INTRODUCTION

The most direct introduction for this book is the story of its development. That story does not begin with deeply contemplated structures and with high concepts. When I started seriously thinking and writing about happiness almost seven years ago, I was not certain what would come of it. Nothing dramatic triggered this enterprise. I was not greatly unhappy. A fair number of my endeavors were bringing me satisfaction, and I had no lack of ideas about conditions that I believed would bring me more satisfaction. But it had bothered me for some time that I possessed no coherent notion of happiness. All I had was a scattering of impressions about it contrasted by a conviction that happiness was very important to me. I recognized that this state of affairs made it difficult to reach or hold, let alone increase or even maximize happiness. Thus, I decided to assemble and consider my impressions to find out whether I could derive a more deliberate approach from them.

I soon realized that my understanding of happiness could not advance much without further exploration. I began by asking whether my objectives, their pursuit, and their fulfillment were generating the best possible quality and quantity of happiness. That questioning encompassed not only obvious failures but successful endeavors as well. Events of happiness appeared to be of short duration and little consequence. They did not appear to have a lasting effect on my long-term level of happiness, which did not impress me as greatly different now from most other times in my life. Perhaps that equalization was fortunate because disappointments seemed to follow the same trend. Still, I wondered whether the results of all my exertions were worthwhile. It worried me that the measures of happiness I had already experienced should be all there would be. How I fared appeared to depend in large parts on the environment of my endeavors and how other persons behaved. Then again, I could see that much of it was a function of my attitudes and actions. Could I have prevented missteps and unsuccessful pursuits? Could I have enhanced the experiences and outcomes of my undertakings? Was there any value in the failures or sacrifices that I had incurred? Was it prudent to give up some of my ambitions and to instead concentrate on others? I found myself asking whether I could have done better. I speculated what I could have done differently and what my life would be like had I made different choices. Even more, I kept wondering whether I was missing anything right now. Was there something that I should be doing of which I was not aware? Should I abandon or restrain certain pursuits for the sake of others? Was I living my life to its greatest potential? I had the suspicion that I was not.

This concern did not only focus on the generation of higher intensities and quantities of happiness. I also worried about the stability of happiness. I wished I could better hold on to it when it faded or regain it after it vanished. Both my impressions of deficiencies and, even more, possible cures were unclear. I had a sense that there was room for improvement, but I could not see a clear path to more happiness.

I further queried myself why I should rely on my aspirations so steadfastly. How many of my ideas were thought out? It seemed that most of them originated as cryptic bits that had attained momentum over time. Where had they come from? Were they really mine? Were they not defined by circumstances I experienced, by what I found possible, by what I was told rather than genuinely by me? Even if my ideas were entirely mine, what basis did I have to think that they would conduct me to happiness? Even if I was confident about my objectives, did I possess sufficient information and skill to implement them? Did I know how to make myself happy? How could I be certain about my competence in setting and pursuing objectives? Even as I confronted myself with the simple question what happiness is, I could cite a variety of examples but I could not succinctly characterize its essence. My inability to define happiness sealed my conviction that I did not have the best grasp on it and drove me to action. The question now became how to extricate myself from this dissatisfactory situation. I realized I was not merely looking for some ideas to boost my happiness. I wanted to get to the bottom of the phenomenon and solve its mystery.

In an attempt to recognize aspects of assurance and direction, I reviewed what I had learned about happiness thus far. I thought I had picked up a sizeable collection of appropriate objectives and standards of conduct that bring about happiness. Perhaps refamiliarizing myself with them, deliberating about them more intensely, or following them more intently could help me to transcend my lack of confidence. Such efforts might empower me to recognize certain principles as true and to confirm or adopt them as mine. I reviewed what I had learned from my family, from school, religion, and the social and cultural context in which I had grown up. I also reviewed what I had learned about happiness as an adult from my personal and work relationships and from other experiences. My life started with a few basic rules that were imposed by my caretakers or that I learned impliedly in contact with my environment. Most of these made intuitive or practical sense and have stood the test of time. But as I was growing up, additional settings and purported authorities emerged whose presence and impositions were less commonsensical. Many principles impressed or inflicted on me were abstract generalities that stayed disconnected from my circum-

