THE HAPPINESS READER

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8. J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 1863
9. Bertrand Russell, *The Conquest of Happiness*, 1930
10. Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 1974
11. Richard Layard, *Happiness: Has social science got a clue?*, 2003
12. Robert and Edward Skidelsky, *How Much Is Enough?*, 2012
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ABOUT THIS READER:

The Happiness Reader includes primary texts from thinkers throughout the ages and across the globe. It has been arranged to help us explore the concept of happiness, or living "the good life," as it has been discussed for the past 2500 years. Each of these texts provides just a snapshot, and if you want to explore more, access the digital version of this reader which provides links to the full texts of the philosophers' work. These excerpts represent various perspectives from the fields of religion, philosophy, political theory, and psychology.

Buddha
The Gospel of Buddha
Chapter 88, "The Conditions of Welfare"
c. 500 BCE

Gautama Buddha, also known as Siddhārtha Gautama, Shakyamuni, or simply the Buddha, was a sage on whose teachings Buddhism was founded. Born in the Shakya republic in the Himalayan foothills, Gautama Buddha taught primarily in northeastern India. [Wikipedia] The text that follows is from the Gospel of Buddha, which was assembled from ancient Buddhist texts and translated by Paul Carus is 1915.

WHEN the Blessed One was residing on the mount called Vulture's Peak, near Rājagaha, Ajātasattu the king of Magadha, who reigned in the place of Bimbisāra, planned an attack on the Vajjis, and he said to Vassakāra, his prime minister: "I will root out the Vajjis, mighty though they be. I will destroy the Vajjis; I will bring them to utter ruin! Come now, O Brahman, and go to the Blessed One; inquire in my name for his health, and tell him my purpose. Bear carefully in mind what the Blessed One may say, and repeat it to me, for the Buddhas speak nothing untrue."1

When Vassakara, the prime minister, had greeted the Blessed One and delivered his message, the venerable Ānanda stood behind the Blessed One and fanned him, and the Blessed One said to him: "Hast thou heard, Ānanda, that the Vajjis hold full and frequent public assemblies?"2

"Lord, so I have heard," replied he.3

"So long, Ānanda," said the Blessed One, "as the Vajjis hold these full and frequent public assemblies, they may be expected not to decline, but to prosper. So long as they meet together in concord, so long as they honor their elders, so long as they respect womanhood, so long as they remain religious, performing all proper rites, so long as they extend the rightful protection, defence and support to the holy ones, the Vajjis may be expected not to decline, but to prosper."4

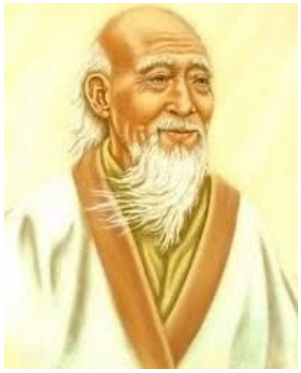
Then the Blessed One addressed Vassakāra and said: "When I stayed, O Brahman, at Vesālī, I taught the Vajjis these conditions of welfare, that so long as they should remain well instructed, so long as they will continue in the right path, so long as they live up to the precepts of righteousness, we could expect them not to decline, but to prosper."5

As soon as the king's messenger had gone, the Blessed One had the brethren, that were in the neighborhood of Rājagaha, assembled in the service-hall, and addressed them, saying:6

"I will teach you, O bhikkhus, the conditions of the welfare of a community. Listen well, and I will speak.7

"So long, O bhikkhus, as the brethren hold full and frequent assemblies, meeting in concord, rising in concord, and attending in concord to the affairs of the Sangha; so long as they, O bhikkhus, do not abrogate that which experience has proved to be good, and introduce nothing except such things as have been carefully tested; so long as their elders practise justice; so long as the brethren esteem, revere, and support their elders, and hearken unto their words; so long as the brethren are not under the influence of craving, but delight in the blessings of religion, so that good and holy men shall come to them and dwell among them in quiet; so long as the brethren shall not be addicted to sloth and idleness; so long as the brethren shall exercise themselves in the sevenfold higher wisdom of mental activity, search after truth, energy, joy, modesty, self-control, earnest contemplation, and equanimity of mind, — so long the Sangha may be expected not to decline, but to prosper.8

"Therefore, O bhikkhus, be full of faith, modest in heart, afraid of sin, anxious to learn, strong in energy, active in mind, and full of wisdom."



Lao Tzu
Tao Te Ching
c. 400 BCE

Laozi was a legendary philosopher of ancient China. He is best known as the reputed author of the Tao Te Ching and the founder of philosophical Taoism, but he is also revered as a deity in religious Taoism and traditional Chinese religions. [Wikipedia] Although Laozi is credited with the writing in the Tao Te Ching, some scholars believe that these writings represent a variety of authors from the Taoist perspective.

56.

Those who know do not talk.
Those who talk do not know.

Keep your mouth closed.
Guard your senses.
Temper your sharpness.
Simplify your problems.
Mask your brightness.
Be at one with the dust of the earth.
This is primal union.

He who has achieved this state
Is unconcerned with friends and enemies,
With good and harm, with honour and disgrace.
This therefore is the highest state of man.

71.

Knowing ignorance is strength.
Ignoring knowledge is sickness.

If one is sick of sickness, then one is not sick.
The sage is not sick because he is sick of sickness.
Therefore he is not sick.

74.

If men are not afraid to die,
It is of no avail to threaten them with death.

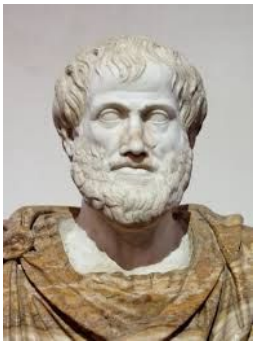
If men live in constant fear of dying,
And if breaking the law means that a man will be killed,
Who will dare to break the law?

There is always an official executioner.
If you try to take his place,
It is trying to be like a master carpenter and cutting wood.
If you try to cut wood like a master carpenter,
you will only hurt your hand.

81.

Truthful words are not beautiful.
Beautiful words are not truthful.
Good men do not argue.
Those who argue are not good.
Those who know are not learned.
The learned do not know.

The sage never tries to store things up.
The more he does for others, the more he has.
The more he gives to others, the greater his abundance.
The Tao of heaven is pointed but does no harm.
The Tao of the sage is work without effort.



Aristotle
Nicomachean Ethics
Book 1
350 BCE

Aristotle was a philosopher in ancient Greece, whose influence to modern day thinking is comparable only to Plato. His philosophies spanned a wide range of topics, from mathematics, to logic, to ethics and political theory. His work shaped centuries of philosophy from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance, and continues to have important implications today.

The Highest Good: Happiness

1.1 The Highest Good Is Supreme in the Hierarchy of Goods

Every craft and every investigation, and likewise every action and decision, seems to aim at some good; hence the good has been well described as that at which everything aims.

However, there is an apparent difference among the ends aimed at. For the end is sometimes an activity, sometimes a product beyond the activity; and when there is an end beyond the action, the product is by nature better than the activity. Since there are many actions, crafts and sciences, the ends turn out to be many as well; for health is the end of medicine, a boat of boatbuilding, victory of generalship, and wealth of household management.

But whenever any of these sciences are subordinate to some one capacity -- as e.g. bridlemaking and every other science producing equipment for horses are subordinate to horsemanship, while this and every action in warfare are in turn subordinate to generalship, and in the same way other sciences are subordinate to further ones--in each of these the end of the ruling science is more choiceworthy than all the ends subordinate to it, since it is the end for which those ends are also pursued. And here it does not matter whether the ends of the actions are the activities themselves, or some product beyond them, as in the sciences we have mentioned.

Suppose, then that (a) there is some end of the things we pursue in our actions which we wish for because of itself, and because of which we wish for the other things; and (b) we do not choose everything because of something else, since (c) if we do, it will go on without limit, making desire empty and futile; then clearly (d) this end will be the good, i.e. the best good.

[...]

Our argument has progressed, then, to the...conclusion [that the highest end is the good]; but we must try to clarify this still more.

Though apparently there are many ends, we choose some of them, e.g. wealth, flutes, and, in general, instruments, because of something else; hence it is clear that not all ends are complete. But the best good is apparently something complete. Hence, if only one end is complete, this will be what we are looking for; and if more than one are complete, the most complete of these will be what we are looking for.

An end pursued in itself, we say, is more complete than an end pursued because of something else; and an end that is never choiceworthy because of something else is more complete than ends

that are choiceworthy both in themselves and because of this end; and hence an end that is always [choiceworthy, and also] choiceworthy in itself, never because of something else, is unconditionally complete.

Now happiness more than anything else seems unconditionally complete, since we always [choose it, and also] choose it because of itself, never because of something else.

Honour, pleasure, understanding and every virtue we certainly choose because of themselves, since we would choose each of them even if it had no further result, but we also choose them for the sake of happiness, supposing that through them we shall be happy. Happiness, by contrast, no one ever chooses for their sake, or for the sake of anything else at all.

The same conclusion [that happiness is complete] also appears to follow from self-sufficiency, since the complete good seems to be self-sufficient.

