Reading Casebook

What Is Happiness?

What is happiness? Is it something everyone wants? Is it something that people try to achieve? Is happiness the ultimate goal of life?

Just as individuals have different points of view about happiness, the academic disciplines take different perspectives as well. On the pages that follow, you will read three excerpts on happiness from psychology, philosophy, and business textbooks. Your own views about happiness may change as a result of considering the perspectives of these disciplines.

Use your reading and thinking skills and the resources of these textbooks to analyze what happiness is and how it can be achieved. As you might expect, each discipline offers a somewhat different perspective or “agenda” in approaching the topic of happiness. How does each discipline reinforce or change your thinking? Read to clarify and expand your views on happiness. Begin by taking a personal inventory of your present perspectives.

Happiness Inventory 1

Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper:

1. Are you happy now? Why or why not? What would it take to make you happy now?

2. Why have you made a long-term commitment to go to college? What benefits of education might make you happier in the future? What else might make you happier ten years from now?

3. How important is money to your happiness? What do you want to buy? How much money do you need? What can’t money do for you?

4. How would fame contribute to your happiness? Would you want to be on the cover of People magazine? Why would you want to be a celebrity?

5. What do friends and family mean to you? What do you consider the definition of a good friend? How do your family and friends make you happy?

6. Do you have a romantic relationship? Why is this important or not important to you? Is a romantic relationship necessary for your happiness?

7. Are you healthy? What do you do to maintain your health? What is the relationship between happiness and health?

8. What is your vision of a satisfying job? How does work contribute to your happiness?

9. What do you do to help other people? What would you be willing to do to make the world a better place? Does helping others make you happy?

10. Are some people naturally happier than others?
If you were seriously unhappy, perhaps the first professional you would see would be a psychologist for counseling. Why? What can the discipline of psychology tell you about achieving happiness? Although psychology is sometimes viewed as common sense, its theories and principles are derived from scientific experiments and observations. The goals of psychology are to describe behaviors or mental processes, to explain why a behavior occurred, to predict conditions required for future behavior, and to control undesired or unwanted behavior. Read to expand your definition of happiness and to identify contributing behaviors and conditions.

THE QUEST FOR HAPPINESS

“Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness”—these ringing words from the Declaration of Independence are familiar to most of us, and most of us would agree that happiness is a desirable goal. But what exactly is happiness, and how can one attain it? These questions are not as easily answered as you might expect.

Psychologists usually equate happiness with the feeling of well-being, the pervasive sense that life is good. As David G. Myers, a leader in the field of happiness research, put it, well-being “is an ongoing perception that this time of one’s life, or even life as a whole, is fulfilling, meaningful, and pleasant” (1992, p. 23). Happiness is closely related to life satisfaction—people who feel happy also tend to believe that their lives are satisfying.

Happiness does not appear to be associated with age, gender, race, or geographical location. Instead, it is related to self-satisfaction. Researchers have found that happy people tend to be energetic, decisive, flexible, creative, and sociable. They are more trusting, loving, and responsive than sad people, tend to look at the brighter side of life, and are more willing to help those in need. Happy people have high self-esteem and a sense of
personal control, are optimistic, and enjoy social support—that is, they have a large circle of friends and often engage in rewarding social activities.

Although it is commonly believed that money can’t buy happiness, there is a connection between money and a sense of well-being. When asked what would improve their quality of life, most people would answer, “More money.” It is true that many poor people are far from happy, but there are limits to the amount of happiness that money can buy. A survey of 49 wealthy Americans, all with net worths well over $100 million, found them to be only slightly happier than average. (Diener et al., 1985).

An important factor affecting happiness is the tendency to compare one’s situation with that of other people. If you feel that you are struggling to make ends meet while everyone around you appears to be living in comfort and security, you will feel less joy and more stress. Indeed, surveys have shown that perceived wealth matters more than absolute wealth. As David G. Myers, a leader of the field of happiness research, points out, “actual income doesn’t much influence happiness; how satisfied we are with our income does. If we’re content with our income, regardless of how much it is, we’re likely to say we’re happy.” To put it another way, “satisfaction isn’t so much getting what you want as wanting what you have” (1992, p.39).

