

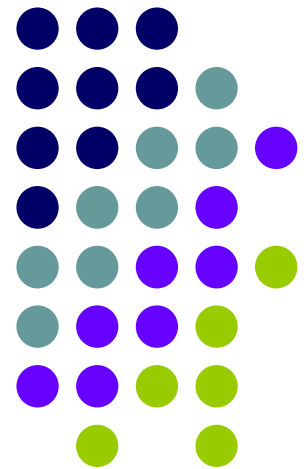
The Pursuit of Happiness

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Introduction:

“Happiness, n. An agreeable sensation arising from contemplating the misery of another.” Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*





Eric G. Wilson (Professor of English at Wake Forest University in North Carolina) in his recent book, Against Happiness: In Praise of Melancholy (2008) writes:



The psychological world is now abuzz with a new field, positive psychology, devoted to finding ways to enhance happiness through pleasure, engagement, and meaning. Psychologists practicing this brand of therapy are leaders in a novel sort of science, the science of happiness. Mainstream publishers are now learning from the self-help industry and printing thousands of books on how to be happy and on why we are happy. The self-help press fills the shelves with step-by-step plans for worldly satisfaction.



Everywhere I see advertisements offering even more happiness, happiness on land or by sea, in a car or under the stars. And as I have already noted, doctors now offer a wide array of drugs that might eradicate depression forever. It seems truly, perhaps more than ever before, an age of almost perfect contentment, a brave new world of persistent good fortune, joy without trouble, felicity with no penalty.



Surely all this happiness can't be for real. How can so many people be happy in the midst of all the problems that beset our globe—not only the collective and apocalyptic ills just mentioned but also those particular irritations that bedevil our everyday existences, those money issues and marital spats, those stifling vocations and lonely dawns?Aren't we further troubled by our culture's overemphasis on happiness? Don't we fear that this rabid focus on exuberance leads to half-lives, to bland existences, to wastelands of mechanistic behavior?



I for one am afraid that our American culture's overemphasis on happiness at the expense of sadness might be dangerous, a wanton forgetting of an essential part of a full life. I further am wary in the face of this possibility: to desire only happiness in a world undoubtedly tragic is to become inauthentic, to settle for unrealistic abstractions that ignore concrete situations. I am finally fearful over our society's efforts to expunge melancholia from the system. Without the agitations of the soul, would all of our magnificently yearning towers topple? Would our heart-torn symphonies cease?



....This kind of happiness appears to entertain a craven disregard for the value of sadness. This brand of supposed joy, moreover, seems to foster an ongoing ignorance of life's enduring and vital polarity between agony and ecstasy, dejection and ebullience. Trying to forget sadness and its integral place in the great rhythm of the cosmos, this sort of happiness insinuates in the end that the blues are an aberrant state that should be cursed as weakness of will or removed with the help of a little pink pill.



Let me be clear. I'm right now thinking only of this specific American type of happiness. I'm not questioning joy in general. For instance, I'm not challenging that unbearable exuberance that suddenly emerges from long suffering. I'm not troubled by that hard-earned tranquility that comes from long meditation on the world's sorrows. I'm not criticizing that slow-burning bliss that issues from a life spent helping those that hurt.



Likewise, I'd like to be clear about this: I don't want to romanticize clinical depression....I do, however, wonder why so many people experiencing melancholia are now taking pills meant simply to ease the pain, to turn scowls once more into smiles. Of course there is a fine line between what I'm calling melancholia and what society calls depression. In my mind, what separates the two is degree of activity. Both forms are more or less chronic sadness that leads to ongoing unease with how things are—persistent feelings that the world as it is not quite right, that it is a place of suffering, stupidity, and evil.



Depression (as I see it, at least) causes apathy in the face of this unease, lethargy approaching total paralysis, an inability to feel much of anything one way or another. In contrast, melancholia (in my eyes) generates a deep feeling in regard to this same anxiety, a turbulence of heart that results in an active questioning of the status quo, a perpetual longing to create new ways of being and seeing. (Pp.5-8)

Where would we be without people who have experienced significant suffering and pain and melancholia?



- Artists: Van Gogh
- Literary Figure: Ernest Hemmingway
- Political leaders: Winston Churchill and Abraham Lincoln
- Musicians: Beethoven and Schuman
- Spiritual Leaders: Gandhi and Jesus



I. Who's Happier?

“For every minute you are angry, you lose sixty seconds of happiness.”