Now what we count as self-sufficient is not what suffices for a solitary person by himself, living an isolated life, but what suffices also for parents, children, wife and in general for friends and fellow-citizens, since a human being is a naturally political [animal]. Here, however, we must impose some limit; for if we extend the good to parents' parents and childrens' children and to friends of friends, we shall go on without limit; but we must examine this another time.

Anyhow, we regard something as self-sufficient when all by itself it makes a life choiceworthy and lacking nothing; and that is what we think happiness does.

Moreover, [the complete good is most choiceworthy, and] we think happiness is most choiceworthy of all goods, since it is not counted as one good among many. If it were counted as one among many, then, clearly, we think that the addition of the smallest of goods would make it more choiceworthy; for [the smallest good] that is added becomes an extra quantity of goods [so creating a good larger than the original good], and the larger of two goods is always more choiceworthy; hence, it is most choiceworthy.]

Happiness, then, is apparently something complete and self-sufficient, since it is the end of things pursued in action.

But presumably the remark that the best good is happiness is apparently something [generally] agreed, and what we miss is a clearer statement of what the best good is.

Well, perhaps we shall find the best good if we first find the function of a human being. For just as the good, i.e., [doing] well, for a flautist, a sculptor, and every craftsman, and, in general, for whatever has a function and [characteristic] action, seems to depend on its function, the same seems to be true for a human being, if a human being has some function.

Then do the carpenter and the leather worker have their functions and actions, while a human being has none, and is by nature idle, without any function? Or, just as an eye, hand, foot and, in general, every [bodily] part apparently has its functions, may we likewise ascribe to a human being some function besides all of theirs?

What, then, could this be? For living is apparently shared with plants, but what we are looking for is the special function of a human being; hence we should set aside the life of nutrition and growth. The life next in order is some sort of life of sense-perception; but this too is apparently shared, with horse, ox and every animal. The remaining possibility, then, is some sort of life of action of the [part of the soul] that has reason.

Now this [part has two parts, which have reason in different ways], one as obeying the reason [in the other part], the other as itself having reason and thinking. [We intend both.] Moreover, life is also spoken of in two ways [as capacity and as activity], and we must take [a human being's special function to be] life as activity, since this seems to be called life to a fuller extent.

(a) We have found, then, that the human function is the soul's activity that expresses reason [as itself having reason] or requires reason [as obeying reason]. (b) Now the function of F, e.g., of a harpist, is the same in kind, so we say, as the function of an excellent F, e.g. an excellent harpist. (c)

The same is true unconditionally in every case, when we add to the function the superior achievement that expresses the virtue; for a harpist's function, e.g., is to play the harp, and a good harpist's is to do it well. (d) Now we take the human function to be a certain kind of life, and take this life to be the soul's activity and actions that express reason. (e) [Hence by (c) and (d)] the excellent man's function is to do this finely and well. (f) Each function is completed well when its completion expresses the proper virtue. (g) Therefore [by (d), (e) and (f)] the human good turns out to be the soul's activity that expresses virtue.

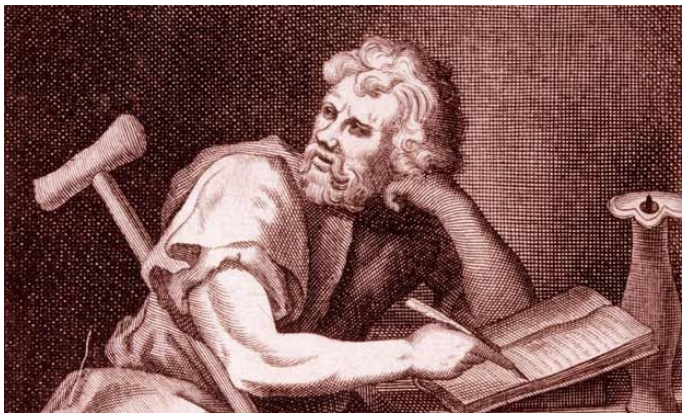
And if there are more virtues than one, the good will express the best and most complete virtue. Moreover, it will be in a complete life. For one swallow does not make a spring, nor does one day; nor, similarly, does one day or a short time make us blessed and happy.

[...]

Nonetheless, happiness evidently also needs external goods to be added [to the activity]..., since we cannot, or cannot easily, do fine actions if we lack the resources.

For, first of all, in many actions we use friends, wealth and political power just as we use instruments. Further, deprivation of certain [externals] -- e.g. good birth, good children, beauty -- mars our blessedness; for we do not altogether have the character of happiness if we look utterly repulsive or are ill-born, solitary or childless, and have it even less, presumably, if our children or friends are totally bad, or were good but have died.

And so, as we have said, happiness would seem to need this sort of prosperity added also; that is why some people identify happiness with good fortune, while others [reacting from one extreme to the other] identify it with virtue."



Epictetus
Enchiridion, or The Handbook
135 CE

Epictetus was a Greek sage and Stoic philosopher. He was born a slave at Hierapolis, Phrygia, and lived in Rome until his banishment, when he went to Nicopolis in northwestern Greece for the rest of his life. [Wikipedia]

1. Some things are in our control and others not. Things in our control are opinion, pursuit, desire, aversion, and, in a word, whatever are our own actions. Things not in our control are body, property, reputation, command, and, in one word, whatever are not our own actions.

The things in our control are by nature free, unrestrained, unhindered; but those not in our control are weak, slavish, restrained, belonging to others. Remember, then, that if you suppose that things which are slavish by nature are also free, and that what belongs to others is your own, then you will be hindered. You will lament, you will be disturbed, and you will find fault both with gods and men. But if you suppose that only to be your own which is your own, and what belongs to others such as it really is, then no one will ever compel you or restrain you. Further, you will find fault with no one or accuse no one. You will do nothing against your will. No one will hurt you, you will have no enemies, and you not be harmed.

Aiming therefore at such great things, remember that you must not allow yourself to be carried, even with a slight tendency, towards the attainment of lesser things. Instead, you must entirely quit some things and for the present postpone the rest. But if you would both have these great things, along with power and riches, then you will not gain even the latter, because you aim at the former too: but you will absolutely fail of the former, by which alone happiness and freedom are achieved.

Work, therefore to be able to say to every harsh appearance, "You are but an appearance, and not absolutely the thing you appear to be." And then examine it by those rules which you have, and first, and chiefly, by this: whether it concerns the things which are in our own control, or those which are not; and, if it concerns anything not in our control, be prepared to say that it is nothing to you.

2. Remember that following desire promises the attainment of that of which you are desirous; and aversion promises the avoiding that to which you are averse. However, he who fails to obtain the object of his desire is disappointed, and he who incurs the object of his aversion wretched. If, then, you confine your aversion to those objects only which are contrary to the natural use of your faculties, which you have in your own control, you will never incur anything to which you are averse. But if you are averse to sickness, or death, or poverty, you will be wretched. Remove aversion, then, from all things that are not in our control, and transfer it to things contrary to the nature of what is in our control. But, for the present, totally suppress desire: for, if you desire any of

the things which are not in your own control, you must necessarily be disappointed; and of those which are, and which it would be laudable to desire, nothing is yet in your possession. Use only the appropriate actions of pursuit and avoidance; and even these lightly, and with gentleness and reservation.

3. With regard to whatever objects give you delight, are useful, or are deeply loved, remember to tell yourself of what general nature they are, beginning from the most insignificant things. If, for example, you are fond of a specific ceramic cup, remind yourself that it is only ceramic cups in general of which you are fond. Then, if it breaks, you will not be disturbed. If you kiss your child, or your wife, say that you only kiss things which are human, and thus you will not be disturbed if either of them dies.

4. When you are going about any action, remind yourself what nature the action is. If you are going to bathe, picture to yourself the things which usually happen in the bath: some people splash the water, some push, some use abusive language, and others steal. Thus you will more safely go about this action if you say to yourself, "I will now go bathe, and keep my own mind in a state conformable to nature." And in the same manner with regard to every other action. For thus, if any hindrance arises in bathing, you will have it ready to say, "It was not only to bathe that I desired, but to keep my mind in a state conformable to nature; and I will not keep it if I am bothered at things that happen.

5. Men are disturbed, not by things, but by the principles and notions which they form concerning things. Death, for instance, is not terrible, else it would have appeared so to Socrates. But the terror consists in our notion of death that it is terrible. When therefore we are hindered, or disturbed, or grieved, let us never attribute it to others, but to ourselves; that is, to our own principles. An uninstructed person will lay the fault of his own bad condition upon others. Someone just starting instruction will lay the fault on himself. Some who is perfectly instructed will place blame neither on others nor on himself.

6. Don't be prideful with any excellence that is not your own. If a horse should be prideful and say, " I am handsome," it would be supportable. But when you are prideful, and say, " I have a handsome horse," know that you are proud of what is, in fact, only the good of the horse. What, then, is your own? Only your reaction to the appearances of things. Thus, when you behave conformably to nature in reaction to how things appear, you will be proud with reason; for you will take pride in some good of your own.

