

THE GREAT IDEAS ONLINE

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Philosophy is Everybody's Business

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If there is some end of the things we do . . . will not knowledge of it, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what we should? If so, we must try, in outline at least, to determine what it is. —**Aristotle**

THE IDEAL OF HAPPINESS IN THE PRESENT

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3 OF 3

SELF-ACTUALIZATION, EUDAEMONISM, AND SELF-REALIZATION

In Chapter 7 we summarized a number of resemblances between eudaemonism and the self-realization theory. In the present chapter we have seen both of these theories reflected in the contemporary self-actualization theory. The doctrines and emphases shared by the three theories, with great differences of accent, are as follows:

1. Man's chief good or happiness consists in the fulfillment of his human nature and individual potentialities.
2. There are higher needs and higher desires that have "functional autonomy," i.e., satisfying them is not simply an indirect way of satisfying biological needs and desires, and they can continue to activate behavior even when the latter are satisfied.
3. The best life or happiness requires that the higher (cultural)

needs and desires be satisfied in some degree. The tendency is to hold that the more they are satisfied, the better the life, even if it is at the expense of biological needs. A physically sick genius is better off than a healthy boor. What seems to be assumed in general is that man is a cultural animal, so that without culture he would not be quite human.

4. The ideal, however, is all-round development, biological as well as cultural.

5. This requires more or less continuous exercise of all the human capacities, especially the highest, but this cannot be routine or repetitive, for, by their very nature, reasoning and aesthetic activity demand ever fresh materials and problems, and the same would be true of social activity.

6. The good life or happiness is not a state but an activity, and the activity seems to be regarded as an exercise of both mind and body, function and structure, bound up in an inseparable unity. In the tradition we are describing, at any rate, no basic causal dualism or opposition between mind and body is to be found.

7. The self is active in achieving its highest good. It is not only determined from outside but also by its own human endowment and acquired nature, and the power of choice.

8. The chief good or happiness is an achievement rather than an issue of fortune. But this does not mean that one achieves happiness by pursuing it as an end-in-view, for the implication is that the ends-in-view most likely to result in happiness may be concrete and delimited objects obtainable by a given individual, and not by others, such as winning a particular woman or completing a certain program of painting or a set of experiments. Although seldom clearly expressed, the chief good or happiness seems to play its part in determining conduct, not as an end-in-view but as a standard by which to judge the acceptability of competing ends-in-view.

9. The achievement of the good life or happiness is consistent with pain, grief, crisis, and struggle, and is generally not possible without them, but there is high “resistance to stress.”

10. The conception of the good life or happiness is expansive rather than prudent and contractive. It is to be attained, not so much by the reduction of one’s desires as by the increase of satisfied desires. There are serious engagements—a big “investment in

living.”

11. Virtuous activity and the natural process of self-fulfillment are the same thing. The criterion of the growth or development that results in self-fulfillment—and therefore happiness—is said to be conscious choice on the basis of a continuing readiness to learn and relearn the complex and changing conditions favorable to the maximum satisfaction of desires, together with a willingness to try out new desires and conduct experimentally and to judge the outcome by this standard, provided, of course, that the environment is in some degree hospitable to such efforts. The basic opposition between desire and virtue is thus rejected. If a virtuous desire prevails over another, it is because it is or becomes a stronger or preferred desire.

12. The fundamental dualism of desire and reason is also transcended. Desire, not reason, is the moving force of human action. But, in the course of natural development, reasons—as criteria, strategies, and prudential considerations—become embedded in desires. Desires thus become desires-for-such-and-such-a-reason. Desires turn out to be “ratiocinative desires,” as Aristotle puts it, while reasons are actually “desiderative reasons.” Unless it is simply an elliptical way of speaking, the tradition we are concerned with does not talk of reason subduing desire.

