

Philosophy of Happiness: A Critical Introduction

by Martin Janello

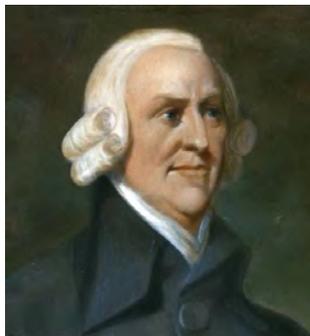
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“Philosophy of Happiness” is a phrase used by self-help, religious, philosophical, and empirical inquiries to describe their premises, arguments, and conclusions on what happiness is and how it can be secured. The commonality of this phrase hides a vast variety of concepts and degrees of achievement about the subject. This article provides a critical overview of these contributions. To follow its analysis, we need to start with the fundamental questions what Philosophy of Happiness is and why it matters. The answers to these questions emerge if we examine the component terms of this phrase in relation to each other.

1. The Definition of Happiness.

Let us first look at “happiness.” It stands for a concept that is immediately accessible to everyone. We do not need anybody to tell us what it means. So I am not going to do that. But just to compare our ideas of happiness, let me tell you how I understand it: Happiness originates in our needs. Their motivations are



Adam Smith
(1723-1790)

expressed in wishes that focus these needs. Happiness happens in successful pursuits of needs and wishes, their gratifications, and our anticipations and memories of these events. Failures in their progression cause unhappiness. As painful opposite sensation of happiness, unhappiness helps to give us a better sense for what happiness means. It also works as a deterrent for our conduct, as much as the pleasure of happiness forms an attractant.

I don't think there is a lot more to say about happiness as a general concept other than this: Happiness is a fiercely individual phenomenon. This may not be apparent at times. As humans, we have much in common, which causes commonalities in how we define our happiness and how we pursue it. The commonalities all humans share can give rise to fundamental rules

for securing happiness and for warding off unhappiness. These rules cover the fundamentals of our existence and thriving we all require. They universally and continuously apply to all humans. However, beyond common basics, happiness expresses itself with individual differentiations. This is logical because we each are our own person. No two individuals are identical. We regularly observe that people are noticeably different from one another despite basic or particular commonalties. Who we are is probable to differ much due to factors that make up our particular personal entirety. These factors include categories of our physical and mental constitution and capacity, our environment, our experiences, and resulting knowledge, resources, dreams, hopes, fears, regrets, affinities, aversions, and expectations. Countless differing and developing articulations in and among these factors form our needs and wishes and thus definitions of happiness.



*Adi Shankara
(788-820)*



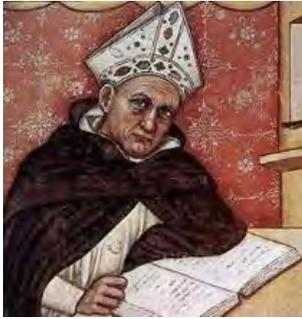
*Adolph von Knigge
(1752-1796)*

To be sure, any of these factors may resemble factors of other humans. Such occurrences can give rise to partial commonalties along the way of individual paths. We may find ourselves in the same or similar settings as others. We may have commonalties in means we possess or want. How we perceive such circumstances may be similar. There is also a chance that we resemble other people in more personal factors. After all, we are members of the same species who are regularly placed and act in conditions that are shared with other humans or at least the same world. Such circumstances can create significant advantages but also competition in our interactions. Opportunities for cooperation or competition can also arise from our differences. Our ideas of objectives and favored ways to pursue them can differ significantly from the ideas of others, even those who share a large number of factors with us. With all similarities among individual ideas, material differences remain that separate us from one another in how we define happiness. These are often magnified since the factors entering our definition of happiness interact with one another. This gives differences in factors the ability to color similarities in others.

The importance of these factors and of their variances for individual happiness has habitually been repressed by natural or imposed conditions. To date, most human development has been characterized by circumstances in which securing basic needs has been difficult enough. This has often not left many or any resources or motivations to work out individual wishes and particularities. And even where we are not subjected to a struggle for basic necessities, we may not feel completely secure. We may anticipate that our individual wishes have to step back when satisfaction of our basic needs is threatened. However, these common denominators are not all we are about as humans. Rather they are the basis from which our imagination and growth take flight. We dream of doing our own thing, making someone of ourselves, living improved or optimized lives. That this can mostly only happen after we