7. Consider when, on a voyage, your ship is anchored; if you go on shore to get water you may along the way amuse yourself with picking up a shellfish, or an onion. However, your thoughts and continual attention ought to be bent towards the ship, waiting for the captain to call on board; you must then immediately leave all these things, otherwise you will be thrown into the ship, bound neck and feet like a sheep. So it is with life. If, instead of an onion or a shellfish, you are given a wife or child, that is fine. But if the captain calls, you must run to the ship, leaving them, and regarding none of them. But if you are old, never go far from the ship: lest, when you are called, you should be unable to come in time.

8. Don't demand that things happen as you wish, but wish that they happen as they do happen, and you will go on well.

9. Sickness is a hindrance to the body, but not to your ability to choose, unless that is your choice. Lameness is a hindrance to the leg, but not to your ability to choose. Say this to yourself with regard to everything that happens, then you will see such obstacles as hindrances to something else, but not to yourself.

10. With every accident, ask yourself what abilities you have for making a proper use of it. If you see an attractive person, you will find that self-restraint is the ability you have against your desire. If you are in pain, you will find fortitude. If you hear unpleasant language, you will find patience. And thus habituated, the appearances of things will not hurry you away along with them.

Augustine
Confessions
Chapter 21-23
400 CE
Augustine of Hippo, also known as Saint Augustine or Saint Austin, was an early Christian theologian whose writings were very influential in the development of Western Christianity and Western philosophy. [Wikipedia]

CHAPTER XXI

30. But is it the same kind of memory as one who having seen Carthage remembers it? No, for the happy life is not visible to the eye, since it is not a physical object. Is it the sort of memory we have for numbers? No, for the man who has these in his understanding does not keep striving to attain more. Now we know something about the happy life and therefore we love it, but still we wish to go on striving for it that we may be happy. Is the memory of happiness, then, something like the memory of eloquence? No, for although some, when they hear the term eloquence, call the thing to mind, even if they are not themselves eloquent--and further, there are many people who would like to be eloquent, from which it follows that they must know something about it--nevertheless, these people have noticed through their senses that others are eloquent and have been delighted to observe this and long to be this way themselves. But they would not be delighted if it were not some interior knowledge; and they would not desire to be delighted unless they had been delighted. But as for a happy life, there is no physical perception by which we experience it in others.

Do we remember happiness, then, as we remember joy? It may be so, for I remember my joy even when I am sad, just as I remember a happy life when I am miserable. And I have never, through physical perception, either seen, heard, smelled, tasted, or touched my joy. But I have experienced it in my mind when I rejoiced; and the knowledge of it clung to my memory so that I can call it to mind, sometimes with disdain and at other times with longing, depending on the different kinds of things I now remember that I rejoiced in. For I have been bathed with a certain joy even by unclean things, which I now detest and execrate as I call them to mind. At other times, I call to mind with longing good and honest things, which are not any longer near at hand, and I am therefore saddened when I recall my former joy.

31. Where and when did I ever experience my happy life that I can call it to mind and love it and long for it? It is not I alone or even a few others who wish to be happy, but absolutely everybody. Unless we knew happiness by a knowledge that is certain, we should not wish for it with a will which is so certain. Take this example: If two men were asked whether they wished to serve as soldiers, one of them might reply that he would, and the other that he would not; but if they were asked whether they wished to be happy, both of them would unhesitatingly say that they would. But the first one would wish to serve as a soldier and the other would not wish to serve, both from no other motive than to be happy. Is it, perhaps, that one finds his joy in this and another in that? Thus they agree in their wish for happiness just as they would also agree, if asked, in wishing for joy. Is this joy what they call a happy life? Although one could choose his joy in this way and another in that, all have one goal which they strive to attain, namely, to have joy. This joy, then, being something that no one can say he has not experienced, is therefore found in the memory and it is recognized whenever the phrase “a happy life” is heard.

CHAPTER XXII

32. Forbid it, O Lord, put it far from the heart of thy servant, who confesses to thee--far be it from

me to think I am happy because of any and all the joy I have. For there is a joy not granted to the wicked but only to those who worship thee thankfully--and this joy thou thyself art. The happy life is this--to rejoice to thee, in thee, and for thee. This it is and there is no other. But those who think there is another follow after other joys, and not the true one. But their will is still not moved except by some image or shadow of joy.

CHAPTER XXIII

33. Is it, then, uncertain that all men wish to be happy, since those who do not wish to find their joy in thee--which is alone the happy life--do not actually desire the happy life? Or, is it rather that all desire this, but because "the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh," so that they "prevent you from doing what you would,"342 you fall to doing what you are able to do and are content with that. For you do not want to do what you cannot do urgently enough to make you able to do it.

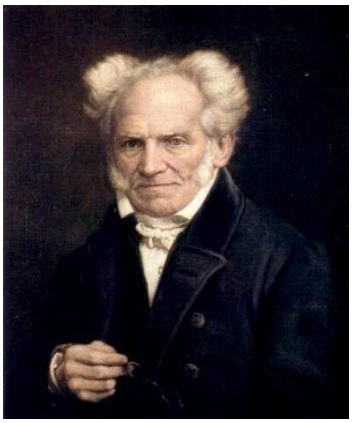
Now I ask all men whether they would rather rejoice in truth or in falsehood. They will no more hesitate to answer, "In truth," than to say that they wish to be happy. For a happy life is joy in the truth. Yet this is joy in thee, who art the Truth, O God my Light, "the health of my countenance and my God."343 All wish for this happy life; all wish for this life which is the only happy one: joy in the truth is what all men wish.

I have had experience with many who wished to deceive, but not one who wished to be deceived.344 Where, then, did they ever know about this happy life, except where they knew also what the truth is? For they love it, too, since they are not willing to be deceived. And when they love the happy life, which is nothing else but joy in the truth, then certainly they also love the truth. And yet they would not love it if there were not some knowledge of it in the memory.

Why, then, do they not rejoice in it? Why are they not happy? Because they are so fully preoccupied with other things which do more to make them miserable than those which would make them happy, which they remember so little about. Yet there is a little light in men. Let them walk--let them walk in it, lest the darkness overtake them.

34. Why, then, does truth generate hatred, and why does thy servant who preaches the truth come to be an enemy to them who also love the happy life, which is nothing else than joy in the truth--unless it be that truth is loved in such a way that those who love something else besides her wish that to be the truth which they do love. Since they are unwilling to be deceived, they are unwilling to be convinced that they have been deceived. Therefore, they hate the truth for the sake of whatever it is that they love in place of the truth. They love truth when she shines on them; and hate her when she rebukes them. And since they are not willing to be deceived, but do wish to deceive, they love truth when she reveals herself and hate her when she reveals them. On this account, she will so repay them that those who are unwilling to be exposed by her she will indeed expose against their will, and yet will not disclose herself to them.

Thus, thus, truly thus: the human mind so blind and sick, so base and ill-mannered, desires to lie hidden, but does not wish that anything should be hidden from it. And yet the opposite is what happens--the mind itself is not hidden from the truth, but the truth is hidden from it. Yet even so, for all its wretchedness, it still prefers to rejoice in truth rather than in known falsehoods. It will, then, be happy only when without other distractions it comes to rejoice in that single Truth through which all things else are true.



Arthur Schopenhauer
The World as Will and Representation
1819

Arthur Schopenhauer was a German philosopher best known for his book, The World as Will and Representation, in which he claimed that our world is driven by a continually dissatisfied will, continually seeking satisfaction. [Wikipedia]

'THE world is my idea' is a truth valid for every living creature, though only man can consciously contemplate it. In doing so he attains philosophical wisdom. No truth is more absolutely certain than that all that exists for knowledge, and, therefore, this whole world, is only object in relation to subject, perception of a perceiver--in a word, idea. The world is idea.

[...]

§ 17. In the first book we considered the idea merely as such, that is, only according to its general form. It is true that as far as the abstract idea, the concept, is concerned, we obtained a knowledge of it in respect of its content also, because it has content and meaning only in relation to the idea of perception, without which it would be worthless and empty. Accordingly, directing our attention exclusively to the idea of perception, we shall now endeavour to arrive at a knowledge of its content, its more exact definition, and the forms which it presents to us. And it will specially interest us to find an explanation of its peculiar significance, that significance which is otherwise merely felt, but on account of which it is that these pictures do not pass by us entirely strange and meaningless, as they must otherwise do, but speak to us directly, are understood, and obtain an interest which concerns our whole nature.

§ 38. In the æsthetical mode of contemplation we have found *two inseparable constituent parts*—the knowledge of the object, not as individual thing but as Platonic Idea, that is, as the enduring form of this whole species of things; and the self-consciousness of the knowing person, not as individual, but as *pure will-less subject of knowledge*. The condition under which both these constituent parts appear always united was found to be the abandonment of the method of knowing which is bound to the principle of sufficient reason, and which, on the other hand, is the only kind of knowledge that is of value for the service of the will and also for science. Moreover, we shall see that the pleasure which is produced by the contemplation of the beautiful arises from these two constituent parts, sometimes more from the one, sometimes more from the other, according to what the object of the æsthetical contemplation may be.