stances. Where specific instructions filled general principles, they often referred to factual and emotional situations with which I could not identify. Even where that did not pose a problem, they regularly presented less than credible or otherwise unsatisfactory explanations why they should apply. Authorities habitually demanded adoption of principles without any verification or only with perfunctory proof. Moreover, many instructions or implementations were plagued by incompleteness or inconsistencies. When they appeared to contain valid aspects, these were frequently hard to recognize and to evaluate because they were adulterated by incorrect translations, interpretations, modifications, additions, or omissions. Quite a number of instructions had been imposed on me under the authority of possible, often vague, direct or indirect external repercussions. Others appealed to an internally administrated sense of shame or of guilt. Even where such pressures were not obvious, their ubiquitous or prevalent acceptance in my environment had suggested them as viable guidelines. For lack of deeper thought or better alternatives, I had tended to comply with them.

As my experience with this guidance had grown, an increasing share of it had revealed itself as detrimental. I frequently found myself disagreeing with attitudes and resulting conditions. Yet that only provided partial instruction about what should take their place. It taught me what not to think, feel, do, or want but less about constructive objectives. I could not even be certain that the guidelines I deemed plausible could be trusted. They frequently conflicted with one another by direct contradiction or indirect competition. Even systems of purported guidance seemed to be afflicted by internal inconsistencies, incompleteness, or inapplicabilities. Frequently, I found in them principles I supported amalgamated with others that I disapproved. If theories appeared acceptable, their practice tended to betray their promise. This meant that hardly any instructions could be adopted free of doubt. It also meant that I could not identify a comprehensive approach toward happiness. My distrust of instructions had grown further with increasing information about their background. They often appeared to have been established or advanced to benefit their initiators and their promoters rather than the persons to whom they were directed.

Not all was lost. I had been able to nuance and supplement the basic guidelines of my youth. I had learned from the concurrences of my experiences with external instructions. I had applied and had confirmed the authority of a number of principles, and I had been able to customize some of them. In addition, I had developed some guidelines of my own through my experiences. In various respects, I had learned what to do if I would find myself in situations similar to those I had al-

ready experienced. Even in regions where I lacked experience, the expanded application of trusted principles could give me some guidance. Still, the frame of reference of the guidelines I had approved kept my concepts largely reactive. It was of little help in determining for what I should be searching, in formulating my objectives past the horizon of what I already knew. I had learned how to get along, how to live with reasonable stability, how to contain problems and resolve them with some success. But I had not necessarily found out how to take charge of my existence. It seemed that my experiences, including my experiences with principles, lacked the capacity to convincingly guide me in achieving more happiness, let alone in maximizing it. Basing my pursuits on an incomplete set of guidelines and trying to expand them by new interesting ideas and their trial did not strike me as the best way of confronting the problem. Even if I could generate some progress in this manner, shaping a happy existence this way seemed uneconomical and ineffective. I thought that, despite unique challenges posed by contemporary life, previous generations must have had many similar experiences. By now, there should be an established, solidly founded, and intelligible guidance structure by which humans should be able to advance their happiness. Only, I had not found such a system.

I was aware that various religious and secular doctrines claimed to have resolved the challenges of happiness. I had examined many of them during my formal studies of law and of philosophy and in later years. Some of their principles rang true to me. Yet I did not discover anything that dramatically reformed my mind. I mostly accumulated deeper insights into what I disapproved. I considered that my failure to be positively impressed by any of the formalized recipes for happiness might be a personal peculiarity. After all, many of these doctrines seemed to have significant influence on many other individuals. Then again, the condition of happiness of their originators, proponents, and followers, let alone the effects their application had on other humans overwhelmingly did not live up to their claims. This was often blamed on interpretive error, abuse, lack of dedication, or the difficulty of circumstances. But I thought that a valid message about how happiness can be accomplished should have broken through such impediments. I found this to be the case for fundamental features stated in a variety of doctrines. However, it seemed to me that anybody sufficiently considerate could readily identify these maxims without much guidance. That philosophies acknowledged these did not redeem their incapacity to go beyond and define a practicable path toward happiness. It had mystified me that, after years of studies, I had not come across a general system for the pursuit of happiness and that it might not exist.

