

All About Happiness

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ABSTRACT

We all long for Happiness but have we ever thought about what is happiness? How do we feel happy? Does happiness lie in external things, like tasty food, a nice scenic picnic spot, melodious songs and so on... Is Happiness temporary or permanent? How can we achieve happiness? Happiness comes from good things; can it also come from evil things? Questions are many! This paper explores the subject, "Happiness" and brings to you "All about Happiness"

Keywords: *Happiness, Pleasure, Joy, Bliss, Eternal Happiness, Meditation, happy life, Hedonism, Eudaimonism*

Nothing could be more apt than the quote by Daphne du Maurier "Happiness is not a possession to be prized, it is a quality of thought, a state of mind."

Indeed, happiness is a state of mind which makes you feel good. Happiness exudes positive energy and illuminates others with a feel-good feeling. It is contagious and engulfs all who witness and share happiness with others. Smile is a reflex action which happens to you when you see happiness on a person's face. Happiness is the emotion that we all want eternally but it just flutters for some moments and slips away!

Why can't we be eternally happy? Is happiness only a thought? Is happiness only a state of mind? What is happiness and what causes happiness? Do all become happy by the same cause i.e., does happiness have a universal cause? Is the cause of happiness for a person always a good noble factor or to some happiness could come from evil deeds? Can we command happiness and get it manifested as per our will? What good happiness does do to our body and life? How are feel-good thoughts generated in our brain and what goes in the brain during feel-good moments?

The list of questions could be endless!

In this paper, we shall try to understand various facets of 'Happiness' minutely. We shall not only find answers to related questions but also seek ways to prolong happy moments as and when they manifest.

Let us first try to understand what is Happiness.

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What is Happiness?

The other day my Yoga Teacher was giving a lecture on Happiness. He gave examples that we derive happiness from different things i.e., We become happy if we eat our favourite delicious food or watch a movie of our liking or enjoy natural beauty when we visit a picnic spot or smell a beautiful rose or even hear a melodious song. And then he asked a question where did happiness lie? Was it in the delicious dish or in the movie or in the scenic picnic spot or in the beautiful rose or in the melodious song?

What do you think?

If the happiness rested in the delicious food, the more I eat it, the happier I should become and the same holds for our experience with other events that made me happy. But this does not happen- once my stomach is full, the same delicious food creates aversion to it and I am no longer happy eating it and the movies which gave me pleasure do not make me so happy when I view them again, and the same goes for other things which made me happy.

So, the happiness did not lie in those things, those things did not contain the happiness. Then where did the happiness lie?

When I thought deeply, I could answer my yoga teacher. I answered him that happiness is not external to us, it lies in our minds. Happiness is a state of mind. The delicious food, the movie, the picnic spot, the rose and the melodious song were the sources that triggered a feel-good sense in me and created a happy state of mind. But happiness was not in them it was something within me.

My thoughts speeded up on the subject and emerged as follows:

- Happiness is a feel-good state of mind
- Happiness does not lie in external things, it is our internal emotional feeling
- It can get triggered by external things
- It can also be triggered internally through our efforts—for example by Meditation

How does it get triggered?

1. It gets triggered as we experience external things by our physical five senses—Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling.
2. Seeing feel-good things--- nice scenery, a movie or beautiful things makes our minds feel good and we are happy.
3. Hearing music or a good song gives a feel-good feeling and we become happy.
4. Smelling a flower or fragrance of perfume etc. triggers a feel-good state of mind.
5. Tasting good food gives us a feel-good sensation and we reach a happy state of mind
6. Touching also gives a pleasant sensation – say velvet cloth etc. and we reach a happy state of mind.

Happiness alone is not a feel-good state of mind—there are many, for example-Pleasure, Happiness, Joy, and Bliss. All these are feel-good states of mind.

What is the difference between these?

The difference lies only in the intensity and duration of the feel-good state of mind,

- **Pleasure** is a very momentary feel-good feeling---- we hear a song and we like it but soon after, we forget about it. This is pleasure.

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- **Happiness** is more intense and longer—suppose you hear a song and its tune is so haunting that you keep that feel-good feeling for many hours. This is an example of happiness
- **Joy** is still more intense and lasts longer than happiness. You can prolong the feel-good feeling by making your mind slow and live the feel-good feeling for long periods. In the Yoga class, a lady talked about enjoying the things in mornings like watching plants, enjoying tea drinking etc. The feel-good moments were being extended by living each moment in the morning. This is Joy. Meditation makes our mind slow fewer thoughts trouble us and the feel-good feeling remains for many hours with us ---These are Joy
- **Bliss** is an eternal feel-good feeling. This state of mind is not achievable by we the worldly people as we cannot get into the state where we are not influenced by thoughts which keep on coming. Maybe this extreme state is achieved only by Rishis and Saints who get the power to control their minds and remain always in a feel-good state of mind.