13. The dilemma of egoism vs. altruism—of selfish desire vs. the duty of unselfishness—is transformed by the claim that unselfishness, properly understood, is the expansion of the self to include a concern for others. Selfishness is the narrowing and freezing of the self by fear and frustration, whereas unselfishness is growth and expansion of the range of interests. The unselfish man has his conflicts of interest, of course, but, when he decides to sacrifice the narrower interest for the larger one, his unselfishness has the sanction of real preference or desire. He is not only unselfish but wants to be.

14. Self-esteem, exempt from self-illusion, self-escape, guilt, and anxiety, is an essential feature of the ideal.

15. Since achievement in the arts and sciences is a crowning phase of self-fulfillment, there is a tendency to regard this kind of achievement, not as something morally indifferent but as a continuation of moral excellence in another sphere, as a growth or enhancement of the self which, since it is possible, ought to be.

16. When moderation is urged in the matter of eating, drinking,

etc., or with regard to certain social activities, it is urged, not for the reason that excess is bad in itself but because it involves inflexibility or fixation, excludes opportunities for learning, and narrows the range of self-fulfillment.

17. Pleasure is not generally the end-in-view, nor is it the standard that measures the excellence of different activities. The view, stated or implied, is that pleasure regularly accompanies the exercise of human functions and individual abilities, when they are not too much impeded, as well as the successful attainment, partial attainment, or anticipated attainment of individual goals. In the latter case, the accompanying pleasure is simply the indisputable pleasantness of satisfying desires. There is some tendency, at least, to recognize that the pleasure may accompany experiences that have not been desired—many come as a surprise or serendipity.

18. The process of self-fulfillment is never completed. Whereas pleasure, as Aristotle claims, is in a sense complete in itself, the good life or happiness is never finished, is always pointing beyond. The growing self can never stop learning and emendation, nor escape the chance of shipwreck and ruin, and can rest on its oars only momentarily. The Faustian man can never avow he has had enough. Venturing a thought he is said to have borrowed from Spinoza, Goethe has the Angel in *Faust II* declare that he who ceaselessly strives is never lost.

19. It is hardly necessary to add that the tradition we have been discussing recognizes that economic goods, a stable social order, and constitutional rule are essentials of the good life or happiness. There is no tendency to asceticism or to a posture of Stoical independence.

As to the differences between the three conceptions of the good life or happiness, it will be granted that there have been tremendous developments in recent times that are bound to affect the outlook on happiness, especially as regards its possible attainment, not only by favored individuals and classes but by entire populations. The developments relating to the nature of happiness seem to be largely psychological. If happiness is interpreted as a process of self-fulfillment, it will probably be conceded that modern discoveries about the specifics of maturation, learning, educational techniques, the effects of punishment, the role of the unconscious and repression, the regularity of ambivalence in love and friendship, and so on, have thrown a good deal of light on this process. The self-actualization authors we have discussed are immersed in theories and facts relating to the abnormal—to obstructions to a satis-

factory life. The reason is that their focus is on therapy, and they have at their disposal knowledge and techniques not available to earlier centuries. It is in their improved knowledge of these obstacles and of the means to their removal that the self-actualization authors go beyond earlier conceptions and make their main contribution to the theory of happiness.

In the specification of the moral content of happiness, on the other hand, the earlier theories—eudaemonism and self-realization—seem to go far beyond the self-actualization theory, which, wishing to remain “objective,” tends to reduce ethics to psychology. But how deep does this ethical neutrality go? The self-actualization theory does not analyze and recommend the Aristotelian virtues, or endorse any other list of virtues in general, but the therapist seeking to aid his patient in actualizing his powers naturally predisposes him to a kind of courage at one concrete juncture, and influences him in the direction of prudence, generosity or other virtues at other points of the therapeutic process. It may be argued, in fact, that self-actualization authors really take the standard virtues for granted, and invoke them when needed in the concrete therapeutic situation. In this case there would be less difference between self-actualization and the earlier theories. It will be remembered, too, that, while the self-actualizing is a natural process, it is also an ideal, and that eudaemonism and the self-realization theory are distinguished by the same blend of the natural and ideal. Thus, while there is a big difference between the psychologizing of the therapists and the moral language of the earlier philosophers, the substantive difference between them may not be so great as it seemed at first sight.