If good fortune in the form of wealth cannot buy certain and enduring happiness, does a life-shattering experience destroy all hope of future happiness? Surprisingly, no. People who have suffered a tragic accident leading to blinding or paralysis (like Christopher Reeve) tend to return to a near-normal state of day-to-day happiness after a period of adjustment.

What can you do to make yourself happier from day to day? For one thing, you can smile more. Smiling really does induce feelings of happiness. Smile at other people—even people you don’t like a lot. As the song goes, “Put on a happy face.” Don’t worry if it feels like pretending: after a while it will come naturally. “Act as if you like someone and soon you may,” Myers notes (1992, p.125).

Another way to make your life happier is to make the most of social occasions—phone calls, visits, meals with friends. Such occasions often require you to behave as if you were happy, which can actually serve to free you from unhappiness.

There are inevitably times when happiness seems far removed from life in the real world—times when you feel bored or anxious, overwhelmed by work, relationships, or life in general. However, there are also times when you are so caught up in an activity that you become oblivious to your surroundings and time seems to fly by. Psychologists refer to this feeling as flow. To be in flow is to be unselfconsciously absorbed (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). People who are engaged in some activity that engages their skills—whether it is work, play, or simply driving a car—report more positive feelings. “To experience flow,” says Myers, “we need to find challenge and meaning in our work, and to seek experiences that fully engage our talents” (1992, p. 134.). So, pursue happiness by living more intentionally—devoting more time to the things you do best and find most meaningful, while avoiding activities that waste time and bring little satisfaction, such as sleeping late, hanging out, and watching television.

In short, there are many things you can do to try to become happier. Myers sums them up in these words:

You and I can decide to exercise, to allow enough hours for sleep, to make comparisons that remind us of our blessings, to manage our time in ways that boost our sense of control . . . to initiate relationships, to devote effort to maintaining love rather than taking it for granted, to plan involving rather than passive leisure activities, . . . and even to begin working at reshaping our culture in ways that will promote the well-being that fame and fortune can’t buy (1992, p.207).

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Answer the following questions with true (T) or false (F) or write a response.

1. The primary purpose of this selection is to describe happiness and give suggestions for attaining it. (T)

2. According to the authors, money can buy some happiness. (T)

3. The authors suggest that life-shattering experiences destroy all hope of enduring happiness. (F)

4. The authors encourage us to pretend we are happy when we really are not happy. (T)

5. According to psychologists, flow can be achieved during both work and play experiences. (T)

6. What is the context and meaning of the phrase “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” in the Declaration of Independence? (The document outlines the grievances of the American colonists against the British and justifies the break from Great Britain. The phrase is part of the underlying philosophy of the founders: that all people have a right to happiness, and part of the role of government is to protect that right.)

7. What does the survey of the 49 wealthy Americans seem to prove? (That money can buy a little happiness but not that much.)

8. What does the author mean by “perceived wealth matters more than absolute wealth”? (The actual amount of money doesn’t affect happiness as much as how satisfied a person is with his or her income.)

9. Why does the author encourage us to make life happier by making the most of social occasions? (At social occasions we have to behave as if we were happy, which may help free us from unhappiness.)

10. What is flow? (Flow occurs when we are un-self-consciously absorbed in what we are doing and oblivious to surroundings and time.)

THINKING AND WRITING AFTER READING

Why do you agree or disagree with the authors that you should avoid activities such as “sleeping late, hanging out, and watching television”? What does this statement suggest to you about the authors?
REFLECT: Do you think flow actually exists? If so, when have you experienced flow?

THINK AND WRITE: If you lived your life more intentionally, as the author suggests, how would you budget your time and set priorities? To what activities would you devote more time? What activities would you drop as a waste of time? Write your answer on a separate sheet of paper.