Feel-good emotions manifest in our thoughts and emerge as Pleasure, Happiness, Joy or Bliss. These get triggered by external stimuli that provoke our thinking process to manifest feel-good feelings. But could our thoughts not get triggered by things which are not external? Could we not feel good by looking inwardly? Could we not find a way of introspection to generate feel-good feelings?

We all carry sweet memories and when we recall these, we feel good!! We feel happy when we remember happy past moments. We feel good while in meditation. We feel good when we are in pleasant dreams. So, maybe only external things do not trigger a feel-good feeling. We could experience happiness even with internal triggers.

Whether we are experiencing Pleasure only for flickering moments or happiness/ joy for more duration; we can always prolong the experience. It can be done by self-training. Normally when we are in a moment, we are not fully in it, we are thinking several things simultaneously and we live the moment for a particular incident only for a fraction of that moment. We must live the moment fully. i.e., we must get fully engrossed in the subject/event we are experiencing at that moment. We must prevent any other thought from coming and disturbing that moment. Live life moment by moment and take the best out of every moment. By doing this you will find that even though the feel-good moment remained for the same duration but you would have stretched that moment and made the feel-good sensation extend it for more time for you. Slow Down your mind and live the moment fully and your enjoyment will become more intense and elongated. What else does meditation do to our mind, it slows it down and we have a feeling of calmness and the feel-good feeling engulfs us for quite a long time. Same way we can elongate our happy feel-good moments by stretching the moment by living the moment and being in it fully engrossed while in the moment.

Above is my thinking on happiness. I tried to explore how far my thoughts corroborate with other thinkers.

Ancient Thinkers on Happiness

A paper from the magazine, Pursuit of Happiness¹ gives details on what eminent thinkers thought about happiness:

The psychological and philosophical pursuit of happiness began in China, India and Greece nearly 2,500 years ago with Confucius, Buddha, Socrates, and Aristotle.

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Buddha's teaching vide Dharmapada 1-2 / Müller & Maguire, 2002.----All that we are is the result of what we have thought. It is founded on our thoughts. It is made up of our thoughts. If one speaks or acts with pure thought, happiness follows one, like a shadow that never leaves. The second verse (above) of the Dhammapada, the earliest known collection of Buddha's sayings, talks about happiness. So, it's not surprising to discover that Buddhism has a lot to offer on the topic of happiness. Buddha's contemporaries described him as "ever-smiling" and portrayals of Buddha almost always depict him with a smile on his face. But rather than the smile of a self-satisfied, materially rich or celebrated man, Buddha's smile comes from a deep equanimity from within.

Budhha preached four noble truths to his followers. These were:

- *Life is /means Dukkha (mental dysfunction or suffering)*
- *Dukkha arises from a craving*
- *Dukkha can be eliminated*
- *The way to eliminate Dukkha is the Eightfold Path*

Budhha preaches that our thoughts make us feel what we feel and only pure thoughts lead us to eternal happiness. I am very near to this when I say that the source of happiness is hidden in our thoughts and thoughts only bring us a feel-good state of mind that is happiness. The only extension, I find in Buddha's teaching is that only pure thoughts make it possible to be eternally happy. But to achieve pure thoughts one has to be pure like saints and rishis; so my thinking that eternal happiness can be achieved only by rishis corroborates with the ancient teaching of Buddha.

Budhha goes on to say that life is full of miseries (dukkhas) which arise out of cravings (non-fulfilment of cravings causes misery).

We normal people have cravings and when some get satisfied, we have feel-good feeling and become happy. Some cravings do get satiated but all cravings can never be satisfied, because having satiated one craving, another one rises and the cycle goes on. Since all cravings do not get satisfied, the unfinished cravings give rise to Dukkhas. Buddha gives the eightfold path to eliminate dukkha to achieve happiness.