All *willing* arises from want, therefore from deficiency, and therefore from suffering. The satisfaction of a wish ends it; yet for one wish that is satisfied there remain at least ten which are denied. Further, the desire lasts long, the demands are infinite; the satisfaction is short and scantily measured out. But even the final satisfaction is itself only apparent; every satisfied wish at once makes room for a new one; both are illusions; the one is known to be so, the other not yet. No attained object of desire can give lasting satisfaction, but merely a fleeting gratification; it is like the alms thrown to the beggar, that keeps him alive to-day that his misery may be prolonged till the morrow. Therefore, so long as our consciousness is filled by our will, so long as we are [pg 254]given up to the throng of desires with their constant hopes and fears, so long as we are the

subject of willing, we can never have lasting happiness nor peace. It is essentially all the same whether we pursue or flee, fear injury or seek enjoyment; the care for the constant demands of the will, in whatever form it may be, continually occupies and sways the consciousness; but without peace no true well-being is possible. The subject of willing is thus constantly stretched on the revolving wheel of Ixion, pours water into the sieve of the Danaids, is the ever-longing Tantalus.

But when some external cause or inward disposition lifts us suddenly out of the endless stream of willing, delivers knowledge from the slavery of the will, the attention is no longer directed to the motives of willing, but comprehends things free from their relation to the will, and thus observes them without personal interest, without subjectivity, purely objectively, gives itself entirely up to them so far as they are ideas, but not in so far as they are motives. Then all at once the peace which we were always seeking, but which always fled from us on the former path of the desires, comes to us of its own accord, and it is well with us. It is the painless state which Epicurus prized as the highest good and as the state of the gods; for we are for the moment set free from the miserable striving of the will; we keep the Sabbath of the penal servitude of willing; the wheel of Ixion stands still.

But this is just the state which I described above as necessary for the knowledge of the Idea, as pure contemplation, as sinking oneself in perception, losing oneself in the object, forgetting all individuality, surrendering that kind of knowledge which follows the principle of sufficient reason, and comprehends only relations; the state by means of which at once and inseparably the perceived particular thing is raised to the Idea of its whole species, and the knowing individual to the pure subject of will-less [pg 255]knowledge, and as such they are both taken out of the stream of time and all other relations. It is then all one whether we see the sun set from the prison or from the palace.

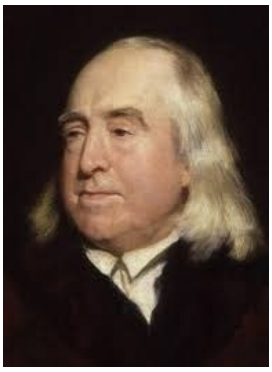
Inward disposition, the predominance of knowing over willing, can produce this state under any circumstances. This is shown by those admirable Dutch artists who directed this purely objective perception to the most insignificant objects, and established a lasting monument of their objectivity and spiritual peace in their pictures of *still life*, which the æsthetic beholder does not look on without emotion; for they present to him the peaceful, still, frame of mind of the artist, free from will, which was needed to contemplate such insignificant things so objectively, to observe them so attentively, and to repeat this perception so intelligently; and as the picture enables the onlooker to participate in this state, his emotion is often increased by the contrast between it and the unquiet frame of mind, disturbed by vehement willing, in which he finds himself. In the same spirit, landscape-painters, and particularly Ruisdael, have often painted very insignificant country scenes, which produce the same effect even more agreeably.

All this is accomplished by the inner power of an artistic nature alone; but that purely objective disposition is facilitated and assisted from without by suitable objects, by the abundance of natural beauty which invites contemplation, and even presses itself upon us. Whenever it discloses itself suddenly to our view, it almost always succeeds in delivering us, though it may be only for a moment, from subjectivity, from the slavery of the will, and in raising us to the state of pure knowing. This is why the man who is tormented by passion, or want, or care, is so suddenly revived, cheered, and restored by a single free glance into nature: the storm of passion, the pressure of desire and fear, and all the miseries of willing are then at once, and in a marvellous manner, [pg 256]calmed and appeased. For at the moment at which, freed from the will, we give ourselves up to pure will-less knowing, we pass into a world from which everything is absent that influenced our

will and moved us so violently through it. This freeing of knowledge lifts us as wholly and entirely away from all that, as do sleep and dreams; happiness and unhappiness have disappeared; we are no longer individual; the individual is forgotten; we are only pure subject of knowledge; we are only that *one* eye of the world which looks out from all knowing creatures, but which can become perfectly free from the service of will in man alone. Thus all difference of individuality so entirely disappears, that it is all the same whether the perceiving eye belongs to a mighty king or to a wretched beggar; for neither joy nor complaining can pass that boundary with us. So near us always lies a sphere in which we escape from all our misery; but who has the strength to continue long in it? As soon as any single relation to our will, to our person, even of these objects of our pure contemplation, comes again into consciousness, the magic is at an end; we fall back into the knowledge which is governed by the principle of sufficient reason; we know no longer the Idea, but the particular thing, the link of a chain to which we also belong, and we are again abandoned to all our woe. Most men remain almost always at this standpoint because they entirely lack objectivity, *i.e.*, genius. Therefore they have no pleasure in being alone with nature; they need company, or at least a book. For their knowledge remains subject to their will; they seek, therefore, in objects, only some relation to their will, and whenever they see anything that has no such relation, there sounds within them, like a ground bass in music, the constant inconsolable cry, "It is of no use to me;" thus in solitude the most beautiful surroundings have for them a desolate, dark, strange, and hostile appearance.

Lastly, it is this blessedness of will-less perception [pg 257]which casts an enchanting glamour over the past and distant, and presents them to us in so fair a light by means of self-deception. For as we think of days long gone by, days in which we lived in a distant place, it is only the objects which our fancy recalls, not the subject of will, which bore about with it then its incurable sorrows just as it bears them now; but they are forgotten, because since then they have often given place to others. Now, objective perception acts with regard to what is remembered just as it would in what is present, if we let it have influence over us, if we surrendered ourselves to it free from will. Hence it arises that, especially when we are more than ordinarily disturbed by some want, the remembrance of past and distant scenes suddenly flits across our minds like a lost paradise. The fancy recalls only what was objective, not what was individually subjective, and we imagine that that objective stood before us then just as pure and undisturbed by any relation to the will as its image stands in our fancy now; while in reality the relation of the objects to our will gave us pain then just as it does now. We can deliver ourselves from all suffering just as well through present objects as through distant ones whenever we raise ourselves to a purely objective contemplation of them, and so are able to bring about the illusion that only the objects are present and not we ourselves. Then, as the pure subject of knowledge, freed from the miserable self, we become entirely one with these objects, and, for the moment, our wants are as foreign to us as they are to them. The world as idea alone remains, and the world as will has disappeared.

In all these reflections it has been my object to bring out clearly the nature and the scope of the subjective element in æsthetic pleasure; the deliverance of knowledge from the service of the will, the forgetting of self as an individual, and the raising of the consciousness to the pure will-less, timeless, subject of knowledge, independent [pg 258]of all relations. With this subjective side of æsthetic contemplation, there must always appear as its necessary correlative the objective side, the intuitive comprehension of the Platonic Idea.



Jeremy Bentham
An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation
Chapter 1
1789

Jeremy Bentham was a British philosopher, jurist, and social reformer. He is regarded as the founder of modern utilitarianism. [Wikipedia] Bentham is primarily known for his philosophy on ethics, particularly the idea of utilitarnism where the good of an action is judged by its consequences.

OF THE PRINCIPLE OF UTILITY

I.1

I. Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure.* It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it. In words a man may pretend to abjure their empire: but in reality he will remain subject to it all the while. The *principle of utility**6 recognizes this subjection, and assumes it for the foundation of that system, the object of which is to rear the fabric of felicity by the hands of reason and of law. Systems which attempt to question it, deal in sounds instead of sense, in caprice instead of reason, in darkness instead of light.

I.2

But enough of metaphor and declamation: it is not by such means that moral science is to be improved.

I.3

II. The principle of utility is the foundation of the present work: it will be proper therefore at the outset to give an explicit and determinate account of what is meant by it. By the principle*7 of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question: or, what is the same thing in other words, to promote or to oppose that happiness. I say of every action whatsoever, and therefore not only of every action of a private individual, but of every measure of government.

I.4

III. By utility is meant that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness, (all this in the present case comes to the same thing) or (what comes again to the same thing) to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness to the party whose interest is considered: if that party be the community in general, then the happiness of the community: if a particular individual, then the happiness of that individual.

I.5

IV. The interest of the community is one of the most general expressions that can occur in the phraseology of morals: no wonder that the meaning of it is often lost. When it has a meaning, it is this. The community is a fictitious body, composed of the individual persons who are considered as constituting as it were its *members.* The interest of the community then is, what?—the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it.

I.6

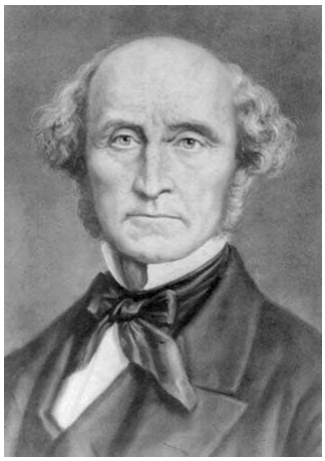
V. It is in vain to talk of the interest of the community, without understanding what is the interest of the individual.*8 A thing is said to promote the interest, or to be *for* the interest, of an individual, when it tends to add to the sum total of his pleasures: or, what comes to the same thing, to diminish the sum total of his pains.