- Conservatives rather than liberals.
- Extremist on both sides of the spectrum.
- Parents more so than non-parents.
- Religious, spiritual people as oppose to non-religious people.
- Married people (men live 7 years longer; women, 4 years). “I married an ideal; now he’s an ordeal and I want a new deal!”



- Older people are just as happy contrary to the views of young people. (Dr. John Garry, Queens University in Belfast study, Changing Ageing Partnership)
- For many people, the most miserable period in their life is theirs 40s. (British Household Survey 1991-2003)
- Two sources of unhappiness: loss of a spouse and loss of a job.
- Benefits: less stressed; live longer; lower risk of depression, suicide, substance use; greater health; longer-lasting marriages; better mental and physical health, resilience and performance; life satisfaction, success etc. But not immune to life and its problems! (Michael B. Frisch)

How the Nations Ranked on Happiness



- 1st – Denmark
- 2nd – Switzerland
- 3rd – Austria
- 4th – Iceland
- 5th – The Bahamas
- 23rd – USA
- 41st – UK
- 90th – Japan
- 178th – Burundi

II. What is Happiness?

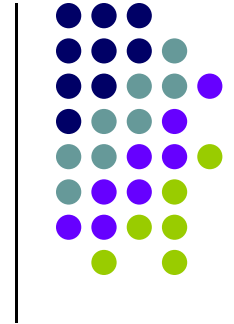


“Happiness is a healthy mental attitude, a grateful spirit, a clear conscience, and a heart full of love.”

III. What is the Relationship of Happiness to Mental Health?



“People aren’t necessarily functioning well just because they don’t have major depression or another mental illness.” Corey L. M. Keyes, 2005



“Flourishing” is the epitome of mentally healthy adults.



1. Personal Growth:

- Accept and like most parts of ourselves
- Have warm and trusting relationships
- see ourselves developing into better people
- Have a direction in life by choosing our fate
Rather than seeing ourselves as victims of fate
- Are able to shape our environments to satisfy our needs
- Have a degree of self-determination.



2. Social Well-being:

- See society as meaningful and understandable
- See society as possessing potential for growth and development
- Feel we belong to and are accepted by our communities
- Accept most parts of society
- See ourselves as contributing to society

A study found that flourishing adults:



- Had exceptionally good physical health
- Had missed fewer days at work
- Were more productive while they were at work
- Had lowest level of perceived helplessness (i.e. low control in life)
- Had highest level of functional goals in life
- Had highest level of self-reported resilience (i.e. that they try to learn from adversities)
- Had highest level of intimacy with family and friends

Languishing adults experience:



- A sense of emptiness
- Are devoid of any feeling towards their life
- Describe themselves and their life as “hollow”, “empty”, “a shell”, “stagnating” and “a void”
- Have reduced emotional, psychological, and social well-being but they are not mentally ill.
- Have significant psychosocial impairments at levels comparable to a depressive episode
- Twice as likely to experience a major depressive episode compared with moderately mentally healthy adults.
- At risk for depression nearly six times greater when compared with flourishing adults
- Had the same amount of chronic diseases as those who were depressed (e.g. cardiovascular disease).



Flourishing adults are:

1. Satisfied with your life
2. Positive affect in life
3. Contribution to society
4. Social integration
5. Social growth and potential
6. Acceptance of others
7. Social interest and coherence
8. Self acceptance
9. Environmental mastery
10. Positive relations with others
11. Personal growth
12. Autonomy
13. Purpose in life

IV. What are the Different Types of Happiness?



“If I am happy in spite of my deprivations, if my happiness is so deep that it is a faith, so thoughtful that it becomes a philosophy of life, — if, in short, I am an optimist, my testimony to the creed of optimism is worth hearing.” ~ Helen Keller in *Optimism* (1903)



In Authentic Happiness, Martin Seligman, one of the founders of Positive psychology, describes happiness as consisting of ‘positive emotions’ and ‘positive activities’.

