

Happiness

In this essay, I wish to say some things about happiness, and how to achieve it, that I have found to be important. What follows is the essence of what some of the great philosophers have said about ultimate values, human rights, virtue, and free will, all of which have to do with experiencing happiness. I do not intend this essay to be an exhaustive survey of the subject, but instead, my own selections from the great writers of western civilization. As will be seen, I rely heavily on Plato, Aristotle, and St. Thomas Aquinas.

I will begin this essay by asserting that happiness is Man's ultimate goal, his purpose for every action. This foundation begins with a discussion of values, specifically, those that we refer to as Transcendental Values, meaning those that are universal, eternal, or ideal. The discussion of the Highest Good leads naturally into an exploration of human rights. The best way to secure values and rights is by conforming one's life to the classical virtues, a discussion of which naturally follows. Once informed about the role of virtue in the good life, each of us then faces the question of how we will use our free will to pursue happiness.

Values

The Transcendental Values are Truth, Beauty, and Goodness. The triad of Truth, Beauty, and Goodness emerged over the centuries of western thought, though they are not found in exactly that form in the earliest reference, which Plato puts into the mouth of Socrates in the *Philebus* (65a): "Well, then, if we cannot capture the good in *one* form, we will have to take hold of it in a conjunction of three: beauty, proportion and truth. Let us affirm that these should by right be treated as a unity and be held responsible for what is in the mixture, for goodness is what makes the mixture good in itself." I propose that an individual's value does not come from wealth, physical appearance, or achievement, but from the extent to which these Universal Values are expressed in his or her soul. This most commonly translates as: Honesty, Integrity, and Compassion.

Truth. Truth is correspondence between words (thought, spoken, or written) and reality. To speak the truth, our words must correspond to our thoughts, in particular those thoughts about which we are convinced and certain. Gandhi taught that God is Truth, and Truth is God. Scott Peck, M.D., agrees with Gandhi and extends his idea to say that lying is evil, and evil is lying. Peck's words echo those of Plato, who opined, "False words are not only evil in themselves; they infect the soul with evil." Aristotle observes that the wandering, undisciplined imagination can mislead the mind into error and falsehood. Truth is the very foundation of virtue, and thus, happiness.

Beauty. Beauty requires (1) integrity or unity, (2) proportion or harmony, and (3) clarity. While the subject matter of truth is thought and logic, and that of goodness is action and morality, beauty deals with pleasure, enjoyment, and aesthetics. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," -- that is all Ye know on earth, and all Ye need to

know.” (Keats) Beauty is a quality of things that are good as objects of contemplation and love. Contemplation is union with its object through desire and love. We direct our desire toward the acquisition and possession of the Good; love, with admiration and undiluted generosity, wishes only the well-being of the beloved. We find moral or spiritual beauty in noble individuals of virtuous character (heroes and heroines).

Goodness. Goodness is the measure or degree of perfection of an object, action, idea, or sentiment. "We always act with a view to some good. The good is the object that all pursue, and for the sake of which they always act" (Plato, Republic, I, iv). Absolute goodness is goodness entirely apart from humanity, in which we judge things by their nature alone. Absolute goodness is therefore objective (independent of human consent) rather than subjective (solely the expression of human opinion or judgment). Moral goodness is the relation in which a thing stands to human need, desire, or reason, which it may be good for someone to pursue, such as virtue, knowledge, or compassion. The Summum Bonum or Highest Good is the sum of all good things which, when possessed, leaves nothing to be desired. Classical philosophers, including Augustine and Aquinas, declare that the Highest Good is happiness. Happiness is the supreme and ultimate object of human endeavor. According to Plato, the highest happiness is not pleasure, nor wealth, nor knowledge, nor power, but consists of the intimate knowledge of, and enthusiastic love for, God. He taught that happiness depends upon the possession of this moral beauty and goodness, which importantly encompasses compassion as well.

Rights

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" (Jefferson).

Life. Human Life is sacred. Humans are unique among the living in their possession and exercise of reason and free will. Immanuel Kant bases his Practical Imperative upon just this conviction: "Wherever we encounter humanity, whether in ourselves or in others, we must treat that very humanity itself as sacred: as an end in itself, and never as means to an end; as a person, and never as an object to be used for the purposes of oneself." Because every human life is sacred, no one can morally use another person for his or her own purposes, nor allow another to exploit oneself. Any act that violates the rights or sacredness of oneself or another is immoral. The use or threat of physical force is legitimate only in defense of one's life, liberty, or property from the violence of another. The initiation of physical force is immoral in every case (Rand).