In tracing developments of the theory of happiness in present thought, we have concentrated on the efforts of psychologists and psychotherapists to define positive mental health, because they seem to have the most relevance to the nature of happiness, whereas pertinent developments in the social sciences relate mostly to its implementation. The literature strongly suggests that what we have called “self-actualization” theory is a continuation of eudaemonism and self-realization theory, and that when psychotherapists prefer other norms of the normal or satisfactory life, this might be explained in one of two ways: Either, like Freud, they do not believe human happiness possible, or they wish, understandably, to delimit the professional commitment to the removal of symptoms and their recurrence, and to restrict themselves to healing the sick.

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Psychotherapy can do nothing, of course, except in the framework of a stable political order. Self-actualization, like self-realization and eudemonian happiness, actually presupposes a welfare state. In this 2,000-year tradition, the state is assumed to be a natural institution indispensable to human survival, and also to the good life. And it is considered a chief means to happiness. The aim of the kingly art or science, Plato holds, is to make men happy, mainly by making them good, for, if they are virtuous, they must surely be happy. For Aristotle, similarly, the aim of politics is to make men happy.

It ordains which of the sciences should be studied in a state, and which class of citizens should learn and up to which point they should learn them; and we see even the most highly esteemed of capacities to fall under this, e.g. strategy, economics, rhetoric; now, since politics uses the rest of the sciences, and since, again, it legislates as to what we are to do and what we are to abstain from, the end of this science [the production of happiness] must include those of the others.

Aquinas agrees with Aristotle's verdict that "we call those legal matters just which are adopted to produce and preserve happiness and its parts for the body politic," since the state is a perfect community." For "the last end of human life is happiness," Aquinas says, "and to this principle chiefly and above all law must be referred." The making of the laws, since they are to promote the common good, is the prerogative of the whole people or a representative of it. And Aquinas also agrees with Aristotle when he says that happiness is a perfecting of the soul, though the perfecting is not, of course, the end or cause of the happiness.

Utilitarians generally go further. Bentham insists that the only justification the restraints of law and administration can have is that they augment the net sum of pleasure for the greatest number. But this is all the justification they need. Pleasure and pain, especially pain, are the great instructors of mankind, as Plato and Aristotle say. A rational system of laws, making sagacious use of these powerful motives, could in time increase the general happiness indefinitely, and also, as a byproduct, improve moral conduct. Indeed, it is only as conduct is improved that the community's sum of pleasure is augmented. It is true that the utilitarian's definition of "right" and "moral" is not accepted by the other schools, but these schools themselves differ in this matter. It is sufficient for the present purpose to keep in view the just, prudent, generous, coura-

geous, temperate conduct that utilitarianism, like other schools, actually enjoins. It is by making men virtuous, by way of a rational system of laws, that Bentham would make them happy. This is also true, with proper qualifications, of the other philosophers mentioned above, and of Rousseau and many others. The state also provides security and certain liberties, but if the people remain unhappy it has failed in its purpose.

In John Locke we find a complete reversal of this traditional view. "The great and chief end ... of Mens uniting into Commonwealths, and putting themselves under Government, is the Preservation of their 'Property.'" The preservation of life and liberty are also ends of the State, according to Locke, but need not always be mentioned, since they depend on the preservation of property, and are understood to be included under it. But the promotion of happiness is certainly not an end of government, in Locke's judgment, except incidentally, insofar as the safeguarding of life and property contribute to it. Nor is virtue an end. Matters of conscience in religion or morals should be of no concern to the magistrate. It is of utmost importance that he confine himself to things that are strictly political.