Eightfold path to happiness as per Buddha

- ***Right Understanding***—Instead of running after our cravings we must have the right views about the nature of reality so that we can become free from the vicious cycle of suffering.
- ***Right Thought***—Turn away from the thoughts of craving for things by committing to a lifestyle of self-improvement and ethical conduct.
- ***Right Speech***--- Don't lie, don't gossip, and don't hurt others by words. In this way, consideration and kindness to others bring happiness to others and consequently, ourselves.
- ***Right Action***--- Just as our thoughts influence our actions, our actions can influence our minds and who we become. Right action stems from not harming others, not cheating, not stealing or being dishonest, avoiding sexual misconduct and helping others to live a life of similar values.
- ***Right Livelihood***--- Make a living through a legal and peaceful profession. As such he advises one to avoid livelihoods that deal with
 - 1) Weapons

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- 2) Living things (people and animals)
- 3) meat and butchery and
- 4) intoxicants (e.g., drugs and alcohol).
- **Right Effort**—Make an effort to try to prevent bad thoughts or bad things, and try to get rid of a bad thought or feeling. Make an effort to try to have good thoughts and feelings and try to maintain a good, wholesome state of mind.
- **Right Mindfulness**-- Cultivate the right mindfulness for all aspects of life in order to see things as they are. In a word, mindfulness is about experiencing the moment with an attitude of openness and freshness to all and every experience. Through right mindfulness, one can free oneself from passions and cravings, which so often make us prisoners of past regrets or future preoccupations.
- **Right Concentration**--- Right Concentration is a mental discipline that aims to transform your mind. As the core practice of “meditation,” right concentration is a foundational activity within Buddhist thought and practice.

One aspect that Buddha’s teaching brings to us is that to understand happiness one has to understand dukkhas i.e., miseries. You appreciate light when you have experienced darkness, sweetness becomes meaningful when you have tasted bitterness. Same way you enjoy happiness in a better way once you have tasted sorrow. Cravings once fulfilled give you momentary happiness but when you have conquered the craving so that you never crave for anything, you achieve eternal happiness or *Bliss* as I call it.

To achieve happiness Buddha preaches eight ways to fully conquer our craving and lead a virtuous life which is free from running after craving and we live life only through noble deeds and helping others.

Socrates (469-399 B.C.) had the following thoughts on happiness

*Happiness is what all people desire: since it is always the end (goal) of our activities, it is an **unconditional** good, happiness does not depend on external things, but rather on how those things are used. A wise person will use money in the right way to make his life better; an ignorant person will be wasteful and use money poorly, ending up even worse than before.*

Very true, happiness does not lie in external things but lies in how you use them. The melodious song is there but to feel happy you have to use it i.e., you have to listen to it, the scenic beauty is there at the picnic spot but you derive pleasure from it when you visit and see it. You are compelled to use it because it is your thinking that prompts you to use it; hence, it is your thought that creates/ does not create happiness. My thinking also follows the same dictum.

As per Aristotle, “Happiness depends on ourselves.” More than anybody else, Aristotle enshrines happiness as a central purpose of human life and a goal in itself. He believed that happiness depended on the cultivation of virtue. Aristotle claims that nearly everyone would agree that happiness is the end which meets all these requirements. It is easy enough to see that we desire money, pleasure, and honour only because we believe that these goods will make us happy. It seems that all other goods are a means towards obtaining happiness, while happiness is always an end in itself. He is happy who lives in accordance with complete virtue and is sufficiently equipped with external goods, not for some chance period but throughout a complete life.

Aristotle brings in the aspect of virtue being central to happiness. As per him while happiness is the ultimate aim of life it comes only by leading a virtuous life. Thus, to normal man eternal

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happiness eludes since living a virtuous life is a far-fetched dream for a common man and hence eternal happiness (*Bliss*) manifests only in godly people. My belief tows the same line of argument.

Thomas Aquinas is uncompromising in his view that our true happiness can only be found in the knowledge of God. No other worldly good or pleasure can truly provide us with the ultimate good we seek. Man can only achieve imperfect happiness and it depends on the actualization of one's natural faculties. The highest faculty the human being possesses is Reason, from which it follows that we can achieve happiness in this life in proportion to the level of truth accessible to Reason.

My ideas on happiness seem to resonate with Thomas Aquinas because I had felt that eternal happiness is not possible for ordinary humans but only by Rishis (Godly persons) which is also claimed by Aquinas when he says that true happiness can be found only in the knowledge of God meaning thereby that it is achieved only by saints and is not accessible to normal humans. Furthermore, when he says that happiness is proportional to the level of truth accessible to reason implies that thoughts do play a major role in the manifestation of happiness—the view put forth by me.

Similar views are put forth by an Islamic scholar Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058-1111 A.D.) when he says:

"He who knows himself is truly happy." Self-knowledge consists in realizing that we have a heart or spirit which is perfect, but which has been covered with dust by the accumulation of passions derived from the body and its animal nature. The essence of oneself is likened to a perfect mirror which if polished would reveal one's true divine nature. The key to this polishing is the elimination of selfish desires and the adoption of a contrary desire to do what is right in all aspects of one's life. As he writes, "Moral discipline aims to purify the heart from the rust of passion and resentment till, like a clear mirror, it reflects the light of God."