*Albert Camus
(1913-1960)*



Albertus Magnus
(1200-1280)

secure our existential necessities has historically skewed humans' concept of happiness because securing fundamental needs has been such a persistent struggle. Besides being formed by this struggle, our outlook on happiness has also been significantly shaped by our traditional social organizations to win this struggle. Strict hierarchical and tribal conventions have placed societies ahead of personal motivations and activities of their members. Only recently have individuals' claims of basic needs and resulting basic rights grown strong enough to be broadly and deeply recognized. And only lately have individual contributions to a society become appreciated enough to promote individual differentiations as a societal benefit. Humans are just coming into their own by gaining the ability to practice particularities and what makes them happy

as distinct and free individuals. Only in the span of a few generations have significant numbers of us acquired sufficient freedom to sustainably define our happiness in ways unique to us according to the particular ingredients that formed us. It is then completely understandable that many of us have not fully grasped the importance or exhilaration of individual pursuits. And it is no wonder we are relative novices at filling this freedom with purpose and success. In many ways of its range, happiness is a new phenomenon.

Realizing our concept of happiness is compiled by the factors that define us and by the interactions of such factors is only the beginning of fathoming this phenomenon. It merely shows us general categories of our existence that form our definition of happiness. It does not show us what exactly makes us happy. As for happiness itself, we know it as a resultant feeling when we experience harmonization or harmony of our conditions with our objectives and pursuits. And we feel unhappiness when they lack.

But neither happiness nor unhappiness are monolithic. We feel different kinds of either depending on the related need and we feel them in varieties of intensities and durations. Also, these aspects are not only determined by directly connected events. Such events are embedded in everything else that influences our happiness at a time. The entirety of our circumstances measured by the entirety of our definitions of happiness dictates how we feel. The complexity of this entirety makes our happiness uniquely ours.



Aldous Huxley
(1894-1963)



Alexander v. Humboldt
(1769-1859)

The emotional qualities and nuances of happiness reserve judgment on it to each of us because we are the only ones feeling them. They also make us best suited to identify the objectives and the pursuits we want to employ to secure and optimize our happiness. This is because we can feel exactly how the results of our choices affect our happiness. That this is so coincides well with our surroundings. We most probably are the ones most interested in our happiness since others are busy minding theirs. Our happiness may coincidentally benefit as a consequence of them being who they are. But others are likely to care about our happiness only in as far as it advances theirs. We may just not be aware of this egocentric stance because making us happy may make them happy as well. In this context of suiting their objectives, they may understand and enhance our happiness to levels beyond fundamentals. Still, this would occur from a relative

distance based on what we tell them, their observations of us, explanations of us shared by others, and from drawing parallels or distinctions with themselves or others they know. Having such attentive attitudes directed at us and the mutuality of extending such attitudes appear to be important ingredients for happiness. However, even if others dedicated themselves to that objective, they could only approximate the proficiency and detail with which we can know our happiness.

This reflection begs the question whether we have sufficiently developed our knowledge about matters of happiness, whether we know enough about it to advance or optimize it and to keep events of unhappiness to a minimum. Under a cursory review, we should be in good shape just based on our sensory system. Our emotional impressions of happiness and unhappiness with differentiations of types and nuances give us ultimate motivations for objectives and pursuits. They also create a finely tuned compass and measuring device for our selection of objectives and pursuits. But they can only teach us by trial and error. In their lessons, they can only give evidence for, but not replace, our search for objectives and pursuits and their consideration. This is where philosophy comes into play.



*Alfred Adler
(1870 -1937)*

2. The Definition of Philosophy of Happiness.

Our philosophy of happiness is our consideration of what happiness is and how we can make it happen and optimize it. Calling this a philosophy may seem overstated. But hear me out. When we try to define the objectives and pursuits for our happiness, we often look for orientation, for guidance, for principles -



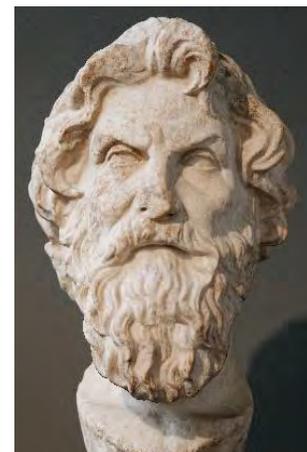
*Anicius Boëthius
(ca. 480 - 525)*

for rules in a wider sense. And certainly, there is no lack of rules affecting us, not all of which are likely to be geared toward serving our happiness. Our parents, family, friends, social contacts, other individuals and groups in society, and society as a whole try to make us abide by their rules. Rules are imposed on us by education, profession, employment, and the economy. Governments and religions subject us to rules. And underlying everything are the rules of nature.

We do not receive all rules in a written or verbal form, or by example. Even in the absence of stated rules, circumstances in us and our environment are

shaped by rules. And they in turn impose on us their resulting obligations, pathways, limits, and standards that could be called rules. Thus, our existence and its potentials occur within organized structures and processes.