A. Positive emotions relating to the PAST (participating in a walk or fundraiser) include:

1. Satisfaction
2. Contentment
3. Pride
4. Serenity



B. Positive emotions relating to the FUTURE (plans to travel to Hawaii) include:



1. Optimism
2. Hope
3. Trust

C. Positive emotions about the PRESENT (graduation ceremony) divided into two categories:



1. Pleasure
2. Gratifications

(Gratifications involve full engagement, flow, elimination of self-consciousness, and blocking of felt emotions.)

V. What are the Components of Happiness?



"Many persons have a wrong idea of what constitutes true happiness. It is not attained through self-gratification but through fidelity to a worthy purpose." ~ Helen Keller *The Simplest Way to be Happy* (1933)



Michael Argyle developed The Oxford Happiness Inventory as a broad measure of psychological well-being. This measures happiness as an aggregate of self-esteem, sense of purpose, social interest and kindness, sense of humor and aesthetic appreciation.



1. Meaningful life: Book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon forgot his Creator.
2. Social relationships
3. Friendships
4. Close and supportive family and friends
5. Work that fits your passion, skills and personality
6. Creative action: music, art, writing, etc.
7. Performance in an important role
8. Important goals in life that fit with your life mission
9. A connection to something larger than self
10. Purpose greater than one's own immediate goals



11. Satisfaction with self: accomplishments
12. A healthy spirituality. Spirituality is about “connection” to self, others, creation and Creator
13. Leisure and play
14. Learning and growth
15. Good health: body mind and spirit
16. Positive outlook on life
17. A strong, firm “keel” (resiliency)
18. Learn forgiveness
19. Ability to love and be loved
20. Grateful spirit: count your many blessings
21. Learn from and embrace suffering and pain as a spiritual discipline

VI. Is There a Formula for Happiness?



- A. Satisfying +
(Pleasures of the moment; biological sensation)
- B. Engagement +
(Engrossed in what we do; forget about “all time”
But not too much obsession!)
- C. Meaning +
(Significance, worth, belongingness, and purpose)
- D. Contentment =
(Resiliency to the storms of life; long term ability to
cope and thrive)
- E. Happiness .
(Quality of Life)

VII. How do you find Happiness?



"I shall take the heart... for brains do not make one happy, and happiness is the best thing in the world." ~ The Tin Woodman in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) by L. Frank Baum



From Henrik Edberg of Sweden

- A. **You choose. “Chose this day whom you will serve.”**

Most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.

Abraham Lincoln

Very little is needed to make a happy life; it is all within yourself, in your way of thinking.

Marcus Aurelius Antoninus



- B. Focus on the present, not yesterday or tomorrow. “Take no thought for tomorrow for sufficient are the challenges of today.”**

When one door of happiness closes, another opens, but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one that has been opened for us.

Helen Keller

The foolish man seeks happiness in the distance, the wise grows it under his feet.

James Oppenheim



- c. **Don't forget to be grateful. "In all things be thankful."**

Man is fond of counting his troubles, but he does not count his joys. If he counted them up as he ought to, he would see that every lot has enough happiness provided for it.

Fyodor Dostoevsky

We tend to forget that happiness doesn't come as a result of getting something we don't have, but rather of recognizing and appreciating what we do have.

Frederick Keonig



- D. **Help someone else find happiness. “Do unto others as you have them do unto you.”**

If you want happiness for an hour — take a nap.

If you want happiness for a day — go fishing.

If you want happiness for a year — inherit a fortune.

If you want happiness for a lifetime — help someone else.

Chinese Proverb

Happiness is like a kiss. You must share it to enjoy it.

Bernard Meltzer



- E. Get rid of a couple of your less valuable desires. “What does it profit a person if he or she gain the whole world and lose his or her soulish happiness.”**

“He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

Jim Elliott

If thou wilt make a man happy, add not unto his riches but take away from his desires.

Epicurus



- F. **Do what you like to do. Not selfishness, but nourishing your body, mind and spirit.**

Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful.

Albert Schweitzer

Happiness is not in the mere possession of money; it lies in the joy of achievement, in the thrill of creative effort.

Franklin D. Roosevelt



G. Or at least do something.

Action may not always bring happiness; but there is no happiness without action.

Benjamin Disraeli

Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.

Mark Twain



Conclusion:

- “If you cannot find happiness along the way, you will not find it at the end of the road.”
- How happy are you?
- How happy do you want to be?
- Some people have chronic illnesses. Are you **CHRONICALLY HAPPY?**