overall happiness on a cosmological scale.<sup>6</sup> Even when he makes recourse to the familiar trope of the happy, simple, rustic life, Akenside hangs his advice on the immense scaffolding of his neo-Leibnizian vision of the best of all possible worlds. He tells average citizens to «[g]o then, once more, and happy be thy toil» (book 2, l. 481, p. 37), i.e. to go about life in the expectation of happily productive labors; but he situates that advice at the conclusion of an allegorical vision of divine design that harkens back to the English religious epic writer, John Milton. Toil yields happiness not owing to its inherent goodness or its healthful pleasure but rather by juxtaposition against the backdrop of god's intergalactic architecture. Akenside now and then does associate happiness with intermediate levels of abstraction. He uses the term 'happy' to characterize the general state of affairs on Albion's shores (book 2, l. 44, p. 24), where liberty and good social institutions reign. Fundamentally, however, happiness is 'of' something. It interacts with the assorted (and restless) powers, passions, and proclivities of the human mind. It harmonizes especially well with such daring drives as ambition and curiosity. The happiness of Nature's care for us is evidenced in the human preference for joys that begin in the adventurous discovery of the unknown:

Nature's happy cares  
The obedient heart far otherwise incline.  
Witness the sprightly joy when aught unknown  
Strikes the quick sense, and wakes each active power  
To brisker measures (book 1, ll. 230-234, p. 11).

<sup>6</sup> Akenside took it as an article of poetic faith that poetry should proceed from and move beyond the beauties of the world: that is mimetic functions served to represent phenomena in a far vaster framework that the imagination could see more readily than the eye. See Fabel 1997, p. 47, and Norton 1970, p. 368.

Familiar joys are all well and good, but happiness is always moving on to greater reaches and out to vaster distances, eventually ending up almost as far as possible from its occasioning, happy causes. The best and most cheering perspective on happiness abides at an almost infinite focal length, in what amounts to the next, presumably as well as literally *supernatural* world.

The association of happiness with escape from the slings and arrows hurtling through our secular world was a familiar theme even in the eighteenth century. The highly emotive and yet superficially philosophical enjoyment of the postponement of true joy to a post-mortem habitat enjoyed a certain cachet during the mid-eighteenth century, when Gothic novelists and 'graveyard' poets began experimenting with the pleasures conferred by the contemplation of the macabre. Another poem in the 'pleasures of' genre, Thomas Warton's *The Pleasures of Melancholy*, goes the extra mile that separates Akenside's contemplation of the happiness of the present configuration of the visible universe from the supernal happiness available in either the next life or in the contemplation of eternity from while living in the present. Warton, like Akenside, is fond of vast, bleak panoramas. He ascribes the greatest happiness not to the 'satrap' who lives riotously in Moscow or other entertainment capitals, but rather the exile who, bereft of his former life at court, can spend as much time as he pleases in contemplating the icy vastness:

To me far happier seems the banish'd Lord  
 Amid Siberia's unrejoycing wilds  
 Who pines all lonesome, in the chambers hoar  
 Of some high castle shut, whose windows dim  
 In distant ken discover trackless plains,  
 Where Winter ever drives his icy car;  
 While still repeated objects of his view,  
 The gloomy battlements, and ivi'd tow'rs  
 That crown the solitary dome, arise (ll. 228-236; Warton 1747, pp. 18-19)

For Warton's fantastically but enthusiastically melancholy exile, 'as good as it gets' translates to 'as far as it gets'.<sup>7</sup> Happiness, or at least its perception, reaches its highest intensity in Ultima Thule. The farther from the site at which joy originates, the greater the capacity to see it in some vaster, more compelling framework, even if that framework abounds in misery. In the wormhole of Warton's gothic imagination, melancholy, the feeling farthest from felicity, warps around emotional space and re-connects with happiness:

7 Warton specializes in distant, exotic scenes, doubling the resulting effects by viewing them from even more remote venues such as ruined towers (Edgecombe 2004, p. 44).

Yet are these joys that Melancholy gives,  
 By Contemplation taught, her sister sage,  
 Than all her witless revels happier far (ll. 297-299, pp. 22-23).

Contemplation, the reflective process by which the happy occasion is drawn into the matrix of long-term happiness, is thus material to the construction of all that counts as happy'. Spontaneous happiness of the kind applauded by the Romantic writers and their successors fits at best awkwardly with the opinions of this purportedly 'pre-Romantic' writer, who applies the studied care and deliberation usually associated with neoclassicism to contrive a version of happiness that stretches beyond present time, into the future, possibly beyond the grave, and so far outside of colloquial notions of happiness that vernacular ideas of jollity are dismissed as 'witless'.

## 5

Thomas Warton's pejorative comments regarding the happy trifles that make simpletons smile suggest that, by the latter days of the long eighteenth century, the particular, detectable happiness that marked out a line of Alexander Pope's verse as a 'happy' bit of wit, or that characterized the good fortune of a Duke of Marlborough as the 'happiness' of military genius, had evaporated not only into a generalized mental state but into a somewhat airy artifact: into a visionary, sometimes even gothic continuum of moods, aspirations, and esoteric contemplations, which left vernacular good feelings far behind and drew its energy from the exploration of offbeat topics, whether the means of securing happiness for Frankenstein's monster or the joy of imagining empyrean kingdoms while witnessing a Montgolfier balloon ascent. Like his fellow would-be prophet, William Blake, Christopher Smart associates happiness with a compass bearing: «For there be twelve cardinal virtues [...] / For there be three to the North – Meditation, Happiness, Strength» (*Jubilate Agno*; see Williamson, Belcher 1980, p. 65). For Smart, happiness is a pure if easily imagined motile process, a gravitation toward one of the points on the spiritual map. Thomas Jefferson's characterization of happiness as a 'pursuit' occurs within the context of this gradual disembodiment of happiness during the Enlightenment, as does consideration of the extension of the state of happiness to other species, a possibility that is entertained in offbeat ways by entomologists such as Friedrich Christian Lesser or René Antoine Ferchault de Réaumur, and as does concern for the durability of happiness as evaluated by theorists of long-term and even geriatric health and happiness such as Richard Graves, John Armstrong, and Samuel Tissot. Understanding this commitment not only to a long but ever-lengthening view of an emotional state so central to and yet

also so elusive within human experience explains a variety of otherwise puzzling phenomena, whether the later eighteenth-century love of distant views and vast panoramas (or their smaller-scale follow-ons in the abstracted painting of J. M. W. Turner)<sup>8</sup> or the jotting of Wordsworthian and Coleridgean poems about spectacles beheld either at a literal or conceptual distance, whether glimpses of far-away bridges or quasi-telescopic encounters with leech-gatherers or glimpses of horizon-plying ships piloted by ancient mariners. Whatever happiness became by the end of the eighteenth century, it was required to be a long way away – which may be why distance-loving astronomers such as William Herschel expanded the size of telescopes nearly seven-hundred percent as the century drew to a close.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps happiness abided not at some point between China and Peru, but rather was moving to far-away Enceladus and beyond!

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8 Indeed, Turner read James Thomson's poetry (Tomlinson 1990).

9 During his long career as a telescope designer as well as astronomer, Herschel gradually increased the diameter of his mirrors (the primary light-collecting elements of a reflecting telescope) from six to forty-nine inches. See the Wikipedia article on the history of the telescope: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_the\\_telescope](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_telescope).



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