COMPARE: According to this passage, why does happiness seem to be a delightful circle for happy people and a vicious circle for unhappy ones? Why do you think happy people have a large circle of friends and engage in rewarding social activities? Which comes first, the happiness or the engaging social activity? Why is social activity difficult for unhappy people to achieve?

DEFINE: How has this selection reinforced and changed your views on happiness? What would you add or delete from your definition of happiness because of this selection?

**Selection 2 Humanities**

Philosophers question existing beliefs, challenge assumptions, and confront problems that others seem unable to solve. In philosophy courses students learn to think critically and to question truth, wisdom, and the meaning of life. What did the ancient philosophers have to say about the complicated concept of happiness? Are there moral and ethical issues in leading a happy life? How does your moral system or network of ethics affect your definition of happiness? Your ethical beliefs may come from religion, family, or culture. The philosopher Socrates believed that reason tells us right from wrong. Consider the following three theories of happiness, and decide which philosopher contributes the most to your definition of happiness.

**Philosophers on Happiness**

Ethnics, with its concerns for morality, also engages in exhaustive analysis of what makes life good. Few of us will deny that we would rather have a good life than a bad one. Happiness is good, and everyone wants it. Ethnics, though, asks us to define that thing called happiness that we all believe is more important than anything else.

The need to "find" happiness becomes acute when it appears to have vanished. There is a sense of something missing, something lost, and then comes the desperate search for the correct definition, at least one that will work. People go to psychiatrists; they write or read any number of books on the subject of being happy. If the humanities make us aware that a definition is hard to come by, they also provide us with many interesting possibilities.
HEDONISM

The Greek philosopher Aristippus (435–360 B.C.E.) declared happiness to be the \textit{sum total of pleasure experience during one’s lifetime}. He thought of pleasure in purely physical terms: taste, sexual excitement, touch, and so on. He admits that a certain amount of satisfaction comes with the knowledge, for example, that one’s country is faring well, but nothing mental compares with physical comfort. People, he said, are selfish animals, concerned solely with their own comforts. He saw nothing wrong with this idea. He asked the question that has been asked for centuries: Is anything greater than being happy? He said no and added that if it were not for pleasure, what would it mean to say you were happy?

Hedonism (from the Greek word for “delight”) is the name given to the philosophy that happiness is limited to physical pleasure and to the possession of things that provide us with pleasure. Hedonism has survived for thousands of years, substantially unchanged from when it was first conceived.

EPICUREANISM

For Epicurus, hedonism was a time-consuming, death-ridden philosophy. If happiness increased with the quality of physical pleasures, then logically no life could ever be long enough. We are here for an uncertain amount of time, true, but we are all subject to the gradual infirmities that come with age, if indeed we do not burn ourselves out before age ever becomes a problem. Therefore, hedonists are fundamentally insecure and unhappy, unable to accept the inevitability of age and death, always worried about the loss of pleasure.

Another Epicurean assumption is that no one can sustain pleasure over prolonged periods of time. Unable to satisfy our pleasure-seeking instincts perpetually, we do the
next best thing: seek material possessions of fame, both of which symbolize happiness without bringing happiness. Money and fame are constantly in the hedonist’s thoughts. They are the compensations for having to die. They are the only possible, tangible embodiment of a successful life. When age makes physical pleasure less attainable, people turn to wealth. But Epicurus recognized that the pursuit of wealth is also self-defeating, futile. The same is true of insisting on fame.

Why, asked Epicurus, burden ourselves with a philosophy with built-in disappointments, frustrations, and inevitable pain? Why not, rather, change the requirements for the good life? Complete happiness is a moderate amount of pleasure with complete freedom from pain, an unlikely scenario for most people, but one that can be more nearly realized as we exert our will not to suffer. Exerting control and enjoying pleasure in moderation, Epicureans seek out the so-called finer things of life.