I.7

VI. An action then may be said to be conformable to the principle of utility, or, for shortness sake, to utility, (meaning with respect to the community at large) when the tendency it has to augment the happiness of the community is greater than any it has to diminish it.

I.8

VII. A measure of government (which is but a particular kind of action, performed by a particular person or persons) may be said to be conformable to or dictated by the principle of utility, when in like manner the tendency which it has to augment the happiness of the community is greater than any which it has to diminish it.



John Stuart Mill
Utilitarianism
Chapter 2
1863

John Stuart Mill, FRSE was an English philosopher, political economist and civil servant. He was an influential contributor to social theory, political theory and political economy. [Wikipedia] His ideas were built on the philosophies of others, including John Locke, David Hume, and Jeremy Bentham, but his way of explaining things remains important for the shape of modern political theories as they are expressed in the Western world.

THE CREED WHICH ACCEPTS as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure. To give a clear view of the moral standard set up by the theory, much more requires to be said; in particular, what things it includes in the ideas of pain and pleasure; and to what extent this is left an open question. But these supplementary explanations do not affect the theory of life on which this theory of morality is grounded- namely, that pleasure, and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends; and that all desirable things (which are as numerous in the utilitarian as in any other scheme) are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain.

Now, such a theory of life excites in many minds, and among them in some of the most estimable in feeling and purpose, inveterate dislike. To suppose that life has (as they express it) no higher end than pleasure- no better and nobler object of desire and pursuit- they designate as utterly mean and grovelling; as a doctrine worthy only of swine, to whom the followers of Epicurus were, at a very early period, contemptuously likened; and modern holders of the doctrine are occasionally made the subject of equally polite comparisons by its German, French, and English assailants.

When thus attacked, the Epicureans have always answered, that it is not they, but their accusers, who represent human nature in a degrading light; since the accusation supposes human beings to be capable of no pleasures except those of which swine are capable. If this supposition were true, the charge could not be gainsaid, but would then be no longer an imputation; for if the sources of pleasure were precisely the same to human beings and to swine, the rule of life which is good enough for the one would be good enough for the other. The comparison of the Epicurean life to that of beasts is felt as degrading, precisely because a beast's pleasures do not satisfy a human being's conceptions of happiness. Human beings have faculties more elevated than the animal appetites, and when once made conscious of them, do not regard anything as happiness which does not include their gratification. I do not, indeed, consider the Epicureans to have been by any means faultless in drawing out their scheme of consequences from the utilitarian principle. To do this in any sufficient manner, many Stoic, as well as Christian elements require to be included. But there is no known Epicurean theory of life which does not assign to the pleasures of the intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments, a much higher value as pleasures than to those of mere sensation. It must be admitted, however, that utilitarian writers in general have

placed the superiority of mental over bodily pleasures chiefly in the greater permanency, safety, uncostliness, etc., of the former- that is, in their circumstantial advantages rather than in their intrinsic nature. And on all these points utilitarians have fully proved their case; but they might have taken the other, and, as it may be called, higher ground, with entire consistency. It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognise the fact, that some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others. It would be absurd that while, in estimating all other things, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasures should be supposed to depend on quantity alone.

If I am asked, what I mean by difference of quality in pleasures, or what makes one pleasure more valuable than another, merely as a pleasure, except its being greater in amount, there is but one possible answer. Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure. If one of the two is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of, we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality, so far outweighing quantity as to render it, in comparison, of small account.

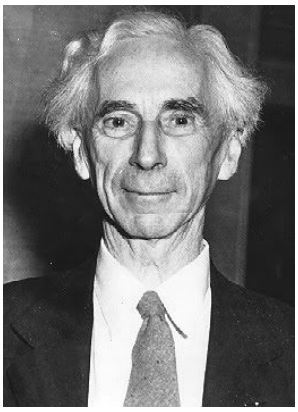
Now it is an unquestionable fact that those who are equally acquainted with, and equally capable of appreciating and enjoying, both, do give a most marked preference to the manner of existence which employs their higher faculties. Few human creatures would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals, for a promise of the fullest allowance of a beast's pleasures; no intelligent human being would consent to be a fool, no instructed person would be an ignoramus, no person of feeling and conscience would be selfish and base, even though they should be persuaded that the fool, the dunce, or the rascal is better satisfied with his lot than they are with theirs. They would not resign what they possess more than he for the most complete satisfaction of all the desires which they have in common with him. If they ever fancy they would, it is only in cases of unhappiness so extreme, that to escape from it they would exchange their lot for almost any other, however undesirable in their own eyes. A being of higher faculties requires more to make him happy, is capable probably of more acute suffering, and certainly accessible to it at more points, than one of an inferior type; but in spite of these liabilities, he can never really wish to sink into what he feels to be a lower grade of existence. We may give what explanation we please of this unwillingness; we may attribute it to pride, a name which is given indiscriminately to some of the most and to some of the least estimable feelings of which mankind are capable: we may refer it to the love of liberty and personal independence, an appeal to which was with the Stoics one of the most effective means for the inculcation of it; to the love of power, or to the love of excitement, both of which do really enter into and contribute to it: but its most appropriate appellation is a sense of dignity, which all human beings possess in one form or another, and in some, though by no means in exact, proportion to their higher faculties, and which is so essential a part of the happiness of those in whom it is strong, that nothing which conflicts with it could be, otherwise than momentarily, an object of desire to them.

Whoever supposes that this preference takes place at a sacrifice of happiness- that the superior being, in anything like equal circumstances, is not happier than the inferior- confounds the two very different ideas, of happiness, and content. It is indisputable that the being whose capacities of enjoyment are low, has the greatest chance of having them fully satisfied; and a highly endowed being will always feel that any happiness which he can look for, as the world is constituted, is

imperfect. But he can learn to bear its imperfections, if they are at all bearable; and they will not make him envy the being who is indeed unconscious of the imperfections, but only because he feels not at all the good which those imperfections qualify. It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides.

[...]

From this verdict of the only competent judges, I apprehend there can be no appeal. On a question which is the best worth having of two pleasures, or which of two modes of existence is the most grateful to the feelings, apart from its moral attributes and from its consequences, the judgment of those who are qualified by knowledge of both, or, if they differ, that of the majority among them, must be admitted as final. And there needs be the less hesitation to accept this judgment respecting the quality of pleasures, since there is no other tribunal to be referred to even on the question of quantity. What means are there of determining which is the acutest of two pains, or the intensest of two pleasurable sensations, except the general suffrage of those who are familiar with both? Neither pains nor pleasures are homogeneous, and pain is always heterogeneous with pleasure. What is there to decide whether a particular pleasure is worth purchasing at the cost of a particular pain, except the feelings and judgment of the experienced? When, therefore, those feelings and judgment declare the pleasures derived from the higher faculties to be preferable in kind, apart from the question of intensity, to those of which the animal nature, disjoined from the higher faculties, is susceptible, they are entitled on this subject to the same regard.



Bertrand Russell
The Conquest of Happiness
Chapter 10, "Is Happiness Still Possible?"
1930

Bertrand Arthur William Russell, 3rd Earl Russell, OM, FRS was a British nobleman, philosopher, logician, mathematician, historian, and social critic. [Wikipedia] Russell is recognized as one of the founders of modern analytic philosophy.

Not so very far removed from the devotion to obscure causes is absorption in a hobby. One of the most eminent of living mathematicians divides his time equally between mathematics and stamp-collecting. I imagine that the latter affords consolation at the moments when he can make no progress with the former. The difficulty of proving propositions in the theory of numbers is not the only sorrow that stamp-collecting can cure, nor are stamps the only things that can be collected. Consider what a vast field of ecstasy opens before the imagination when one thinks of old china, snuff-boxes, Roman coins, arrow-heads, and flint implements. It is true that many of us are too 'superior' for these simple pleasures. We have all experienced them in boyhood, but have thought them, for some reason, unworthy of a grown man. This is a complete mistake; any pleasure that does no harm to other people is to be valued. For my part, I collect rivers: I derive pleasure from having gone down the Volga and up the Yangtse, and regret very much having never seen the Amazon or the Orinoco. Simple as these emotions are, I am not ashamed of them. Or consider again the passionate joy of the baseball fan: he turns to his newspaper with avidity, and the radio affords him the keenest thrills. I remember meeting for the first time one of the leading literary men of America, a man whom I had supposed from his books to be filled with melancholy. But it so happened that at that moment the most crucial baseball results were coming through on the radio; he forgot me, literature, and all the other sorrows of our sublunary life, and yelled with joy as his favourites achieved victory. Ever since this incident I have been able to read his books without feeling depressed by the misfortunes of his characters.

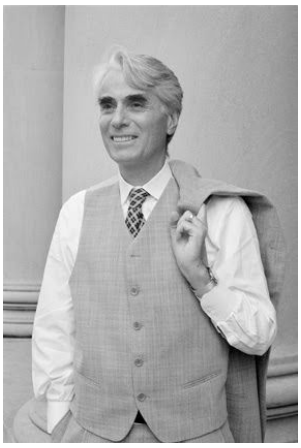
Fads and hobbies, however, are in many cases, perhaps most, not a source of fundamental happiness, but a means of escape from reality, of forgetting for the moment some pain too difficult to be faced. Fundamental happiness depends more than anything else upon what may be called a friendly interest in persons and things.