Few rules appear inevitable or mandatory in a sense that we cannot act otherwise if we wanted to. For the vast majority of rules, following them seems to be up to us. But our non-compliance may produce consequences or risks of consequences we may not be willing to take on. Our needs, wishes, and pursuits fall into this category of discretion. Some of their essential parts may seem nonnegotiable if we want to survive or are otherwise hard-pressed



*Antisthenes
(ca. 445 BC - 365 BC)*



Aristippus
(ca. 435 BC - 356 BC)

path toward happiness may lead through unhappiness. Or it may initially show us happiness and then lead to unhappiness. Many paths may offer mediocre results either continuously or in medians of ups and downs. Some may be more trying or costly than others with results more or less reflecting the effort. Paths may in all or in some of their possibilities be undetermined. They may offer prospects of a variety of ratios between risks and potential results. It may be difficult or impossible to foresee where they lead, how we progress on them, and what effect we can have. We may only know how happy or unhappy paths make us after tallies at their end, without ability to compare them to alternatives.

But despite many unknowns, we can be sure that all paths will be governed by rules. The particular sets of rules connected to each path may differ depending on the type of path and the terrain it traverses. They may contain rules for finding or laying out our track and how to build or modify it. They may give it boundaries, prescribe tracks, or grant guardrails. They may encourage, permit, or forbid us to jump or join tracks, take detours, halt, branch off, or reverse. They

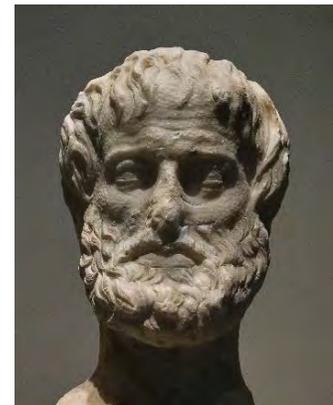


Arthur Schopenhauer
(1788-1860)

may condition such and other modifications or give us instructions how to undertake, prevent, or circumvent them. They may tell us how to advance and pace ourselves or how to conduct ourselves if we encounter obstacles, dead ends, forks in the road, poor visibility, or pitfalls. Different rules may apply at different junctures of our path or depending on the selections we make during its pursuit, and rules themselves may change or evolve as we proceed. The list of possible track metaphors goes on.

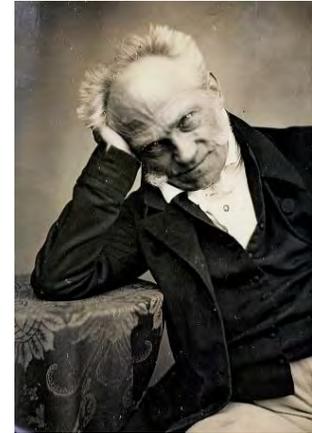
It is up to us whether we want to find out and think about these rules as much as they can be recognized or anticipated. We may decide to undertake this before we select and embark on a track or while we are on it. But we ignore the rules for our objectives and their pursuit at our risk. This is a risk we may not want to take or at least may want to reduce. We may then resolve to analyze what our needs and wishes are and make plans

in our affairs. Still, we may decide against following their pleas. And we may possess choices how to get to what we absolutely need or want. Past fundamentally critical requirements, we are likely to experience our options opening up more. There may be myriads of paths to choose from at any moment to thrive or get by. But they may conduct us to different intensities or sorts of happiness or unhappiness in the course of their pursuit, at the instant of reaching their destinations, or subsequent thereto. And paths to happiness may be difficult to distinguish from paths to unhappiness. A



Aristotle
(384 BC - 322 BC)

how to meet them considering the rules for their pursuit. How can we take account of and understand all these rules in ourselves and our environment and how they apply to different paths? Which paths are available and how do we select among them? Which sets of rules apply to which paths? Do we have choices among rules on the same path? And if so, how do we select the right ones for us? How do we select among competing rules and competing systems of rules? Are we blindly or obediently following rules or do we allow ourselves be forced to abide by rules? Do we comply passively or perfunctory or actively support them? Do we take part in their generation, maintenance or enforcement? Do we openly reject rules or covertly work against them? Do we attempt to evade them, change them, or escape them by changing our venue or circumstances? Which rules are immutable or inescapable? What are the possible consequences of non-compliance and how high are the risks? These are questions we must answer to take care of our happiness. And many



*Arthur Schopenhauer
(1788-1860)*

of our answers will have to be particularized to the situation and may change as we move through life and encounter changes in us or in our surroundings and possibly new paths or sections of paths. Also, the review and application of rules are not linear. Needs and wishes change and means for their fulfillment



*Aruni (Uddalaka)
(8th century BC)*

compete, and we keep having to arrange them. And our pursuits are likely to occur in settings where others are pursuing their happiness. This entails arrangements to get along as well as a significant cooperation potential. Arrangements among people or groups can be a source for formal or informal rules to regulate and guide their existence together. Such arrangements and the rules to administrate them may change in time as contributing factors change and as individuals and societies develop.