Confronting this issue again brought back a vivid memory of an event during my studies of philosophy at the University of Heidelberg. I had been attending an introductory course with Professor Friedrich Fulda, the dean of the philosophical faculty. One of the statements he made engraved itself into my mind down to its exact setting. I can still see and hear the professor pronounce that studying philosophy is not likely to help individuals who are looking for authoritative answers to their personal problems. Rather, it instills a flexibility of thought and tolerance of different viewpoints and gives us the tools to explore and compare these viewpoints. This declaration had not bothered me immediately because I had not chosen philosophy to find answers to personal problems. I had begun studying it in addition to law because of an interest in the foundations of law. But I had not understood why I had that interest. Looking back, I began to recognize that my interest had been all along in happiness and had only been couched in terms of legal theory. I had hoped that the incongruities between assertions of safe and systematic guidance and the reality I had increasingly encountered could be closed by studying sources. That issue had become acute if I was going to represent such guidance in form of the law. I had expected that the study of philosophy would disclose substantive guidance on how to behave individually, as a society, and as a species. I had thought that, similar to wealth and health, happiness was an objective state and therefore assumed that its constituents and principles could be rationally investigated, understood, detailed, and implemented. I had expected that identifying objective normative principles by which happiness operates and can be systematized was feasible. I had trusted that best practices of acting and interacting with others, best principles of law and morality could be deduced as matters of science. I had believed in their derivability from a substance of happiness and that, by following them upstream, that substance could be revealed.

It had profoundly surprised me that someone like the professor, who had such intense knowledge of so many philosophies, should not have found and would not commit to authoritative answers on how to lead a proper existence. I had no problem acknowledging that certain areas of philosophy should be preoccupied with technique. But I had not been able to accept that the study of philosophies addressing human affairs should be a mere exercise of instilling flexibility, tolerance, and analytical skills, that there was little hope of finding one guiding truth in them. As I remembered my struggling with the implications of this apparent limitation, I realized that I had not found peace with it. If there was no singular truth applicable to human existence, there could be any number of legitimate opinions and approaches. This had

not comported with my ideal of happiness as an objective phenomenon then, and I could not accept it now. It seemed problematic to me that there should be multiple coexisting claims to the truth. I likened this setting to different positioning in observation of a physical environment. Although the experiences made in different positions might vary, they would still pertain to the same objective phenomenon that could be described as one truth by the same principles. It struck me as odd that human happiness should deviate from this standard, particularly in view of the claim of scientific derivation and objective certainty by most philosophies addressing matters of happiness. Much of that claim was already suspect to the extent philosophies contradicted one another. Yet, if their characteristics merely represented one viewpoint among others, all of them would have to be mistaken in their claim of objective truth regarding these characteristics. They could not contain any valid knowledge of what makes humans happy other than subjective preferences and their elaborations. Some of us might be fortunate enough to find a philosophy in concordance with our views and obtain applicable guidance from it. The rest of us would be on our own. Further, the subjectivity of happiness called into question the functionality of many laws, morality, and other principles that might be focused on improving and optimizing human existence. Even where philosophies superficially appeared to agree, their interpretations frequently left them with little in common. The widespread absence of objective truth about happiness in them seemed to make the derivation of generally valid principles for human behavior mostly impossible.

I remembered that the lack of guidance revealed by this conclusion had troubled me. As much as I had tried to escape this result, my studies in the following years had regularly confirmed it. This had led me to considerable disillusionment about the function of philosophy in the betterment of humans and humanity. My disappointment with substantive philosophies and their reflection on law had prompted me to concentrate on the technical aspects of law and philosophy. In my practice as a business attorney, I represented a broad variety of interests. I learned to assess the positions, objectives, and arguments of all participants to a transaction and to negotiate solutions among them. I became skilled in the safeguarding and the cooperative optimization of clients' purposes in a shared environment. Developing and applying these capacities formed a source of considerable satisfaction. Still, as I assessed the progression from my university days through my career, I realized that I had become a representation of Professor Fulda's declaration. I had become proficient in understanding, in respecting, and in harmonizing different viewpoints to design productive arrangements