Such a task is not easy, thus it would seem that genuine happiness is not a state most people can attain. Indeed, al-Ghazali emphasizes that only a few people have attained this supreme happiness, which is the ecstasy of union with the divine. These people are the prophets, which appear in all times and places, as messengers to remind mankind of their true purpose and their ultimate goal. The prophets are those who have succeeded in cleansing their inner mirrors of all the rust and dirt accumulated by bodily desires and comparisons with others. As a result, they can see in their waking moments what other people only see haphazardly in their dreams, and they receive an insight into the nature of things through an immediate flash of intuition rather than through laborious learning.

Al Ghazali also says that genuine happiness is beyond reach for common people. For Genuine happiness, one has to know one's real self which is a mirror. Mostly for common people this mirror is not clean and prevents them from seeing their real self and hence they cannot experience genuine happiness. Only rishis who have achieved the clean mirror of self can experience genuine happiness. Again, my thoughts were in line with the above.

Discussions on ancient thoughts on Happiness would not be complete without discussing three ancient theories on Happiness

Ancient theories on Happiness

Hedonism

Perhaps the earliest written record of hedonism comes from the Cārvāka, an Indian philosophical tradition based on the Barhaspatya sutras. The Cārvāka persisted for two thousand years (from about 600 B.C.E.). Most notably, the Cārvāka advocated scepticism and Hedonistic Egoism – that the right action is the one that brings the actor the most net pleasure. The Cārvāka acknowledged that some pain often accompanied, or was later caused by, sensual pleasure, but that pleasure was worth it.

The Cyrenaics, founded by Aristippus (c. 435-356 B.C.E.), were also sceptics and Hedonistic Egoists. Although the paucity of original texts makes it difficult to confidently state all of the justifications for the Cyrenaics' positions, their overall stance is clear enough. The Cyrenaics believed pleasure was the ultimate good and everyone should pursue all immediate pleasures for themselves. They considered bodily pleasures better than mental pleasures, presumably because they were more vivid or trustworthy. The Cyrenaics also recommended pursuing immediate pleasures and avoiding immediate pains with scant or no regard for future consequences. Their reasoning for this is even less clear, but is most plausibly linked to their sceptical views – perhaps that what we can be most sure of in this uncertain existence is our current bodily pleasures. (Source: <https://iep.utm.edu/hedonism/#H2>)

Kiki Birk² discusses hedonism as follows:

According to hedonism, happiness is simply the experience of pleasure. A happy person has a lot more pleasure than displeasure (pain) in his/her life. To be happy, then, is just to feel good. In other words, there's no difference between *being* happy and *feeling* happy.

Famous hedonists include the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus and the modern English philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. These philosophers all took happiness to include intellectual pleasures (such as reading a book) in addition to physical pleasures (such as having sex).

A different tone is given to happiness in Eudaimonism where it is not instant pleasure but has a deeper meaning

Eudaimonism

Tim Lake³ explains ***Eudaimonism***:

Eudaimonia is a Greek word that doesn't have a direct translation in English. Sometimes it is translated simply as happiness, but this can be misleading and a closer translation would be "flourishing" or perhaps "well-being". Flourishing is best understood by thinking about plants. When a plant has good soil, enough sunlight, and water, it is full of life, grows stronger, and reaches its full potential. When these conditions are not met, the plant's growth is stunted.

It is easy to see what eudaimonia is for a plant, but for a person, it is a little more complicated. It can't just come down to the simple everyday things that we think we want or need to do – catch the bus, earn a living, eat lunch, physical intimacy – as all of these are temporary and don't give life much substantial meaning. So, Aristotle comes to the same conclusion as Socrates: living a virtuous life guided by reason is what leads to eudaimonia.

The kind of happiness that comes from a state of eudaimonia is closer to contentment and it is quite distinct from pleasure. In his philosophy, Aristotle doesn't deny that pleasure is important; in fact, he says that if we aren't getting pleasure from life, we can't flourish. However, he says that pleasure is the result of living well, and can't itself be a purpose.

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Aristotle concludes that eudaimonia is reached by having an active life that develops our natural capacities and talents as specific individuals, but also as humans, to their fullest. To be the best human is to be the most virtuous. To become virtuous a person has to use reason to recognize, learn and apply the virtues.