We then must cope with the fact that our paths as well as the rise and application of rules we encounter are dynamic processes. We must continually evaluate and re-evaluate paths and their rules and how we can

serve our happiness in their context. We also have to cope with the fact that many rules are of a prohibitive character. They may prescribe a framework within which to operate. But they may not tell us how to fill these outer parameters with constructive substance and procedures. Other rules may only give us generally constructive guidance that requires fleshing out and detailing. Or they may only give us tools for pursuits but not tell us how to use them, what to produce with them, or how useful they can be. We also may cast how we respond to circumstances into rules of our own when we detect that this might help us in making faster or better decisions in future similar circumstances. How do we decide this and how do we formulate our rules? Do we even need rules of our own or can or should we rely on other sources? Are things too complicated and varying for rules to make sense? Might they prevent us from addressing issues with the required flexibility?



*Aryadeva
(3rd century)*

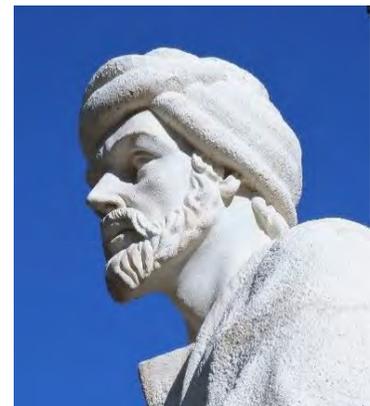


*Asanga
(4th century)*

Or should we live in the moment, form our intent then, and apply what we can find when we need or want something? And, regardless of inclination to foresee or plan, we may not possess the luxury of doing so. We stand to encounter situations where no previously applicable or trusted rules seem much help. We may not have the time or information to weigh alternatives. We may have to make choices based on gut feelings, relying on the compass of the entirety of who we are and what we have learned. In such situations, we may not be able to trace decisions in the moment. We may only be able to afterwards assess whether we acted correctly and what to do if similar situations challenge us. But what situations are similar enough to warrant an application of these rules and how do we allow for variables?

3. Taking Refuge from the Complexity of Happiness.

Finding our way through a complicated world that we only have limited means to understand, predict, and influence is complicated and can be taxing and frustrating. It often demands complicated collections of information, assessments, and deliberations as well as constructive attitudes and approaches from us. This is why we have every right to call this process, its principles, methods, and results our philosophy of happiness. Happiness is complex because it involves the entirety of our subjective and objective reality. All we undergo, perceive, think, feel, and undertake in connection with our self or human and nonhuman surroundings can influence our happiness. For our entire life, we remain occupied with reaching for, and holding on to, a multitude of facets of happiness in ever-changing settings. And we are longing to arrange them into a beautifully cut diamond. Experience may tell us that arriving at a point at which all the facets of our happiness will be aligned in perfect harmony will be short-lived, if it is possible at all. We might for these reasons try to lower our expectations. We might set our sights on more realistic lower levels of harmony and lesser levels of perfection for the individual facets of our happiness to better match our capacities. We might focus on essential needs and let other parts slide.



*Averroes
(1126-1198)*



*Avicenna
(980-1037)*

Still, we may not get much control over our needs and wishes. If they remain unfulfilled, they develop the tendency of staying with us as dreams we would love to fulfill if we had the chance. And our pursuit of ideals diminished to our capacities may still stress or exceed our capacities. After all, capacities are frequently the results of our successes in prior pursuits. If we lower our ambitions and pursuits, our capacities may follow. We may be lucky enough to possess enough material or other means to take the worry out of securing some of our capacities. But the capacities necessary to satisfy our needs and wishes may differ depending on the need or wish. They also may not be translatable into one another. It seems that no matter who we are or what we have accomplished, we still must work on having a good life and even more so to animate our life to its fullest. We also

experience that happiness is not a one-time, lasting accomplishment but has to be maintained or regained in all its facets. Pursuing our happiness may then be exhausting work and we might end up exhausted unless we can secure adequate happiness to make our pursuits worthwhile. Despite all optimism we might have, the concern of not being able to satisfy our wishes and needs, of remaining or becoming unhappy, descending even to becoming existentially threatened, continues to haunt us.