In his passionate defense of the individual and of his right to any idiosyncrasy that does not result in injury to his fellows, J. S. Mill goes a long way toward endorsing the dictum that "the state which governs least governs best." But, as is well known, Mill is of two minds on this question, and one of his most striking exceptions to the laissez-faire doctrine is his insistence that the State has the duty of seeing that all its citizens receive an education, if need be, entirely at public expense. One important test of the goodness of political institutions, accordingly, is "how far they tend to foster in the members of the community the various desirable qualities, moral and intellectual. . . . The government which does this best has every likelihood of being best in all other respects, since it is on these qualities, as far as they exist in the people, that all possibility of goodness in the practical operations of government depend." A government is good or bad, then, insofar as its tendency is "to improve or deteriorate the people themselves." Yet, in spite of this, Mill is far from agreeing with Bentham that it is the business of government to make men happy; its role is rather to equip them with the intellectual and moral wherewithal to find happiness themselves, each in his own unique way.

The documents that mark the advent of the American republic present a startling variation of doctrine. The Declaration of Independence states that "all men are endowed by their Creator with certain

unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.” And the Preamble to the Constitution announces that ‘We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote general welfare ... do ordain and establish this Constitution of the United States of America.’”

Although a great deal happened in the eleven years between the Declaration and the Constitution, we need not suppose that the “promote general welfare” of the second document is out of line with the “pursuit of happiness” of the first. On the contrary, it would seem that the program of promoting general welfare provides implementation of the inalienable right to pursue happiness, that is, promises that the external means would be provided for citizens to pursue their happiness, each in his own way.

It is notable that the intention to promote morality, so much a part of the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition, is entirely lacking in both documents, and that the establishment of a religion is expressly prohibited by the Constitution. Only the subsequent ill-fated 18th Amendment undertook to reform morals, and it was not long after rescinded by the 21st Amendment. It is significant, too, that the arguments in favor of the Constitution put forward in the Federalist Papers continually urge the consideration of happiness, or the conditions of it, but seldom invoke morality. Again and again it is argued that only through the proposed Union can happiness, along with security and liberty, be preserved and enlarged, and that this is the end and justification of government. But we do not find it urged on behalf of self-government or “the more perfect union” of the states that it will improve morals of citizens or make them better men, though much, indeed, is said about its effect on security and welfare.

A thousand historical circumstances no doubt bid for a share in explaining this deliberate reticence. What concerns us here is the dialectical relation between this reticence and “the pursuit of happiness.” Had the aim been to make men happy, something would have been said about making them just and moral, for it is unlikely that happiness was envisaged without virtue. But nothing was said about making men virtuous, presumably, because the laws have no jurisdiction, as Locke said, in matters of conscience in religion and morals. The conclusion of this hypothetical argument would be that the aim was not to make men happy, but to make this possible. Happiness, then, was not something that could be designed and

produced by government, even the wisest, but could only be prepared for and perhaps found. What government by the consent of the governed could provide were some absolute essentials of a successful pursuit.

The individual, unique, largely incalculable, and serendipitous character of happiness is emphasized, it will be remembered, by John Dewey and Moritz Schlick, but in most authors it remains obscure, overshadowed if not crowded out by the formal features of the common good.

There seems no doubt that in the competition of forms of government, democracy is now winning the race, but the victory is perplexed by division and uncertainty. In a recent series of lectures, C. B. Macpherson contrasts three contemporary forms of democracy: Liberal-capitalist democracy, nonliberal communist democracy, and the nonliberal, noncommunist democracy being realized in underdeveloped nations of Africa and Asia. Many would prefer to reserve the tide of democracy to one of the three forms alone, yet each can claim usage and models, ancient or modern, and a body of theory in its support. Many speak and act on the conviction that the people's happiness would be best served by the one real democracy in every country the world round, no matter what the native traditions, economic conditions, and realistic prospects may be. Is not the same medicine and the same science of engineering good for all countries alike? The counterthesis is to the effect that people can borrow science and technology with sheer advantage, but that one's happiness, like one's virtues, is more personal, and should be selected with a practiced eye to all the indigenous circumstances and opportunities, studied with loving care inspired by community or self-interest alone, and that the political forms in which the very possibility of happiness is enshrined are also an intimate choice.

This issue of happiness is not, unfortunately, merely academic, but the airing of differences at least discourages the worst results. 📖

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