Thus, lasting happiness is the result of cultivating the virtues—both moral and intellectual—such as wisdom, courage, temperance, and patience. A happy person must be sufficiently virtuous. To be happy, then, is to cultivate excellence and to flourish as a result.

The view held by Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics means that only virtuous people could be happy. But is it really true?

An important part of being virtuous is being morally good.

But are immoral people *always* unhappy? Arguably not. Many bad people seem happy in spite of—or even because of—their unsavoury actions. And a similar point can be made about intellectual virtue: unwise or irrational people aren't always unhappy, either.

Exploring the above two theories further, let us probe deeply and understand the basic difference between the two theories and then arrive at their relevance during current times.

Comparison between Hedonism vs Eudaimonism

Anna Katharina Schaffner⁴ compares the two theories:

The debate about eudaimonic vs. hedonic well-being usually contrasts self-fulfilment with maximizing pleasure; value- and virtue-oriented living with prioritizing enjoyable experiences; and designing for long-term flourishing vs. seeking short-term gratification. But the matter is more complex than that.

Eudaimonic	Hedonic
Self-fulfillment	Maximizing pleasure
Virtue-orientated living	Prioritize enjoyable experiences
Long-term flourishing	Short-term gratification

If we look at Maslow's theory on the hierarchy of needs i.e., physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization; maybe we could relate Hedonic happiness only to the first three needs but Eudaimonic happiness may relate to esteem and self-actualization. Thus, the hedonic aspect of happiness is more related to normal humans and is achievable by them but to achieve Eudaimonic happiness one has to rise to the level of saints.

Apart from the above, there is a middle path chosen by the Epicurean Theory of Happiness, let us discuss it now

Epicurean Theory of Happiness

Jodi Clarke⁵ gives details,

“Epicurus, a Greek philosopher (341BC to 270BC) believed that happiness comes from moderation, simplicity, friendship, and community. In simple terms, it is an approach to life that stresses finding happiness through living simply.

Epicureanism suggests finding joy in life's simple pleasures. This includes finding a sense of community and practising moderation, virtue, and temperance. In modern life, this translates to minimalism, living modestly, saving money, reframing negative thoughts, and focusing on positivity.

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The happiness can be derived from

- *Abstaining from bodily desires*
- *Community*
- *Friendship*
- *Knowledge*
- *Living a virtuous life*
- *Living a temperate life*
- *Moderation in all things*

Epicurean thoughts are relevant in modern times. If we limit our desires and live with minimum means and live simple life we can attain happiness. What he suggested can be termed as Minimalism in modern times. Minimalism suggests that by living with less, we can experience greater peace and freedom.

Having glanced at the thoughts on the happiness of ancient philosophers, let us now turn to modern thinkers:

Modern thoughts on happiness

Many people associate happiness differently. Some people look at happiness on external factors like family or money and for some, it is an internal state. The ancient notion of happiness was concerned with the transformation that virtue effects upon one's desires but the modern notion of happiness consists in the fulfillment of an individual's desires.

Pursuit of happiness¹ and a paper in Play for Thoughts⁶ mention John Locke, a philosopher of the 18th century who talks about happiness in the following manner:

"Far from simply equating "happiness" with "pleasure," "property," or the satisfaction of desire, Locke distinguishes between "imaginary" happiness and "true happiness." Thus, in the passage where he coins the phrase "pursuit of happiness," Locke writes: "The necessity of pursuing happiness [is] the foundation of liberty. As therefore the highest perfection of intellectual nature lies in a careful and constant pursuit of true and solid happiness; so the care of ourselves, that we mistake not imaginary for real happiness, is the necessary foundation of our liberty. The stronger ties we have to an unalterable pursuit of happiness in general, which is our greatest good, and which, as such, our desires always follow, the more are we free from any necessary determination of our will to any particular action. Locke indicates that the pursuit of happiness is the foundation of liberty since it frees us from attachment to any particular desire we might have at a given moment. So, for example, although my body might present me with a strong urge to indulge in that chocolate brownie, my reason is that ultimately the brownie is not in my best interest. Why not? Because it will not lead to my "true and solid" happiness which indicates the overall quality or satisfaction with life."

Locke links liberty to happiness and tries to indicate that freeing ourselves from all urges may lead to true happiness. This view seems to have inspiration from Buddha who preaches that happiness will come by winning over our urges of craving for things.

The same paper mentions the views of William James, a great thinker from the nineteenth century:

"According to James, happiness is created as a result of our being active participants in the game of life. Instead of brooding on the suffering and evils of existence, we are to readjust our attitudes and act as if life does have an ultimate meaning, even though this can never be proved by the rational mind. As James writes, "Believe that life is worth living, and your very belief will help create the fact."