This complexity paired with these concerns can make people shy away from tackling happiness in a comprehensive manner. They might not feel up to this critical challenge and may want to take refuge. Now, turning away from the challenges our happiness proposes to us does not seem inevitable. After all, we would not have to start from scratch to build a philosophy of happiness of our own. We could derive such a philosophy in large part by questioning existing rules and practices and reflecting on them. We could learn as we go to see how our ideas and pursuits fare, and we could draw conclusions from them how to handle similar situations. We might compare our views on happiness with views of others to see how they could fit us. This sort of questioning, testing, comparing, and reflecting seems to go on in everybody's mind to some degree. The resulting collection of experiences may eventually make us wiser about setting objectives and



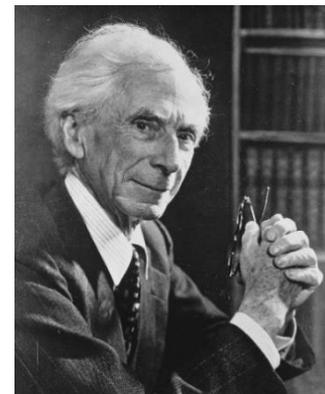
*Ayn Rand
(1905-1982)*



*Baruch (Benedictus) Spinoza
(1632-1677)*

pursuing them. But tragically, it may take us most of our life to accumulate enough knowledge or means for a happy life. Or this may never happen. We may run out of time and capacity to make our dreams a reality. We may not want to run this risk. So we might prepare for an eventual investment in the right pursuits by gathering means. But we may not get to spend them or be able to give them the necessary opportunity to flourish. We may not be able to enjoy their fruits as much, or our enjoyment may be shortened by their late arrival. These impressions inject us with impatience.

In this situation, elders in our circle of family and friends may try to impart some of their wisdom to us. But we may not take them seriously for various reasons. They may seem distant from us at their stage in life, distant from our aim and vigor, our mind and mindset, our thirst for life, our capabilities, our needs or wishes, our settings, our times. We may also discount elders' advice because we have seen them not living according to their late-acquired wisdom. We may not believe that the wisdom they share with us has made their life any or much happier. We may discount what little they achieved in application of their wisdom. If their achievements are great, we may decide these are not as important to us and that we do not want to go down the same path. The understanding and communication between generations is additionally disturbed by family dynamics. This naturally includes children trying to break free from the guardianship of their elders to become independent. But the weightiest reason we don't listen, or why elder advice is ineffective even if we listen, is most probably that we are too different from others in principle,



*Bertrand Russell
(1872-1970)*



*Bodhidharma
(483-540)*

even with all the affinities between friends and family and regardless of our position in relationships or age. We could not learn from them all we need for our happiness even if we wanted and they offered it. Whatever the reasons might be in a particular instance, a generational transfer of wisdom about happiness does not work very well. Beyond imparting a few pointers and general maxims, instruction by our elders is incapable of granting us a shortcut toward figuring out our happiness. They leave us with the independence we might need anyway to find our fortune.

Still, we may not trust in ourselves at all or entirely with such a monumental undertaking to extract the desired directions in reasonable time or ever. Maybe this is due to a genuine mental inability. But I think most who feel such a reluctance to exert self-determination suffer from other deficiencies that stem from and in turn cause a lack of preparation. People who shy from developing their own philosophy of happiness may not have discovered this is possible. They may not have learned to reflect about or assess their happiness for themselves. They may have been prevented by induced or otherwise occurring stresses. Or they may have been told other values outrank happiness generally or their happiness. They may not even have had an opportunity to recognize happiness as an objective or objective worth pursuing. Not possessing a good foundation for developing their own philosophy of happiness, many of us might feel incapable of doing so right from the start or after some frustrating dabbling.

Nevertheless, our innate needs as humans and open life questions connected to them urge us for competent responses. As this urgency grows from our failure to respond, we may look, or be receptive, to try, emulate, or espouse somebody else's philosophy of happiness. Without much of an idea of our own, we may prefer broadly inclusive solutions. We may prefer buying into ideological systems



*Asian Buddhist Monks
(12th - 13th century)*



*Buddha (Siddhartha Gotama)
(4th - 5th century BC)*

that provide us with turnkey models for objectives and pursuits. Or we may prefer to pick and choose among a menu of ideas and pathways toward happiness. Either way, our lack of experience and fear of being overwhelmed by life's decision-making demands may make us prefer simplicity. We may favor fast and easy-to-follow instructions that do away with the prickly complexities in the pursuit of happiness. If ideas or their systems seem too incomplete, general, or hard to understand, we may seek help interpreting and applying them. We may search for someone with superior insight to summarize, compare, and endorse philosophies of happiness or parts of them for us. If we cannot decide which ideas to adopt, we may seek authoritative guidance in selecting. Or we might think we can pick among philosophies and ideas without further aid after allowing them and their proponents opportunities to convince us or at least impress us with a likelihood of success.