A friendly interest in persons is a form of affectionateness, but not the form which is grasping and possessive and seeking always an emphatic response. This latter form is very frequently a source of unhappiness. The kind that makes for happiness is the kind that likes to observe people and finds pleasure in their individual traits, that wishes to afford scope for the interests and pleasures of those with whom it is brought into contact without desiring to acquire power over them or to secure their enthusiastic admiration. The person whose attitude towards others is genuinely of this kind will be a source of happiness and a recipient of reciprocal kindness. His relations with others, whether slight or serious, will satisfy both his interests and his affections; he will not be soured by ingratitude, since he will seldom suffer it and will not notice when he does. The same idiosyncrasies which would get on another man's nerves to the point of exasperation will be to him a source of gentle amusement. He will achieve without effort results which another man, after long struggles,

will find to be unattainable. Being happy in himself, he will be a pleasant companion, and this in turn will increase his happiness. But all this must be genuine; it must not spring from an idea of self-sacrifice inspired by a sense of duty. A sense of duty is useful in work, but offensive in personal relations. People wish to be liked, not to be endured with patient resignation. To like many people spontaneously and without effort is perhaps the greatest of all sources of personal happiness.

I spoke also in the last paragraph of what I call a friendly interest in things. This phrase may perhaps seem forced; it may be said that it is impossible to feel friendly to things. Nevertheless, there is something analogous to friendliness in the kind of interest that a geologist takes in rocks, or an archaeologist in ruins, and this interest ought to be an element in our attitude to individuals or societies. It is possible to have an interest in things which is hostile rather than friendly. A man might collect facts concerning the habitats of spiders because he hated spiders and wished to live where they were few. This kind of interest would not afford the same satisfaction as the geologist derives from his rocks. An interest in impersonal things, though perhaps less valuable as an ingredient in everyday happiness than a friendly attitude towards our fellow creatures, is nevertheless very important. The world is vast and our own powers are limited. If all our happiness is bound up entirely in our personal circumstances it is difficult not to demand of life more than it has to give. And to demand too much is the surest way of getting even less than is possible. The man who can forget his worries by means of a genuine interest in, say, the Council of Trent, or the life history of stars, will find that, when he returns from his excursion into the impersonal world, he has acquired a poise and calm which enable him to deal with his worries in the best way, and he will in the meantime have experienced a genuine even if temporary happiness.

The secret of happiness is this: let your interests be as wide as possible, and let your reactions to the things and persons that interest you be as far as possible friendly rather than hostile.



Robert Nozick
The Examined Life
Happiness
1974

Robert Nozick was an American philosopher who was most prominent in the 1970s and 1980s. He was a professor at Harvard University. He is best known for his book *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, a libertarian answer to John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*. [Wikipedia] His philosophies continue in the analytic tradition heavily influenced by the thinkings of Bertrand Russell.

SOME THEORISTS HAVE CLAIMED that happiness is the only important thing about life; all that should matter to a person—they say—is being happy; the sole standard for assessing a life is the amount or quantity of happiness it contains. It is ironic that making this exclusive claim for happiness distorts the flavor of what happy moments are like. For in these moments, almost everything seems wonderful: the way the sun shines, the way that person looks, the way water glistens on the river, the way the dogs play (yet not the way the murderer kills). This openness of happiness, its generosity of spirit and width of appreciation, gets warped and constricted by the claim pretending to be its greatest friend—that only happiness matters, nothing else. That claim is begrudging. unlike happiness itself. Happiness can be precious, perhaps even preeminent, yet still he one important thing among others.

There are various ways to nibble away at the apparent obviousness of the view that happiness is the one thing that is important. First, even if happiness were the only thing we cared about, we would not care solely about its total amount. (When I use "we" in this way, I am inviting you to examine whether or not you agree. If you do, then I am elaborating and exploring our common view, but if after reflecting on the matter you find you do not agree, then I am traveling alone for a while.) We would care also about how that happiness was distributed within a lifetime. Imagine graphing someone's total happiness through life; the amount of happiness is represented on the vertical axis, time on the horizontal one. (If the phenomenon of happiness is extremely complicated and multidimensional, it is implausible that its amount could be graphed in this way—but in that case too the purported goal of maximizing our happiness becomes unclear.) If only the total amount of happiness mattered, we would be indifferent between a life of constantly increasing happiness and one of constant decrease, between an upward- and a downward-sloping curve, provided that the total amount of happiness, the total area under the curve, was the same in the two cases. Most of us, however, would prefer the upward-sloping line to the downward; we would prefer a life of increasing happiness to one of decrease. Part of the reason, but only a part, may be that since it makes us happy to look forward to greater happiness, doing so makes our current happiness score even higher. (Yet the person on the downward-sloping curve alternatively can have the current Proustian pleasure of remembering past happiness.) Take the pleasure of anticipation into account, though, by building it into the curve whose height is therefore increased at certain places; still most of us would not care merely about the area under this enhanced curve, but about the curve's direction also. (Which life would you prefer your children to have, one of decline or of advance?)

We would be willing, moreover, to give up some amount of happiness to get our lives' narratives moving in the right direction, improving in general. Even if a downwardly sloping curve had slightly more area under it, we would prefer our own lives to slope upward. (If it encompassed

vastly greater area, the choice might be different.) Therefore, the contour of the happiness has an independent weight, beyond breaking ties among lives whose total amounts of happiness are equal. In order to gain a more desirable narrative direction, we sometimes would choose not to maximize our total happiness. And if the factor of narrative direction might justify forgoing some amount of happiness, so other factors might also. Straight lines are not the only narrative curves. It would be silly, though, to try to pick the best happiness Curve; diverse biographies can fit the very same curve, and we care also about the particular content of a life story. That thing we really want to slope upward might be our life's narrative story, not its amount of happiness. With these stories held constant, we might then care only about happiness's amount, not its slope. However, this too would support the general point that something matters—an upward slope, whether to the narrative line or to the happiness curve—besides the quantity of happiness.

We also can show that more matters than pleasure or happiness by considering a life that has these but otherwise is empty, a life of mindless pleasures or bovine contentment or frivolous amusements only, a happy life but a superficial one. "It is better," John Stuart Mill wrote, "to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied." And although it might be best of all to be Socrates satisfied, having both happiness and depth, we would give up some happiness in order to gain the depth.

We are not empty containers or buckets to be stuffed with good things, with pleasures or possessions or positive emotions or even with a rich and varied internal life. Such a bucket has no appropriate structure within; how the experiences fit together or are contoured over time is of no importance except insofar as some particular arrangements make further happy moments more probable. The view that only happiness matters ignores the question of what we— the very ones to be happy—are like. How could the most important thing about our life be what it contains, though? What makes the felt experiences of pleasure or happiness more important than what we ourselves are like?

Freud thought it a fundamental principle of behavior that we seek pleasure and try to avoid pain or unpleasure—he called this the pleasure principle. Sometimes one can more effectively secure pleasure by not proceeding to it directly; one countenances detours and postponements in immediate satisfaction, one even renounces particular sources of pleasure, due to the nature of the outside world. Freud called this acting in accordance with the reality principle. Freud's reality principle is subordinate to the pleasure principle: "Actually, the substitution of the reality principle for the pleasure principle implies no deposing of the pleasure principle but only a safeguarding of it. A momentary pleasure, uncertain in its results, is given up but only in order to gain along the new path an assured pleasure at a later time."

[...]

We care about things in addition to how our lives feel to us from the inside. This is shown by the following thought experiment. Imagine a machine that could give you any experience (or sequence of experiences) you might desire.When connected to this experience machine, you can have the experience of writing a great poem or bringing about world peace or loving someone and being loved in return. You can experience the felt pleasures of these things, how they feel "from the inside." You can program your experiences for tomorrow, or this week, or this year, or even for the rest of your life. If your imagination is impoverished, you can use the library of suggestions extracted from biographies and enhanced by novelists and psychologists. You can live your fondest dreams "from the inside." Would you choose to do this for the rest of your life? If not, why not? (Other people also have the same option of using these machines which, let us suppose, are provided by friendly and trustworthy beings from another galaxy, so you need not refuse connecting in order to help others.) The question is not whether to try the machine temporarily, but whether to enter it for the rest of your life. Upon entering, you will not remember having done this;

so no pleasures will get ruined by realizing they are machine-produced. Uncertainty too might be programmed by using the machine's optional random device (upon which various pre selected alternatives can depend). The question of whether to plug in to this experience machine is a question of value. (It differs from two related questions: an epistemological one—Can you know you are not already plugged in?—and a metaphysical one—Don't the machine experiences themselves constitute a real world?) The question is not whether plugging in is preferable to extremely
dire alternatives—lives of torture, for instance—but whether plugging in would constitute the very best life, or tie for being best, because all that matters about a life is how it feels from the inside.