Liberty. According to Thomas Hobbes, the natural right of every person is "the liberty each man has to use his own power . . . for the preservation of his own nature, that is to say, of his own life . . . and consequently of doing anything which in

his own judgment and reason he shall conceive to be the aptest means thereunto." John Locke distinguishes natural and civil liberty: *Natural* liberty consists in being "free from any superior power on earth" or not being "under the will or legislative authority of man." On the other hand, *civil* liberty consists in being "under no legislative power but that established by consent." Civil liberty for Locke is a freedom for the individual to follow his or her own will in anything not prohibited by the law of the State. Kant more simply states that liberty is "independence from the compulsory will of another." Augustine and Aquinas agree that the virtuous individual enjoys moral and spiritual liberty because for him, reason has triumphed over the passions. According to Baruch Spinoza, when a person is governed by passions or feelings, that one is in "bondage, for a man under their control is not his own master, but is mastered by fortune, in whose power he is, so that he is often forced to follow the worse, though he sees the better before him." On the other hand, the one governed by Reason possesses liberty, because that one "does the will of no one but himself, and does those things only which he knows are of greatest importance in life, and which he therefore desires above all things." J. S. Mill proclaims, "The only freedom which deserves the name is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it, for in proportion to the development of his individuality, each person becomes more valuable to himself, and is therefore capable of being more valuable to others."

Happiness. "Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence," says Aristotle. "Man wishes to be happy, and only wishes to be happy, and cannot wish not to be so"(Paschal). Happiness is "an agreeable feeling or condition of the soul arising from good fortune or propitious happening of any kind; contentment; joyful satisfaction" according to Mr. Webster. Aristotle makes **eudaimonia** (happiness, flourishing, or literally, "good spiritedness") the highest good and ultimate end of human endeavor. He is famously quoted as having said, "Happiness is the highest good, being **a realization and perfect practice of virtue.**" "Happiness is a long-lasting, enduring enjoyment of life; it is being in love with living. It is your reward for achieving a good character and personal, rational, values in life Once you learn to have confidence in your own mind, and once you discover the virtues that make it possible for you to achieve your values that make your life worth living, then you will experience the result – an earned pride and a genuine self-esteem. And of course, happiness." (Ellen Kenner, Ph.D., Web Page) For the Stoics, as represented by Seneca, **virtue is entirely sufficient for happiness**; not that it renders one insensible to pain, but because of it one rises superior to pain. If you want to experience happiness, commit to a lifetime of virtue.

Virtues

The simplest definition of virtue is Aquinas' "good habit." More technically, an action conforming to morality is a virtuous action. Virtue is the conformity of the will to morality as discerned by practical reason or conscience. For the classical philosophers, virtue relates to happiness as the means to that very end. They enable a person to lead a good life and achieve happiness. The ancient conception of virtue extends to mind as well as to character, to thinking, knowledge, and reasoning as well as desire, emotion, and action. In the Republic, Plato states, "Virtue is the health and beauty and well-being of the soul, while vice is its disease, weakness, and deformity." Also according to Aquinas, happiness "is the true reward for which the virtuous work, for if they worked for honor, it would no longer be virtue, but ambition." Spinoza proposes that, "To act in conformity with virtue is to act according to the guidance of reason, and every effort that we make through reason is an effort to understand, and therefore the highest good of those who follow after virtue is to know God . . . The good that everyone who follows after virtue seeks for himself, he will desire for others, and his desire on their behalf will be greater in proportion as he has greater knowledge of God." Elsewhere, Spinoza writes, "Happiness does not follow virtue, rather it **is** virtue." J. S. Mill adds, "The multiplication of happiness is, according to the utilitarian ethics, the object of virtue." "Because the moral virtues . . . direct our desires, determine our choices, and govern our actions in accordance with reason's discrimination between real and apparent goods, the exercise of these habits results in happiness or living well" (M. Adler).