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William James puts forth the view that if you believe that life is worth living and you actively participate in life you will be happy. Don't digress thoughts to suffering and evils, just be content with your life and this act will keep you happy.

Modern contemporary thinker Martin Seligman concludes that happiness has three dimensions that can be cultivated: the Pleasant Life, the Good Life, and the Meaningful Life.

*A **pleasant Life** is realized if we learn to savour and appreciate such basic pleasures as companionship, the natural environment, and our bodily needs. We can remain pleasantly stuck at this stage or we can go on to experience the **Good Life**, which is achieved through discovering our unique virtues and strengths and employing them creatively to enhance our lives. According to modern theories of self-esteem, life is only genuinely satisfying if we discover value within ourselves. Yet one of the best ways of discovering this value is by nourishing our unique strengths in contributing to the happiness of our fellow humans. Consequently, the final stage is the **Meaningful Life**, in which we find a deep sense of fulfilment by employing our unique strengths for a purpose greater than ourselves.*

He seems to believe that temporary happiness can be derived from worldly things. Still, a higher level of happiness will come only by contributing to the happiness of other human beings where we give precedence to others over ourselves.

We had a very elaborate discussion on understanding what is happiness, how it manifests and how can we follow the path to reach eternal happiness. If we summarise, we observe that happiness is a state of mind and is in our thoughts; this resonates well with what Buddha and Socrates say.

Buddha preaches that our thoughts make us what we are and only pure thoughts lead us to happiness. I am very near to this when I say that the source of happiness is hidden in our thoughts which brings us to a feel-good state of mind which is happiness.

As per Socrates, happiness does not lie in external things but lies in how you use them. It is your thinking that results in their usage and hence it is your thought which creates/ does not create happiness. My belief is again in line with what Socrates had said long back in history.

Buddha emphasizes that craving is the course of misery and to experience the importance of happiness one has to experience misery. It is like saying that you will experience light only if you have experienced darkness. He gave an eightfold path leading to happiness. The path is towards leading a virtuous life as is led by saints and these paths only will lead us to an eternal blissful state of mind and we shall get real happiness. Aristotle also brings in the aspect of virtue being central to happiness. As per him while happiness is the ultimate aim of life it comes only by leading a virtuous life. Similar thoughts are propounded by Thomas Aquinas who says that true happiness can be found only in the knowledge of God meaning thereby that it is achieved only by saints and is not accessible to normal humans.

Similar are the views of Al Ghazali who goes on to say that genuine happiness is beyond reach for common people. For genuine happiness, one has to know one's real self which is a mirror which should be free of dust. Mostly for common people this mirror is not clean and prevents them from seeing their real self and hence they cannot experience genuine happiness. Only rishis who have achieved the clean mirror of self can experience genuine happiness.

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As can be recalled I had also talked about an eternal happy blissful state of mind which is free from all thoughts and this is not possible to be achieved by ordinary human beings; only saints can achieve it.

Locke links liberty to happiness and tries to indicate that freeing ourselves from all urges may lead to true happiness. This is similar to Buddha's teaching which says freeing ourselves from cravings will lead to happiness.

William James puts forth the view that if you believe that life is worth living and you actively participate in life you will be happy. Don't digress thoughts to suffering and evils, just be content with your life and this act will keep you happy.

Martin Seligman concludes that happiness has three dimensions that can be cultivated: the Pleasant Life, the Good Life, and the Meaningful Life. He seems to believe that temporary happiness can be derived from worldly things. Still, a higher level of happiness will come only by contributing to the happiness of other human beings where we give precedence to others over ourselves.

To cut the story short, we can say that short-term happiness can be achieved by normal human beings but eternal happiness is possible only through a path which is usually followed by godly saints and is beyond the reach of common people.

As per my thoughts we, the common people could at best reach the pleasure or happy or joyous state of mind which are in the increasing order of intensity and duration of feel-good feeling but cannot reach the eternal happy state of mind which is a blissful state of mind-- Eudaimonic state which is achievable by only saints and rishis.

So, this is all about what is happiness and how can we achieve it.

Let us now explore how a happy state of mind impacts our body and brain.

Ilhamul Azam⁷ feels that *Happiness* is a state when the human body is flooded with the 'happiness' hormone, serotonin. When we are okay with the way things are, the calm and quiet contentment is happiness. According to what Mo Gawdat, author of 'Solve for Happy', said in the Deep Dive podcast, "Being happier is a choice, absolute happiness is not. Everyone cannot be happy always, they can be miserable."