Notice that this is a *thought* experiment, designed to isolate one question: Do only our internal feelings matter to us? It would miss the point, then, to focus upon whether such a machine is technologically feasible. Also, the machine example must be looked at on its own; to answer the question by filtering it through a fixed view that internal experiences are the only things that can matter (so of course it would be all right to plug into the machine) would lose the opportunity to test that view independently. One way to determine if a view is inadequate is to check its consequences in particular cases, sometimes extreme ones, but if someone always decided what the result should be in any case by applying the given view itself, this would preclude discovering it did not correctly fit the case. Readers who hold they would plug in to the machine should notice whether their first impulse was not to do so, followed later by the thought that since only experiences could matter, the machine would be all right after all.

Richard Layard
Happiness: Has social science got a clue?
BACK TO BENTHAM
2003

Richard Layard is a British labour economist, currently working as programme director of the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics. [Wikipedia] The Wellbeing Programme was founded the same year the Layard gave his lectures of Happiness and social science.

So we are in a situation of moral vacuum, where there are no agreed concepts of how unselfish a person should be, or of what constitutes a good society. I want to suggest that the right concept is the old Enlightenment one of the greatest happiness. The good society is the one where people are happiest. And the right action is the one which produces the greatest happiness.

This is not a currently fashionable view among philosophers. But they do not offer any alternative overarching theory which would help us to resolve our moral dilemmas. Instead they support various separate values: promise-keeping, kindness, truthfulness, fairness and so on. But what do we do when they conflict? What should I do if I have promised to go to my daughter‘s play and my father is taken to hospital – keep my promise or be kind to my father? I see no way in which conflicts between principles could be resolved without reference to some overarching principle. And that principle would surely focus on the feelings of the people affected. The question is how strongly each of them would feel if I did not turn up.

As I see it, moral philosophy is not about a limited set of moral dilemmas, but about the whole of life – how each of us should spend our time and how society should allocate its resources. Such issues cannot be resolved without an overarching principle. _Do as you would be done by‘ might seem to be one such principle but it provides little guidance on how the state should treat anyone, be he a criminal, a minor or a taxpayer. And, even in private morality, it seems to require an excessive disregard of the person one knows best, which is oneself.

So I want to propose the principle of the greatest happiness. First let me deal with some of the objections and then attempt to justify the principle.

Some people object that the concept of happiness is too vague or too hedonistic – which I hope I dealt with in the first lecture. Others object to the fact that actions are judged only by their consequences, as if this meant that the nature of the action itself is immaterial. But of course the feelings produced at the time of the action are as much a part of its consequences as the whole stream of feelings thereafter. Others argue that you cannot become happy by trying, so it is inconsistent to consider happiness the goal. Even if it were true, it is a non-sequitur since we have all kinds of goals that can only be pursued indirectly. And finally there is the argument that utilitarianism does not imply any basic rights, which I would deny since people become so miserable without them while the rest of society gains less.

If the critics offered a convincing alternative ideology for public and private morality, we could

argue about which was better. But, since none is offered, we have the choice between a society with no comprehensive philosophy or one that embraces utilitarianism.

Even so, why should one accept the utilitarian objective? I would base it on 5 propositions, which show that it is a logical development of our nature. Let me state the propositions first and then try to justify them at more length.

1. It is in our nature to want to be happy. On Monday I explained how this acts as a basic motivational mechanism, which has led to our survival.
2. We also want our relatives to be happy, a parent‘s love being the strongest example.
3. As regards relationships outside the family, humans are innately sociable and in varying degrees helpful to each other. We know genes are involved in this because twin studies show that the trait of cooperativeness is partly heritable. This trait provides the emotional support for the development of a moral theory.
4. So does our next trait, which is an inbuilt sense of fairness, which requires at the very least the equal treatment of equals.
5. To these ingredients we bring the power of reason, which reasons about moral issues in much the same way that it reasons about the working of the natural world. In both cases it seeks a unified theory. In natural science this has paid off handsomely and made us masters of the earth. In moral philosophy there has been less progress but, if we persevere, we surely have a chance to better master ourselves.

Let me end this lecture by discussing these various steps.

Man’s partial unselfishness Humans naturally seek the good of more than themselves. At least they seek the good of their kin. But fruitful enterprises with non-relatives also require cooperation. Natural selection will punish those who cannot cooperate with others, and who instead seek only their short-run gain. So natural selection will select cooperative people, and it will also select those societies which educate their people to be cooperative.

It‘s convenient to discuss this in the standard context of the Prisoners‘ Dilemma, involving two people. If we both cooperate, we both do better than if we are both selfish. But how can I ensure that, if I cooperate, you do not cheat? In a series of simulations Axelrod showed that, if I had to deal with you a lot, whatever strategy you followed, I would on average do best to follow Tit for Tat.

This means that I would start off cooperating but, if you acted selfishly, so would I, until you started cooperating again, when I would then again cooperate. Thus, in the struggle of life, people would do best who were initially cooperative, but also ready to protect their back.

We humans are roughly that sort of people and this could well be because natural selection operated like a series of Axelrod‘s simulations, from which people with our kind of strategy emerged victorious. In the lingo of geneticists Tit-for-Tat is an evolutionary stable strategy which will see off personality types who operate differently.

However our instincts for interacting with each other have also been refined by upbringing and the values we have been taught. And the result of this joint product of nature and nurture is that we cooperate to an important extent because it makes us feel better. Here is a little evidence from an experiment in which people‘s brains were monitored while playing the Prisoner's‘ Dilemma game.

When they made cooperative moves in the game, their brains showed the standard signs of pleasurable activity, and not otherwise.

And this happened before they knew the outcome of the game and whether the other player had cooperated. To that extent virtue is its own reward.

Notice that I am not here talking about reciprocal altruism – giving favours in expectation of favours returned. I am talking about something that goes beyond that, and explains why we help many people we will never meet again. We tip taxi-drivers, vote in elections and even dive after drowning people that we do not know. These social feelings are deep inside us and can even lead us to sacrifice our lives. But they have survived the stringent test of natural selection because people who are made like that are liked by other people and used for rewarding activities. They are liked because they do not always calculate.

That said, we do also watch our back. In repeated interactions with people we withdraw cooperation if they behave badly. And in one-off interactions, we take care to find out about the person‘s previous reputation.

So people who behave badly do generally get punished, and good behaviour springs not only from natural sociability but also from the fear of being caught. Both are necessary since natural sociability is not universal. But natural sociability should not be underestimated – and it can of course be encouraged further by good moral education, provided there is a clear moral philosophy to be taught.

So now we come to the conscious formulation of our morality. We seem to have an inherited instinct for fairness, as shown by a whole host of psychological experiments and by the existence of the concept in every known human society. So if we value our own happiness, it is only fair if we value equally the happiness of others. This is harder for some people to do than for others and it is certainly easier the more naturally benevolent we are. But, stepping outside ourselves, it seems extremely natural to say that the best state for society is where the people are happiest – each counting for one. And, going on, right actions are those which promote that state of society.

You could of course argue that rather than look for a clear philosophy we should just stick with our various different moral intuitions. But that was not the way we progressed in our understanding of nature. We did not stick with our partial intuitive concepts of causality. We sought desperately for a unified theory which could cover all kinds of disparate phenomena – the fall of the apple and the rotation of the moon, and so on. It is surely in our nature to make moral progress by the search for an overarching moral principle, and by its widespread adoption. I do believe such progress is possible.

In the West we already have a society that is probably as happy as any there has ever been. But there is a danger that Me-First may pollute our way of life, now that divine punishment no longer provides the sanction for morality. If that happened, we should all be less happy. So we do need a clear philosophy. The obvious aim is the greatest happiness of all – each person counting for one. If we all really pursued that, we should all be less selfish, and we should all be happier.

So my conclusion is: bully for Bentham. Let me end with these words from a birthday letter which he wrote shortly before he died to the daughter of a friend. He wrote: _Create all the happiness you

are able to create: remove all the misery you are able to remove. Every day will allow you to add something to the pleasure of others, or to diminish something of their pains. And for every grain of enjoyment you sow in the bosom of another, you shall find a harvest in your own bosom; while every sorrow which you pluck out from the thoughts and feelings of a fellow creature shall be replaced by beautiful peace and joy in the sanctuary of your soul‘. I call that pretty good advice.

Robert Skidelsky and Edward Skidelsky
In Praise of Leisure
2010

Robert Skidelsky is a historian best known for his definitive three-volume biography of John Maynard Keynes; his son Edward Skidelsky is a philosopher. They have collaborated on a book arguing that people in wealthy countries like Britain and the United States work too hard and by doing so miss out on the “good life.” [New York Times]

IMAGINE A WORLD IN which most people worked only 15 hours a week. They would be paid as much as, or even more than, they now are, because the fruits of their labor would be distributed more evenly across society. Leisure would occupy far more of their waking hours than work. It was exactly this prospect that John Maynard Keynes conjured up in a little essay published in 1930 called "Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren." Its thesis was simple. As technological progress made possible an increase in the output of goods per hour worked, people would have to work less and less to satisfy their needs, until in the end they would have to work hardly at all. Then, Keynes wrote, "for the first time since his creation man will be faced with his real, his permanent problem—how to use his freedom from pressing economic cares, how to occupy the leisure, which science and compound interest will have won for him, to live wisely and agreeably and well." He thought this condition might be reached in about 100 years—that is, by 2030.

