The study of life-satisfaction
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ABSTRACT This chapter reviews the literature on life satisfaction. Six questions are considered: 1) What is the point of studying life-satisfaction? 2) What is life-satisfaction? 3) Can life-satisfaction be measured? 4) How satisfied are we? 5) What causes us to be satisfied or dissatisfied with life? 6) Can the level of life-satisfaction be increased? These questions are considered at the individual level as well as the societal level. In the concluding section a general overview is given of the work presented in this book.

Studies on the variance in life satisfaction between nations have shown that living conditions exert a strong influence over average life satisfaction. That is, economically prosperous countries tend to have a higher average life satisfaction than poorer nations; on a similar note, countries with better job prospects are generally higher in life satisfaction than countries where unemployment is high (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2017). A fascinating study on life satisfaction in older individuals who had already passed explored the impact of a slightly morbid factor—years from death. Most of the studies comparing happiness and life satisfaction
countries focus on averages. However, distributional differences are also important. Life satisfaction is often reported on a scale from 0 to 10, with 10 representing the highest possible level of satisfaction. This is the so-called ‘Cantril Ladder’. The below visualization shows how responses are distributed across steps of this ladder.