ARISTOTLE

For Aristotle, Plato’s famous pupil, happiness was a major concern. Aristotle concludes that happiness is not a moment-to-moment experience of pleasurable things but a way of characterizing how one’s life is being conducted. Happiness is living and having lived a good life. Complete happiness comes with the final summing up of that life. If we are leading a good life along the way, however, we can know that we are on the right path. Then the philosopher goes on to investigate what makes life good, and therefore happy.

Aristotle makes a list of the things that can be said to make life good. What he wants to determine is the nature of the highest good. If we could reach a state in which nothing else could ever be desired, we should have found the highest good, or what Aristotle calls the final good. This final good is that of complete happiness, and because nearly all of us continually strive for greater good than we have at any particular time, it follows that achieving complete happiness, reaching the final good, must be the goal, the purpose of life.

Think for a moment. Aristotle may say that happiness is the final good, but in our ceaseless quest for greater and greater goods, most of us cannot even imagine a final good. The reason is that we want things that make happiness more difficult to attain than need be. A simple experiment can solve the problem for us. Ask anybody why money, love, and recognition are desired goals. The answer will always be the same: “Because these things make me happy.” If asked what happens after happiness is reached, the answer is likely to be a blank stare. Is it possible to be more happy? So the answer seems to be either to limit our wants or to find some other, and possibly shorter, route to happiness.

For many, the good life must include a great deal of love and deep friendships. Although he agrees that love is one of the components of the good life, Aristotle recognizes that when partners have physical longings for each other, one or both may be selfish. For him, as indeed for Plato before him, the highest form of love is a lasting relationship between two kindred spirits, neither of whom is using the other for personal gain.

Viewing the subject of happiness from the perspective of aging presents yet another component of the good life: work. Although from time to time almost every working person has felt trapped in a daily routine that is not continually satisfying, that same person is likely to miss the routine once it is taken away. When we are younger and have more choices, we may deplore that we are defined by what we do for a living, but in later life that definition often makes life meaningful. Significant work is anything that keeps us from growing into “couch potatoes,” anything we can point to with justifiable pride.

―The Art of Being Human, Seventh Edition, by Richard Janaro and Thelma Altshuler
COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Answer the following questions with true (T) or false (F) or write a response.

1. The primary purpose of this selection is to define happiness.  
   \[ T \]

2. In Hedonism, selfish concern for the moment is coupled with an equal concern for one's country.  
   \[ F \]

3. Epicureans believe that old age dooms hedonists to unhappiness.  
   \[ T \]

4. Epicureans believe that wealth brings happiness.  
   \[ T \]

5. Aristotle believed that limiting desires could aid in achieving happiness.  
   \[ T \]

6. In the phrase “The need to ‘find’ happiness,” the author puts the word find in quotes because the word is used in a different or sarcastic manner because happiness is not an item that we actually find.

7. What is the basis of happiness for Hedonists?  
   Happiness is physical pleasure and the things that bring us that pleasure.

8. What are the major assumptions of Epicureanism?  
   Nothing lasts forever. Happiness is pleasure in moderation and freedom from pain. Enjoy the finer things of life.

9. Why did Epicurus feel that hedonism was a time-conscious and death-riden philosophy?  
   If hedonists are only concerned with physical pleasure, aging makes this philosophy depressing. Hedonists will spend much time being unhappy because the illnesses and difficulties of aging mean the gradual loss of physical pleasures.

10. Why does Aristotle feel that the final good is unattainable?  
    As goals are satisfied, we ceaselessly quest for greater and greater goods. We continue to redefine the goals of happiness.

THINKING AND WRITING AFTER READING

REACT  
Do you think work is important to happiness? How does Aristotle define work, and why do you think he includes it in his philosophy of happiness?

His definition of work is “anything we can point to with justifiable pride.” Happiness is not moment to moment but the final summing up. Perhaps he felt the feeling of purpose and contribution of work is part of living a good life.
REFLECT  How would the hedonists and Epicureans disagree with Aristotle’s view of the highest form of love as a part of happiness?

The hedonists and Epicureans would describe love in terms of personal gain and selfish pleasure, whereas Aristotle sees love as an unselfish relationship without personal gain.