4. Self-Help Contributions to Philosophy of Happiness.

This attitude has created a massive market for self-help presentations and books peddling ideas of happiness. Most of these are unhelpful or misleading in too many ways to list them all. A good number of them sell feel-good fluff. They contain naïve opinions and recipes that display their incompetence on their face. Or they suggest niceties that might soothe symptoms of unhappiness or give people a little lift but fail to address deeper questions of happiness. Some publications pretend to give answers to such questions. They cleverly exploit the gullibility of consumers to believe the wildest claims without genuine proof. Others flatter with false, superficial empowerment, including that we each are perfect as is or can do anything we set our mind to, against all obvious evidence of human imperfections and limitations. Still others attempt



Buddha Shakyamuni
(4th - 5th century BC)



Buddha Amitabha
(4th - 5th century BC)

to implant readers with concepts of what happiness really is or who they should be and how they should act or change their mind to be happy. These tactics are often hyped by success stories, celebrity endorsements, or more remote apparent authorities to add respectability or fashionability.

Not all self-help attempts regarding happiness can be disqualified as superficial, nonsensical, or misleading. Some do offer suggestions about happiness that merit consideration. But these are far and between, and searching for kernels of wisdom in a sea of chaff is frustrating. Often, mere kernels are all there is to a book that promises an abundant harvest. Even with all kinds of anecdotal fillers, illustrations, large print, spacing, margins, thick paper, and other design tricks many of these writings barely make it to book size. It is tiresome to pay good money for and read on and on about a stretched-out idea that could have been described on a few pages. If one spots something that rings true, it is often a commonsense insight that is sensationalized as groundbreaking revelation. Even if we find something of potential utility beyond the trite, its actual utility is frequently compromised. Most of the ideas warranting consideration either stay too general and detached from our lives, focus only on partial aspects of our lives, or vastly overstate the place of a technique or concept in the pursuit of happiness. Even if we can appreciate their utility, there are so many disjointed or contradictory recipes and tips for happiness we could collect that it becomes impossible to make much connected sense of them. Even where propositions elaborate in more detail, they are, with very few exceptions, popularized concepts or parts of concepts loaned from other sources that are better described by these or secondary sources. Beyond that, their popularization habitually includes an entertainment aspect, which as a mere vehicle of conveying information is not objectionable. But this aspect may threaten or be geared to take over the knowledge or skill to be imparted. Worthwhile methods or substance may be packaged with motivational showmanship into events that take on importance of their own for participants' happiness. They may draw people



Candrakirti
(ca. 150 - ca. 250)



*Carl Gustav Jung
(1875-1961)*

who wish to overcome their loneliness, to belong, to be acknowledged, to be close to their idol, or to be affected by a positive outlook. Consumers may count fulfillment of these wishes as a significant progress in their happiness and may become conditioned to continue the motivational relationship in dependency and monetization. Strategies exploiting such fragilities convert the idea of self-help into its opposite. They shape funnels and channels of alignment that curb independent judgment and action, thus showing signs of becoming a cult.

Such conversions of the self-help model might be extremes. Still, after reviewing a lot of self-help approaches over the years, I came to the conclusion that, at best, most are a waste of time and money. Even with the better ones, I was regularly glad to have read them at the bookstore or seen a video of them and not having spent any money or any more time on them. At worst, the self-help materials I reviewed threaten to talk victims into investing themselves in

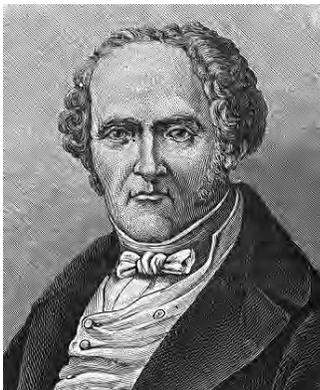
ill-conceived or overwrought objectives or strategies that in all likelihood will not pan out. This may cause or worsen unhappiness in vulnerable consumers who may already suffer various degrees of unhappiness and long for more happiness. Whatever the nature and merit of self-help ideas might be, I have not found anything in this category that would do justice to the complexity of happiness even in partial aspects let alone its comprehensive interrelation.

