

Defining Happiness:

Assimilating statistics, philosophy, politics and critical thinking to determine definitions of happiness, joy and well-being.

'Happy: delighted, pleased, or glad, as over a particular thing' (dictionary.com, 2014).

Haybron (2012) describes two definitions of happiness: 1) Psychological Happiness. i.e the opposite of depression, not to be confused with the short term feeling of joy. Many say that we can be happy without feeling happy. Such as experiencing life-satisfaction and tranquility. 2) Well-being happiness. Aristotelians describe this as 'a life of virtuous or excellent activity.' Haybron concludes that 'Happiness' is emotional well-being. Buddhists would suggest that these two ideas are interdependent: 'If you look at the high sea, there might be [a] beautiful, calm ocean... There might be storms, but the depth of the ocean is still there, unchanged' (Ricard, 2007). The surface here representing 'joy', and the deep ocean, well-being.

Gilbert (2004) explains that we have a genetic natural happiness, the way in which it is perceived and expressed is a synthetic, neurological process which takes place in the prefrontal cortex. Lottery winners and paraplegics are equally happy a year following their respective life-changing events, showing that happiness is a matter of perception. Sagmeister (2010) borrows an analogy from Jonathan Haidt to explain this idea: 'The conscious mind is this tiny rider on this giant elephant, the unconscious. And the rider thinks that he can tell the elephant what to do, but the elephant really has his own ideas'. Suggesting that our psychological happiness is determined by the unconscious.

The feeling of happiness, pleasure or joy is caused by a chemical reaction, a release of serotonin in the pineal gland deep within the brain. (MNT, 2013). Artificial release of serotonin can be achieved with prescription and recreational drugs, though the rapid release of serotonin depletes chemical supply within the brain. This causes the brain to re-produce the serotonin, a process which actually causes us to feel depressed (Channel 4, 2012).

Psychologists have developed a formula for happiness $[= P + 5E + 3H]$ happiness equals personal characteristics i.e our outlook on life, adaptability and resilience plus existence which includes; health, friendships and financial stability multiplied by five plus our 'higher order' representing our self-esteem, expectations and ambition multiplied by three. (CNN, 2003)

So, how can you consciously achieve happiness? Maybe you could move to Costa Rica, the world's happiest country (happyplanetindex.org, 2014). Gutman (2011) says all we have to do is smile more. While Marks (2010) puts forth that we should connect with people, be active, take notice, keep learning and give to others. Alternatively, Sagmeister (2011) suggests that you should simply do more of the stuff that you like to do and much less of the stuff that you don't like to do. Csikszentmihalyi's (2004) idea of 'flow' could be another route to happiness, which illustrates a continual balance between skill and challenge.

And finally, as Schwartz explains in 'The Paradox of Choice', we have come to expect perfection and when we expect only the best, the best you can ever hope for is that stuff is as good as you expect it to be. And thus, the secret to happiness is low expectations (Schwartz, 2005).

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