The repeated exercise of virtue becomes not only habitual, but also enters one's character, enhancing and improving it. Likewise, the repeated indulgence in vice (the opposite of virtue) becomes habitual, and enters one's character, rendering it pathetically enslaved to base passions. The clamor of the passions (feelings) then deafens one's moral sense, the compelling energy of the passions (feelings) determines one's actions, one's independent self-mastery is lost, and one's freedom is limited to a choice among contending masters and forms of obedience. A virtuous person is one with whom the voluntary suppression of unbridled feelings and immoral passions is habitual. Under the law of habit, which states that through repetition our physical as well as mental faculties acquire dexterity and strength, the moral desires of the virtuous person prevail more and more uniformly. Under the same conditions, the vices, denied the nourishment of gratification, become weaker and eventually atrophy. Virtue indicates the subjection of craving immoral desires. Such virtuous refinement secures peace, harmony, and the dignity of moral excellence. In conquering one's passions, one becomes truly free. However, until virtue is fully perfected, debatable whether possible in this life, there is continual strife between "the lusts of the flesh" and one's higher reasoning and conscience.

Courage. One meaning of courage is fearlessness, the capacity to do what we must as if there were no fear of pain, injury, or death. This is the courage of action, the sort of courage that manifests as physical strength, feats of endurance, and of fortitude. Fortitude is a reservoir of moral and spiritual strength to sustain action when flesh and blood can carry on no further. Aquinas adds that the courageous "face danger on account of the good of virtue, which is the abiding object of their will, however great the danger may be." In contrast to the courage of action, there is the courage of the mind: steeling the will, reinforcing its resolutions, and turning the mind relentlessly toward reason, toward seeking and facing the truth. The ability to face, without flinching, the hard questions reality can pose constitutes the temper of a courageous mind. The courage of the mind is the ability to stand alone in the face of opposing opinion, when one's own convictions have the strength of reason, even when that opposition turns to unpopularity, ostracism, embarrassment, or other social or physical injury. Aquinas defines fortitude (a synonym of courage) as "a disposition whereby the soul is strengthened for that which is in accord with reason, against any assaults of the passions or the toil involved in any work to be done." Fortitude is the steady purpose of mind that enables a person to undergo pain, peril, or danger when judged the right thing to do.

Justice. Sometimes the first principle of justice is stated, simply and elegantly, "Seek good; avoid evil." A slight expansion gives "Do good to others, injure no one, and render unto others what is their due." Aristotle says, "The just is the lawful and fair," and "We call those acts just that tend to produce and preserve happiness and its lawful components for the political society." Therefore, justice is the virtue that promotes fairness, the common good, and the concern of one individual for the rights and well-being of others. As discussed in the section on life, justice serves the good of each person involved; injustice favors one at the expense of others. Again, Aristotle, "Justice, alone of the virtues, is thought to be 'another's good,' because it is related to our neighbor. Justice alone, of all the virtues, implies the notion of duty." Fair dealing in the exchange of goods, determined by objective relations of equality, is the substance of justice as a virtue. It embraces all the moral virtues as far as they direct their actions to the good of others. For Aquinas, justice is submission of the body to the mind, of the mind to reason, and of reason to God.

Temperance. Aquinas defines temperance as "a disposition of the soul, moderating any passions or acts, to keep them within bounds." Socrates persuades Calicles that "instead of the intemperate and unsatisfied life, one should choose that which is orderly and sufficient and has a due provision for daily needs." The intemperate person, he says, is like "a vessel full of holes, because it can never be satisfied." The temperate individual is able to satisfy his or her desires, but the intemperate, of unlimited desire, can never pause in his or her search for more and more pleasure, and never finds happiness. When reason does not regulate desire for bodily pleasures and delights, Aristotle tells us that such desire "will go to great

lengths, for in an irrational being the desire for pleasure is insatiable even if it tries every source of gratification," and, "The appetite in a temperate man should harmonize with reason." Temperance teaches us to avoid excess and to avoid the development of any licentious or vicious habit. Emphasis is due, in any discussion of temperance, that the meaning of the virtue is for moderation and decidedly not abstinence. Unrestricted indulgence in food, sex, alcohol, spending, possessions, ambition, fame, power, laziness, or any other passion will prove to be its own punishment. However, the virtue of temperance is about moderately partaking in such pleasures, not the complete avoidance of them. Some passions and behaviors, however, are so destructive to the life, liberty, and happiness of oneself and others that we must exclude them outright, such as greed, envy, theft, murderous rage, dishonesty, illicit drugs, and manipulation or exploitation of others. (This is not a complete list.)