Acknowledging the complexity of happiness may be unpopular with some audiences because it implies that a broad diversity of efforts is and will remain necessary. They would rather hear about a few simple fixes that can propel them to, and keep them in, a happy state. Or they would rather hear superficial suggestions to tell themselves they are actually doing something to improve their happiness when in fact they are not. Just consuming self-help materials may keep them in that imaginary constructive mindset. They may derive rewards from them that are similar to those from watching cooking shows whose recipes one never tries or at least does not incorporate into one's cooking routines. Just buying self-help books or attending self-help seminars may make us feel better about ourselves. The



*Carl Menger
(1840-1921)*

consumption of such materials may give us permission to give in to fears of leaving our comfort zones by merely reading about leaving it. Purveyors of self-help materials may thus get away with inferior quality or inapplicable suggestions. But they may also respond to such consumer attitudes with diminished depth or detail in their offerings. They may want to avoid being at odds with an audience that prefers easy and quick solutions. Then again, the complexity of happiness is already unpopular with most presenters of happiness propositions since it tends to make their ideas look deficient or small. This has produced an alignment of wishes on both sides of self-help instruction that has prevented an adequately deep and broad discussion of happiness in this field. But maybe this is asking too much from the self-help genre. Maybe one has to turn to higher, more recognized authorities to find more profound treatments of the subject of happiness.



*Charles Fourier
(1772-1837)*

5. Religious Contributions to Philosophy of Happiness.

Religions are often cited as important if not primary sources for improving the human condition. Their inclusive knowledge and regulation of human affairs are commonly regarded as sources of ultimate competence and reliability on how to live one's life. This confidence is based on the assurances of divine texts that in many religions are relayed and interpreted by a professional clergy. In fact, such systems typically contain good ideas for what to do and not to do in pursuit of a good life. However, their direction regarding human objectives and pursuits is heavily influenced by their introduction of speculative concepts into a rational conversation. This conversation may be restricted by justifications not open to proof or reason. But it also stands to be expanded by placing human happiness into a larger context in which humanity and its happiness may not be a primary objective. By introducing beings more powerful than humans, human existence and happiness is largely characterized by the relationship with these beings.



Chi-Tsang (Jizang)
(549-623)

In many religions, this relationship is defined by myths that establish humanity and its world as divine creations. Religious views regarding the manner or purpose of this creation vary. They may include predecessor, successor, or intermediary beings that exert divine power. But religions mostly imply from divine creation a hierarchy of importance from which they derive a priority of divine happiness. To find application of this priority among humans, religions have to explain how human objectives and pursuits relate to those of the deities they describe. An essential feature for the priority of divine happiness is that the deities set the rules for human conduct and thus human happiness. That seems in order. Arguably, the more advanced or absolute capacities and vantage points of deities allow them a better understanding of how human affairs ought to be organized. And this competence and authority appears to be out of question if the creating deity sets the rules. It can be presumed to have fashioned humanity according to a plan and to have the ability of perfectly matching rules applicable to them. But most of all, creation suggests a creator's caring parental interest in the welfare and thriving of the creation. As a consequence, a belief in creating deities would make it seem logical to let them set rules and for humans to comply. This trust may extend to superhuman entities in the creation hierarchy depending on their character and ascribed conduct, or commonality of creation and implied combined purpose divined by the creating deity.

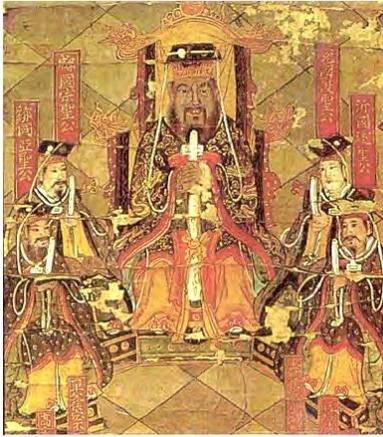


Christian Rosenkreutz
(15th century)

The varieties in which deities are said to shape human behavior with their rules are too many to address in this context. Most describe reciprocal relationships in which both divine beings and humans benefit by providing each other what they need or want. This harmonizes with human parallels to a creative context and might be seen as the purpose of creation. But mutuality may also be said to include entities on other levels in a creation hierarchy. Humans may struggle understanding all



Christoph Martin Wieland
(1733-1813)