Happiness and the brain

Ilhamul Azam⁷ says,

The Amygdala [part of the brain] is the human problem-scanning machine. This makes us go over all the negative consequences we can go through, drowning us with negative thoughts, and finding flaws even in perfect situations. That is what evolution has done to the brain.

Emotions such as joy, pleasure, excitement, elation and ego are dopamine-driven. Some of them are positive feelings but not genuine happiness.

Dopamine is an excitatory hormone which tells us to do more. It feels really good to have all that rush of it in your body. But, our brain keeps setting the baseline for dopamine higher and looks for more and more – like an addiction.

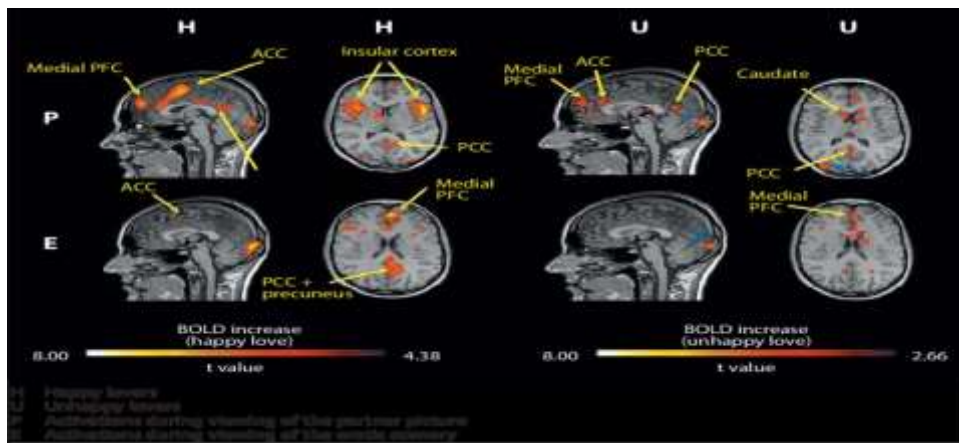
Dopamine depletion is really quick. Whenever you cannot supply the demand, you are thrown into misery. And every time it gets harder to meet the demand. The more dependent you

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become on dopamine, the more deprived you get of serotonin- the calmer hormone- the actual happiness hormone.

While Azam briefs about activities in the brain during happiness, Shintaro Funahashi⁸ pinpoints brain areas which get activated during a happy state of mind. As per him

“Happiness is a kind of subjective feeling of positive emotions. Since the psychological process of reward is closely linked to pleasure, studies to elucidate the brain mechanisms of happiness have focused on the neural circuitry that processes reward information. Brain imaging studies have revealed that the orbitofrontal cortex, cingulate cortex, medial prefrontal cortex, insula, nucleus accumbens, ventral pallidum, substantia nigra, and ventral tegmental area are the key areas related to happiness.



(Figure showing areas of the brain impacted in Happy (H state) and Unhappy (U state))

Having explored brain activity, let us now see how our body gets impacted when we are in a happy state of mind.

Impact of Happiness on Our Body

When we are happy our appearance is at its best, glowing teeth and stretched lips exude a beautiful smile beauty of which is enhanced with redness in our cheeks and glow in our eyes. Each pore of our body resonates with a feel-good sensation when we are happy. You can have this feel in the picture given below



Happiness glows our whole body and our appearance is at its best at happy moments

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Research into true happiness, carried out by Harvard University over 75 years, concluded that the people we surround ourselves with, as well as our acceptance into society, can have a positive effect on our physical and mental health and help us live longer. Happiness hormones that the body is capable of producing by itself include: dopamine, which makes us feel good; serotonin, which reduces depression; and endorphins, which make us happy and thus help to reduce physical pain.

(<https://www.samitivejhospitals.com/article/detail/happiness-hormones>)

A paper posted in General Health⁹ brings out the impact of a happy mood on the body:

When you feel energized from a good mood and go for a walk or to the gym, this releases more feel-good chemicals (dopamine, serotonin, endorphins, and oxytocin) in your body. More feel-good chemicals mean more energy, so the cycle continues.

How do positive mindsets actually work in the body? Well, there are a few components. The feeling of joy comes from activity in the nervous system, specifically in our neurotransmitters. These transmitters carry chemicals throughout our bodies, including those feel-good chemicals mentioned in the previous paragraph, AKA “joy” chemicals. When you have an abundance of these chemicals in your system, your physical health improves. Better sleep, digestion, weight loss and a stronger immune system are some of the benefits of a joyful mood.