Prudence. Good judgment comes from experience, and experience comes from bad judgment. While overstated, this maxim points to the meaning of prudence. For Aristotle, prudence is "practical wisdom": "Such wisdom is concerned not only with universals but with particulars, which become familiar from experience [rather than instruction]." The prudent individual knows how to deliberate or calculate well about how he ought to do things. Prudence is skill of mind in choosing among alternative courses of action, but it does not require as much rational power as memory and imagination, in order to project past experience into the future. As justice seems primarily to be a virtue that characterizes one's duty to others, we can view prudence as duty to oneself, in that prudence directs the choices necessary in the pursuit and achievement of happiness. Yet Aristotle states that, "It is impossible to be practically wise without being good. Virtue makes us aim at the right goal, and practical wisdom makes us take the right means," which is similar to a thought of Aquinas, "One cannot have prudence unless one has the moral virtues, since prudence is right reason about things to be done, to which end man is rightly disposed by moral virtue." Prudence teaches us to regulate our lives and actions according to the dictates of reason.

Wisdom. Aristotle distinguishes between prudence, or practical wisdom, and philosophical or speculative wisdom, and philosophical wisdom is the highest form of knowledge: "The end of theoretical knowledge is Truth, while that of practical knowledge is action." Tolstoy writes in *War and Peace* that the highest wisdom "is but one science – the science of the whole – the science explaining the whole creation and man's place in it. To receive that science it is necessary to purify and to renew one's inner self. To attain this end, we have the light called conscience that God has implanted in our souls." Wisdom unites knowledge and action, as well as knowledge and understanding. The pursuit of wisdom is a pursuit of discerning good from evil. Aristotle refers to both types of wisdom when he says, "Each one has just so much happiness as he has of virtue and wisdom, and of virtuous and wise action." In the

opening pages of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle identifies wisdom with the supreme philosophical science – the science that investigates first principles and causes. Thus, he also identifies it with theology, for, as he says, "God is thought to be among the causes of all things and to be a first principle." It is "the most desirable [science] on its own account and for the sake of knowing. It alone exists for its own sake." The Tanach (Hebrew Scriptures) and the Christian Testament speak of reverential awe of God as the beginning of wisdom, and that wisdom comes to humanity not through efforts at learning or discovery, but only as a divine gift.

Dignity. The word dignity derives from the Latin *dignus*, worthy. The American Heritage Dictionary gives us "The quality or state of being worthy of esteem or respect," "Inherent nobility and worth: the dignity of honest labor," and "Poise and self-respect. Stateliness and formality in manner and appearance." Dignity (positive self-regard) is the reward of following an inner disposition of the will to do what Reason judges to be right in the particular case. To maintain one's self-respect one must obey a standard of conduct set for oneself. While duty rests upon a set of laws applicable to all, dignity begins with self-consciousness of virtue in the individual alone. It differs from the confusing term "pride," for while pride can also reflect a sense of confidence in one's intrinsic worth or achievements, more often it implies arrogance, clearly a vice in any system of ethics. Dignity avoids the extremes of hubris and self-deprecation. The dignified individual neither underestimates his own worth nor overestimates himself, seeking recognition out of proportion to his abilities.

Modesty. Modesty is the counterpart to Dignity – when one is confident in one's own intrinsic worth, there is no need to seek fame, glory, or undue attention. The American Heritage Dictionary tells us that modesty is "Reserve or propriety in speech, dress, or behavior, lack of pretentiousness, and simplicity." Mr. Webster speaks of "that lowly temper which accompanies a moderate estimate of one's own worth and importance; absence of self-assertion, arrogance, and presumption; humility respecting one's own merit." T. H. Huxley reminds us, "Thoughtfulness for others, generosity, modesty, and self-respect, are the qualities that make a real gentleman, or lady, as distinguished from the veneered article that commonly goes by that name."