Given when it was written, it is not surprising that Keynes's futuristic essay was ignored. The world had much more urgent problems to attend to, including getting out of the Great Depression. And Keynes himself never explicitly reverted to his vision, though the dream of a workless future was always there in the background of his thinking. Indeed, it was as a theorist of short-term unemployment, not of long-run economic progress, that Keynes achieved world fame, with his great book, The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money. Nevertheless, there are good reasons for returning to the questions Keynes raised, then dropped.

He asked something hardly discussed today: What is wealth for? How much money do we need to lead a good life? This might seem an impossible question. But it is not a trivial one. Making money cannot be an end in itself—at least for anyone not suffering from acute mental disorder. To say that my purpose in life is to make more and more money is like saying that my aim in eating is to get fatter and fatter. And what is true of individuals is also true of societies. Making money cannot be the permanent business of humanity, for the simple reason that there is nothing to do with money except spend it. And we cannot just go on spending. There will come a point when we will be satiated or disgusted or both. Or will we?

We in the West are once more in the midst of a Great Contraction, the worst since the Great Depression. A great crisis is like an inspection: it exposes the faults of a social system, and it prompts the search for alternatives. The system under inspection is capitalism, and Keynes's essay offers a vantage point from which to consider the future of capitalism. The situation has brought to light two defects in the system, usually obscured by the near-unanimous commitment to growth at almost any cost.

The first defect is moral. The banking crisis has shown yet again that the present system relies on motives of greed and acquisitiveness, which are morally repugnant. It also divides societies into rich and poor, latterly very rich and very poor, justified by some version of the "trickle down" idea. The coexistence of great wealth and great poverty, especially in societies in which there is enough for everyone, offends our sense of justice.

Second, the crisis has exposed capitalism's palpable economic problems. Our financial system is inherently unstable. When it goes wrong, as it did in 2008, we realize how inefficient, wasteful, and painful it can be. Heavily indebted countries are told that the bond markets will not be satisfied until they have liquidated a large fraction of their national incomes. Such periodic collapses of the money-making machine are a great spur to thinking about better ways of life.

Finally, Keynes's essay challenges us to imagine what life after capitalism might look like (for an economic system in which capital no longer accumulates is not capitalism, whatever one might call it). Keynes thought that the motivational basis of capitalism was "an intense appeal to the money-making and money-loving instincts of individuals." He thought that with the coming of plenty, this motivational drive would lose its social approbation; that is, that capitalism would abolish itself when its work was done. But so accustomed have we become to regarding scarcity as the norm that few of us think about what motives and principles of conduct would, or should, prevail in a world of plenty.

So let us imagine that everyone has enough to lead a good life. What is the good life? And what is it not? And what changes in our moral and economic system are needed to realize it? Such questions are seldom asked, because they do not fall neatly into any of the disciplinary boxes that make up modern intellectual life. Philosophers construct systems of perfect justice, unmindful of the messiness of empirical reality. Economists ask how best to satisfy subjective wants, whatever those may be. We need to bring together insights from both disciplines—economics for the sake of its practical influence, philosophy for the sake of its ethical imagination. It's time to revive the old idea of economics as a moral science, a science of human beings in communities, not of interacting robots.

Sonya Lyubomirsky
How of Happiness: The scientific pursuit of happiness
7 Myths About Happiness
2013

Sonja Lyubomirsky is a professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of California, Riverside and author of The How of Happiness, a book of strategies backed by scientific research that can be used to increase happiness. [Wikipedia]

Nearly all of us buy into what I call the myths of happiness—beliefs that certain adult achievements (marriage, kids, jobs, wealth) will make us forever happy and that certain adult failures or adversities (health problems, divorce, having little money) will make us forever unhappy. Overwhelming research evidence, however, reveals that there is no magic formula for happiness and no sure course toward misery. Rather than bringing lasting happiness or misery in themselves, major life moments and crisis points can be opportunities for renewal, growth, or meaningful change. Yet how you greet these moments really matters.

I'll Be Happy When I'm Married to the Right Person

One of the most pervasive happiness myths is the notion that we'll be happy when we find that perfect romantic partner—when we say "I do." The false promise is not that marriage won't make us happy. For the great majority of individuals, it will. The problem is that marriage—even when initially perfectly satisfying—will not make us as intensely happy (or for as long) as we believe it will. Indeed, studies show that the happiness boost from marriage lasts an average of only two years. Unfortunately, when those two years are up and fulfilling our goal to find the idea partner hasn't made us as happy as we expected, we often feel there must be something wrong with us or we must be the only ones to feel this way.

I Can't Be Happy When My Relationship Has Fallen Apart

When a committed relationship falls apart, our reaction is often supersized. Fear of divorce is especially acute: We feel that we can never be happy again, that our life as we know it is now over. However, people are remarkably resilient, and research shows that the low point in happiness occurs a couple years before the divorce. As soon as four years after the break of a troubled marriage, people are significantly happier than they ever had been during the union.

I Need a Partner

Many of us are positive that not having a partner would make us miserable forever. However, multiple studies show that single people are no less happy than married ones, and that singles have been found to enjoy great happiness and meaning in other relationships and pursuits. Unfortunately, believing in this myth may be toxic: Not recognizing the power of resilience and the rewards of singlehood (such as more time to spend with friends or engaging in solo projects and adventures) may lead us to settle for a poor romantic match.

Landing My Dream Job Will Make Me Happy

At the root of this happiness myth is the misconception that, although we're not happy now, we'll surely be happy when land that dream job. We encounter a problem, however, when acquiring that seemingly perfect job doesn't make us as happy as we expected and when that happiness is ever so brief. What explains this unwelcome experience is the inexorable process of hedonic adaptation—namely, the fact that human beings have the remarkable capacity to grow habituated or inured to most life changes. Unfortunately, if we are convinced that a certain kind of job would make us happy (and it doesn't), then misunderstanding the power of hedonic adaptation may compel us to jettison perfectly good careers. Hence, a critical first step is to understand that everyone becomes habituated to the novelty, excitement, and challenges of a new job or venture. This new awareness will suggest to us an alternative explanation for our occupational malaise. To wit, there may be nothing wrong with the job or with our motivation or with our work ethic. The fact may be that we are simply experiencing a naturally occurring, all-too-human process.

I'll Be Happy When I'm Rich and Successful

Many of us fervently believe that, if we're not happy now, we'll be happy when we've finally made it—when we have reached a certain level of prosperity and success. However, when that happiness proves elusive or short-lived, we weather mixed emotions, letdown, and even depression. When we've achieved—at least on paper—much of what we have always wanted to achieve, life can become dull and even empty. There is little around the corner to look forward to. Many prosperous and successful individuals don't understand this natural process of adaptation, and may come to the conclusion that they need even more money to be truly happy. They do not realize that the key to buying happiness is not in how successful we are, but perhaps what we do with our success; it's not how high our income is, but how we allocate it.

I Will Never Recover from a Dire Medical Diagnosis

When our worst fears about our health are realized, we can't imagine getting beyond the crying and despairing stage. We can't imagine experiencing happiness again. Yet our reactions and forebodings about this worst-case scenario are governed by one of the myths of happiness. Much can be done in the face of positive test results to increase the chances that our time living with illness will not be all misery and purposelessness—indeed, that it can be a time of growth and meaning—with hundreds of studies to substantiate it.

Science shows that we have the power to decide what our experience is and isn't. Consider that during every minute of your day, you are choosing to pay attention to some things and opting to ignore, overlook, suppress, or withdraw from most other things. What you choose to focus on becomes part of your life and the rest falls out. You may have a chronic illness, for example, and you can spend most of your days dwelling on how it has ruined your life, or you can spend your days focusing on your gym routine, or getting to know your nieces, or connecting to your spiritual side. We can change our lives simply by changing our attitudes of mind.

The Best Years of My Life Are Over

Whether we are young, middle-aged, or old, the great majority of us believe that happiness declines with age, falling more and more with every decade until we reach that point at which our lives are characterized by sadness and loss. Thus, we may be surprised to learn what research conclusively

confirms—that many of us could not be farther from the truth when we conclude that our finest years are long behind us. Older people are actually happier and more satisfied with their lives than younger people; they experience more positive emotions and fewer negative ones, and their emotional experience is more stable and less sensitive to the vicissitudes of daily negativity and stress.

Although exactly when the well-being peak takes place is still unclear—three recent studies demonstrated that the peak of positive emotional experience occurred at ages sixty-four, sixty-five, and seventy-nine, respectively—what is very clear is that youth and emerging adulthood are not the sunniest times of life.

Why is this? When we begin to recognize that our years are limited, we fundamentally change our perspective about life. The shorter time horizon motivates us to become more present-oriented and to invest our (relatively limited) time and effort into the things in life that really matter. So, for example, as we age, our most meaningful relationships become much more of a priority than meeting new people or taking risks; we invest more in these relationships and discard those that are not very supportive. In a sense, we become more emotionally wiser as we age.

For a great deal more detail -- and citations of supporting theory and research -- see my new book, The Myths of Happiness