COMPARE  Which of the three philosophies of happiness is most compatible with the concept of happiness described in the previous psychology selection? Why? Aristotle’s concept is most compatible because happiness was described as more than immediate pleasure. Happiness is not associated with age or illness. It includes work, love, and limiting our own comparisons so that we want what is attainable.

DEFINE  How has this selection reinforced and changed your views on happiness? What would you add or delete from your definition of happiness because of this selection?

Business management textbooks teach proven theories and techniques for achieving business success, which is defined by raising the company’s bottom line or profits. This selection explains the goal of camaraderie at the office, relates the goal to company objectives for employees and profits, and then explains on a larger scale several theories for achieving the goal.

CHUCKLE WHILE YOU WORK

Lighten up. Let loose. Laugh a little. Experts are now advising managers to make company-sponsored fun a fundamental part of work. That’s because after experiencing a decade of restructuring, downsizing, and reengineering, employees could use a laugh or two. In fact, a recent survey of 1,300 corporate managers showed that more than 60 percent disagreed with the statement “I have fun at work these days.”

“Because we spend more of our waking hours working than doing anything else, fun should be a very fundamental part of work,” notes one expert on human behavior. In fact, workplace fun is increasingly important because today’s jobs are more insecure and more competitive than they once were. Furthermore, camaraderie is diminishing as employees spend more and more time relating to machines rather than each other, eating lunch at their desks, or working from home.

Although traditional business wisdom says that people having fun on the job are probably slacking off, studies show that a happy workforce is also a productive one. For one thing, a little wisecracking and side-splitting laughter can go a long way toward relieving stress. Moreover, it can raise a company’s bottom line by improving health, reduc-
ing absenteeism, boosting morale, building teamwork, releasing creativity, improving productivity, and increasing enthusiasm. So while the pursuit of fun may seem frivolous to the serious-minded, more and more companies are beginning to see the value of a good hearty laugh or a little giggle now and then.

MOTIVATING EMPLOYEES

Employees who maintain a high morale or a positive attitude toward both their job and organization perform better. Employees, regardless of their status, want and expect their employers to treat them fairly. They want more than a good paycheck and satisfying work. They want to balance their careers and their family lives. They want to be part of something they can believe in, something that confers meaning on their work and on their lives. They want to be motivated.

TWO-FACTOR THEORY

In the 1960s, Fredrick Herzberg and his associates undertook their own study of human needs. They asked accountants and engineers to describe specific aspects of their jobs that made them feel satisfied or dissatisfied. Upon analyzing the results, they found that two entirely different sets of factors were associated with satisfying and dissatisfying work experiences: hygiene factors and motivators.

What Herzberg called hygiene factors are associated with dissatisfying experiences. The potential sources of dissatisfaction include working conditions, company policies, and job security. Management can lessen work dissatisfaction by improving hygiene factors that concern employees, but such improvements seldom influence satisfaction. On the other hand, managers can help employees feel more motivated and, ultimately, more satisfied, by paying attention to motivators such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, and other personally rewarding factors. Herzberg’s theory is related to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. The motivators closely resemble the higher-level needs, and the hygiene factor resembles the lower-level needs.

THEORY X AND THEORY Y

In the 1960s psychologist Douglas McGregor identified two radically different sets of assumptions that underlie most management thinking. He classified these sets of assumptions into two categories: Theory X and Theory Y.

According to McGregor, Theory X–oriented managers believe that employees dislike work and can be motivated only by the fear of losing their jobs or by extrinsic rewards,
such as money, promotions, and tenure. This management style emphasizes physiological and safety needs and tends to ignore the higher-level needs in Maslow’s hierarchy. In contrast, Theory Y–oriented managers believe that employees like work and can be motivated by working for goals that promote creativity or for causes they believe in. Thus Theory Y–oriented managers seek to motivate through intrinsic rewards. The assumptions behind Theory X emphasize authority; the assumptions behind Theory Y emphasize growth and self-direction. It was McGregor’s belief that, although some employees need the strong direction demanded by Theory X, those who are ready to realize their social esteem and self-actualization needs will not work well under Theory X assumptions.


### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Answer the following questions with true (T) or false (F) or write a response.

1. The primary purpose of this selection is to define happiness.
2. The author implies that restructuring, downsizing, and reengineering have been positive and uplifting experiences for employees.
3. From the quoted survey, the reader can assume that 40 percent of the corporate managers felt that they do not have fun at work.
4. In the Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory, improvements in hygiene factors show large gains in worker satisfaction.
5. According to McGregor, Theory X–oriented managers seek creative projects for their employees.

6. **Why do employees want to be motivated?** Employees want to be **enthusiastic about their work and maintain high morale. They want meaningful work and, regardless of status, they want to be treated fairly.**

7. **In Herzberg’s Two-Factor theory, which factors would seem to be the easier for managers to change? Why? What might prevent such changes?** Probably hygiene factors are easier because some seem more tangible than the motivators. Opinions may differ on this answer. Owners or stubborn employees might prevent such changes.

8. **As a manager, which of Herzberg’s motivators would you first try for an unskilled low-wage earner who is very insecure?** Hygiene

9. **Which of McGregor’s theories has a more positive view of the employee?** Theory Y

10. **Which of McGregor’s theories should be applied to an employee who works at home three days a week?** Theory Y
THINKING AND WRITING AFTER READING

**REACT**  In your first career job out of college, explain how you envision yourself being motivated by a manager according to both Herzberg’s and McGregor’s theories.

**REFLECT**  Refer to the selection in Chapter 9 entitled “Motivating Yourself,” and read the section on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. In what level of Maslow’s hierarchy would you place having fun at work? Why?

Fun would be at the middle or social level. Camaraderie at work is part of being accepted and enjoying the company of others.

**COMPARE**  As noted in this selection, “we spend more of our waking hours working than doing anything else”; consequently, work becomes a significant part of our total happiness. How does this business selection define happiness from the employee-employer perspective? How does this definition compare with the significance of work described in the previous selections by Aristotle and the psychologists? What do the three perspectives have in common?

Happiness in this business selection means creating conditions in which employees are motivated, secure, dedicated, and working together toward the company goal of making profits. Happiness is a sense of productive well-being for the employee. From the company perspective, happiness is making money and keeping good employees because turnover erodes profits. Aristotle believed that work makes life meaningful and is something we can point to with pride. Thus, work contributes to the final summing up of what makes a good life. For the psychologists, work offers challenge, meaning, and an opportunity to fully develop talents. Engaging work can create a sense of flow. The common thread in the three perspectives is that meaningful work can lead to self-fulfillment as Maslow explained. Happy employees seek Theory Y motivators and intrinsic rewards.

**DEFINE**  How has this selection reinforced and changed your views on happiness? What would you add or delete from your definition of happiness because of this selection?
Explore the Net

Two of the leading researchers on happiness are David G. Myers and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Search the Internet to find articles by each. Write a paragraph summarizing additional ideas on happiness that you gleaned from each researcher. Conduct your own search or begin with the following websites.

Austega
www.austega.com/education/articles/flow.htm

David Myers
www.davidmyers.org/

Happiness Inventory 2

Review your response to Happiness Inventory 1 in the introduction. How have your views changed? Answer the following questions to reflect your expanded knowledge and critical thinking about happiness.

1. How important is money to your happiness? What do you want to buy?
2. Why would you desire fame?
3. What do friends mean to your happiness?
4. How does your family contribute to your happiness?
5. How can a long-term romantic relationship contribute to your happiness?
6. What do you want to do to maintain your health?
7. What is your vision of a satisfying job?
8. What would you be willing to do to make the world a better place?
9. Are some people relatively happier than others? Why or why not?
10. What would it take to make you happy now?
11. What else will it take to make you happy ten years from now?

Share your responses with class members. Notice how people differ in their needs for happiness. Rejoice in the differences and good luck on your life-long quest!