Love. One dictionary defines love as "goodwill in action." My own is "a commitment to the long-term well-being of the beloved through benevolence and generosity." Neither of these characterizes this most universal of human feelings and desires as an emotion, but rather as actions. In any dictionary, love has two distinct definitions, strangely opposite one another. One is "my desire to possess, adore, and take enjoyment from you by satisfying my passions," and the other is "my desire to be generous to you, to give you what you want and need, with indifference to my cost or benefit." Often, the first takes on a sexual implication, becoming synonymous with "puppy-love," lust, and technical terms such as concupiscence and cupidity. The

second is identical with the Greek word, agape, which is the love of parents for their children, the love of God for humanity, and unconditional love for anyone. The first is selfish, and typically violates the principles discussed above under life and justice, that no human being can morally be treated as an object for the gratification of the desires of another. The second is not completely unselfish, but reflects a virtuous choice in recognizing that giving to one's beloved enhances one's own pursuit of happiness. I suggest that genuine love seeks to give rather than to get, or to get only as the result of giving. Love can even be satisfied in the contemplation of the beloved's beauty or goodness. *Omnia vincit amor*, Virgil writes, "Love conquers all."

Free Will

Do we possess genuine free will in our thoughts, words, and deeds, or are they all merely the inevitable outcome of our circumstances? Are we under the complete control of fate? Unfortunately, there are many logical defenses in the history of philosophy supporting a conclusion of determinacy, and none for free will. Yet philosophers agree that the universal experience of Man is that he is ultimately free to exercise his will to choose as he alone decides to do. Though subjective, the complete universality of this perception is the primary argument in favor of free will. There is another argument by consequence: Unless people are actually and truly free, we cannot justly be held responsible for our actions, any more than we can for the date of our birth or the color of our eyes.

According to a line of reasoning set out by Aquinas, will is rational appetite; man necessarily desires happiness, but he can freely choose between different forms of it. Free will is simply this elective power. Infinite Good (the Beatific Vision) is not visible to the intellect in this life, and therefore we cannot fully and accurately see, and then choose, what actually our best good in any situation is. Therefore, no perceivable good in this life completely satiates or irresistibly entices the will.

The good that we perceive presents itself in many forms – the pleasant, the prudent, the right, the noble, and the beautiful – and in reflective or deliberative action we can choose among these. When we reflect with awareness of the moral quality of a good, comes the recognition that we must decide between right and wrong. It is then that our consciousness is truly choosing freely, and it is then that we are fully responsible and accountable for our thoughts, words, deeds, and omissions.

Conclusions

1. An individual's value does not come from wealth, physical appearance, or achievement, but from the extent to which the Universal Values are expressed in his or her soul. This most commonly translates as: Honesty, Integrity, and Compassion.

2. Behaving virtuously is the way to achieve happiness. Suffering follows vice and indulgence. Immediate gratification of impulses and desires is largely synonymous with vice, and leads to brief pleasure, yet prolonged suffering. Delayed gratification is to the same extent synonymous with virtue, and leads to brief discomfort, yet prolonged well-being.
3. The habitual exercise of virtue increases our moral freedom. The practice of yielding to impulse results in weakening self-control. The faculty of inhibiting strong desires, of concentrating attention on future goods, and of reinforcing the higher though less compelling motives, will undergo atrophy if unused. In proportion as a person habitually yields to intemperance or some other vice, his freedom diminishes and he does in a true sense sink into slavery – slavery to his passions and feelings. The more frequently one restrains mere impulse, checks inclination towards the pleasant, puts forth self-denial in the face of temptation, and steadily aims at a virtuous life, the more does that one increase in self-command, self-mastery, and control of his own life, and therefore does that one increase in personal freedom and happiness.

A Practical Postscript

The Christian Testament forbids us to pass judgment upon others, and the teachings of Taoism and Zen Buddhism expound the folly and the harm that comes from doing so. Nevertheless, it is wise to exercise some kind of evaluation, which I will call discernment, in our choice of friends and romantic partners, and in our own moral inventory or daily self-examination. To begin with, is the person in question a slave to passion, or does s/he enjoy an abundance of freedom and reason? How thoroughly does the person exhibit the values and virtues listed above? Are they habitual in his or her life, or is s/he acquainted with them at all? Finally, is the person, as defined in this essay, truly happy? And of course, you may ask these questions of yourself as well.