for my clients. However, I had not come across a philosophy by which I could comprehensively identify and connect valid objectives and systematically enhance and maximize their pursuit. This did not disturb my functioning. Clients hired me to represent their defined or implied business objectives and not to answer deeper questions of what they really wanted or should want. But I had also relented finding these answers for myself. As this insight emerged, I understood why the professor's statement had stayed with me so persistently. For all this time, I had ignored the reminder of an unfinished task that my memory of his statement had continued to submit. I finally decided to pay attention and ask: If philosophies cannot provide authoritative answers to the question how to be happy, what or who can? The answer was obvious. I needed to find my own way. I began to see why I had avoided this task before. It seemed exceedingly difficult. There did not seem to be much to work with even now that I understood the challenge better. The assortment of principles I had gathered up along my path had served me reasonably well. Yet, if I was to improve on them, I had to take a few steps back and gain a better comprehension of happiness. I had to reflect deeper on what my impressions represented and might have to develop and supplement them. To undertake all that, I had to represent my thoughts and thus began to commit them to writing.

As my considerations progressed, I detected an unexpected development. Not only did I assemble a better picture of what happiness meant to me. I also began to notice the emergence of a general procedural concept about how happiness might be found, maintained, improved, and maximized according to an individual's autonomous insights. The development of this method instigated my writing of this book in addition to the personal records I built for myself. It does not presume to know the particularities of happiness for any of us. Rather, it explores how we can identify what will make us happy. It proposes that we must turn inward to accomplish this identification. We have to comprehensively come to know who we are and what we want. The book offers perspectives on how to achieve that knowledge and shows that autonomous acquisition of knowledge is not only possible but is also necessary. Once we have established a topical comprehension of what makes us happy, we must employ this knowledge in its practical context. We have to identify, examine, and select means and strategies to pursue our objectives. That work exceeds immediate technical concerns. We have to comprehend how to harmonize our pursuits within ourselves and with our human and nonhuman environment to obtain the best possible results. A significant portion of this book is therefore dedicated to the transitioning of our ideas of happiness into reality.

Because these processes focus on exploring and expressing who we are and bringing our self into reality, their results are bound to be as individual as our differences. Nevertheless, when we step back from the particulars of our pursuits and compare them with the pursuits of other individuals, we can perceive a larger picture. We can distinguish common denominators that derive from our nature as humans and universally shared conditions of human existence. These commonalities cause us to recognize foundations of our nature in others. They allow us to draw conclusions about happiness and our pursuit of it beyond individual particularities. They permit us to formulate a general concept of happiness, including its purposes, sources, motivations, requirements, detractions, and implications. As a result, we are able to construct a general substantive theory of happiness. Although its tenets may be modulated by particular internal and external conditions, it prescribes guidelines and parameters for our objectives and pursuits that we cannot transgress if we want to be happy. Understanding the nature of happiness is a condition for more comprehensive access to its potential. To prosecute our happiness effectively and efficiently, we must comprehend the topography and physics of its universe and our position in it. This orientation permits us to improve the selection of objectives and methods and to behave in a more purposeful manner. Further, we gain a better judgment of our ability to control our happiness and about how much happiness we might be able to obtain.

The exposition of both the procedural and substantive aspects of a general theory of happiness obligated me to observe stringent requirements. To preserve the general applicability of the theory, I had to keep its presentation separate from the originally intended writing that focused on my person. Still, neither of these writings would have been possible without the other. Exploring and memorializing ideas for the advancement of my happiness alerted me to the manifestation of generally applicable principles. Moreover, the development of these principles benefited from being tested by personal application. In return, applying emerging principles greatly helped me to develop and understand what I needed to do for my happiness. The mutual illumination between theory and practice helped me to develop and sharpen both of these aspects. My hope is that this book can prompt a similar progress of reciprocal discovery between the principled and practical aspects of happiness for its readers. I set forth best efforts to find, develop, and delineate universal concepts. But proving their universality is not my supreme ambition. A critical examination is necessary if the concepts in this book are to serve their function of enabling readers to identify and advance their happiness through their own insights.