Another bodily reaction to joy takes place in the circulatory system (which sometimes also responds to negative emotions). When you feel happy, your circulatory system might respond by flushing your cheeks, raising your body temperature, or creating the feeling of “butterflies” in your stomach. While these reactions may also occur during moments of anxiety, keep in mind that they can be a good sign as well!

Guess what else? The part of your nervous system you don’t control (the autonomic nervous system), might react. It may mean quickened (or slowed, if you’re experiencing a feeling of calm) breathing, dilation of the pupils or sweating are potential side effects of a boosted mood. The reaction in your autonomic nervous system can even affect your organs since it controls the smooth muscles in your body (which your organs are lined with). Your digestive tract might feel the effects of a joyful mood, which can cause an increase or decrease in appetite. You may also notice that you’re digesting food faster than normal, another unique effect of the autonomic nervous system.

Funny enough, laughter can also have some immediate benefits on your overall health. When you laugh out loud, you instantly calm your cardiovascular system and release endorphins into your nervous system. If you’re a knee-slapping kind of laughter, the movements you make during a giggle fit also produce calm feelings and reduce stress. Laughter increases your heart rate, which sends blood and oxygen to the brain, leading to a sense of clarity and calmness. Even the simple act of smiling tells the body that it’s okay to relax (you don’t even have to mean it!) Faking a smile does the trick as far as your nervous system is concerned.

Our body reacts well to a happy mood and body organs tend to improve. Our health gets a boost with happiness.

Having explored the impact of happiness on our body and brain, we now approach the end of this paper. We have seen that even though feel-good thoughts bring temporary happiness but thoughts lead us to cravings which deprive us of happiness. Eternal happiness can only be attained if we can reach a thoughtless state and live virtuous, noble lives as led by Rishis. The

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thoughts are the main factors that deviate us from happiness; and eternal happiness is possible only if we can make the mind thoughtless which is possible only to rishis and saints.

But is happiness synonymous only with noble work? Do people derive happiness only from good things? Happiness, as we know, gets triggered by good external things, e.g., good food, good music, good scenic beauty of nature and so on...

But some people derive happiness and pleasure not from good things but from evil acts.

Happiness for some gets triggered by evil acts

As discussed in the paper, happiness lies in thoughts and for normal human beings, good thoughts trigger happiness. But all humans are not the same, some people get sadistic pleasures from evil deeds. As long as the act causes happiness, its source seems arbitrary and irrelevant. Take for example a sadist. The pleasure they experience can be at the direct suffering of another inflicted by them. But a sadist surely doesn't take all their pleasure from actions of this nature, most people have many sources of pleasure in their lives. So, for a sadistic individual, a 'kind and decent' act may result in equal or lesser pleasure than that of an evil one.

Abhirup Mishra¹⁰ is also of the view that happiness does not always manifest to good-doers; it can be achieved even by morally bad people because happiness is totally and utterly based on perception. A drug dealer gains happiness by successfully undergoing a huge deal, knowing damn well that these drugs of his would most probably ruin *innocent* and *imbecile teenagers*' lives. A corrupt politician achieves happiness by living a lavish lifestyle, going around in expensive cars and being a part of extravagant parties even at the cost of hundreds of honest taxpayers' money. A hitman receives happiness after earning easy money despite clearly knowing the fact that he took the life of an innocent human being.

Pablo Escobar, the infamous drug kingpin, was responsible for the deaths of around *Four Thousand* policemen, juries and innocent civilians. Yet, he lived on to lead a luxurious life, had moments with his family, possessed every materialistic thing in the world and was ultimately happy. He was happy, even after putting thousands of lives through ruin. The families of the dead, the civilians who had to face the terror of the attacks, and the witnesses of the horrors; their lives never remained the same. Yet, a sick murderer like him is considered a 'legend' by some imbeciles.

We approach the end of the paper with the above discussions that add another dimension to the understanding of happiness that happiness is a matter of perception and is not dependent on virtuous or bad acts.

But this perceptual happiness is temporary; eternal happiness is independent of perception and can be achieved only by becoming nearly thoughtless which is possible only through noble and virtuous life led by rishis and saints.

I believe that we, the common people, have to be contented with temporary happiness and this can come only if we live life moment by moment by stretching the moment to its limit by really being in it and enjoying it. Mother Teresa's words echo in my mind and I practice these in my life. She said, "Be Happy in the Moment, that's enough. Each moment is all we need, no more! This is the Place you can always find ***Happiness***"

(<https://images.app.goo.gl/23yZz7g8b85i7YE49>)

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