*Kung Fu-Tzu (Confucius)
(551 BC - 479 BC)*

the rules these relationships imply. But their belief in the benevolent nature of divine beings or the potential of keeping or rendering them benevolent may cause followers to comply with hierarchic mandates. Compliance is expected to lead followers to higher and highest levels of happiness or at least to enable them to maximize their happiness under their circumstances. Since deities are thought to rarely speak to humans or interfere in human affairs, representatives are customarily deemed required to receive and disseminate divine communications, convince heathens they should become believers, and direct human affairs in conformance with divine intent. Founders of religions are not able to undertake this task on their own and their lifetime limits their capacity in continuing it. This implies the establishment of religions as administrative agencies. Claiming supreme authority in the absence of their founders and gods, religions assume the functions of stating, interpreting, imposing, and enforcing the rules of their creed. Without them, divine directives could be unheeded, falsified, or fade away. They thus take on a dominant function in the relationship between humans and gods. To the extent religious teachings carry commonly agreeable ideas, they can be recognized as forces assisting human happiness. But humans may struggle finding such ideas due to lack of access to a range of religions from which they might choose. They may also have trouble discerning ideas among competing religions or within religions. It seems then of vital interest for religions to help actual and potential subjects identify with their teachings because this acts as a commonsense litmus test for the applicability of a religion on its asserted higher levels.

A decision regarding the applicability of religious teachings may be difficult if they primarily rely on spiritual premises and benefits that ultimately cannot be evidenced but only believed or not believed. This, combined with the irritant that religions may assert dissimilar notions, makes entrusting oneself to a religion a leap of faith. Even if we are born



*Confucius, Laozi, and Buddha
(between 17th - 20th century)*



*Kung Fu-Tzu (Confucius)
(551 BC - 479 BC)*

into a situation where a free offer or selection among religions is prevented, we may at some point wonder whether the religion imposed on us carries true notions and what these are. In answering these questions, we may believe in the original creed but have reservations regarding its management. The fact that religious agencies are led and staffed by humans exposes them to human failings. They may commit errors and other lapses in dispatching their duties. The by far greatest threat to religions, their underlying faith, and followers is an abuse of power by human proxies for deities. This threat is great because of the great imbalance of power between gods and humans. Religions might not exercise this power. But their potential for its exercise alone is fearsome. The prospect of abusing this potential attracts illegitimate elements. They may view organizational advantages of religions, paired with decreased resistance and open mindsets of their followers, prime tools for their selfish purposes.

One of such purposes may be misappropriating resources on a personal supply scale by pretense of religious dedication and service. The risk such grifters pose seems controllable. But impostors may aim much higher to usurp, convert, and wield powers of religions for selfish secular or sectarian purposes. By impersonating service to a religion, they may try to reach levels of power that they otherwise could not reach or could only reach with more risk or effort. These ambitions may stretch as far as the potentials of religions will carry them. To come to power, usurpers preferably target religions with centralized or decentralized, hierarchical administrations because their structures seem best equipped to assume and exert domination. Usurpers may try to rise through the levels of such hierarchies or put themselves in leading positions through other means. Whatever rank they might reach in such hierarchies, to be safe they can never drop their pretense as long as the organization remains beholden to claimed divine service. They must justify all their behavior by this service to keep the religious apparatus working for them. Even in their changes to a religious system in their favor, they must hold the line that



*Count of St. Germain
(17th century – 1784)*



*David Hume
(1711-1776)*

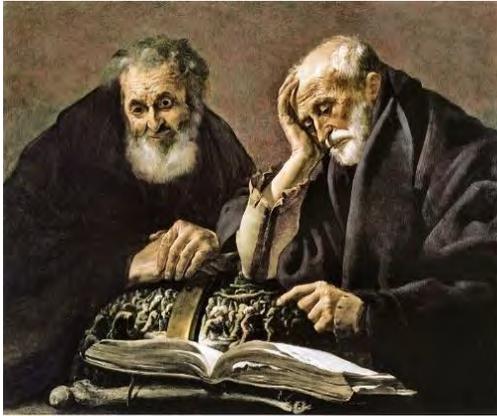
their variations represent the true faith and that opponents are to be attacked as heretics. Such ruses are often assisted by surrounding selfish pursuits with actual service. Usurpers may not even admit their secular or sectarian ambitions to themselves or to their inner circles. All this can make their unmasking difficult. And once they reach leading positions, use of hierarchical domination further reduces the chances of saving the religion. These susceptibilities make lasting conversions of hierarchical religions seem rather likely unless they are closely guarded.

To be most successful, usurpers may pursue absolute power. In forming this objective as well as its pursuit, they may take guidance from secular examples. However, the spiritual dimension of religions adds an opportunity to expand and fortify absolute power. Religions create this opportunity by establishing their gods as absolute sovereigns combined with establishing the principle of absolute obedience to these gods. This

subordination of humans to deities accords divine happiness absolute priority over the happiness of humans. Human objectives and pursuits are adjudicated by how well they fit into this divine priority. But there is another element to the priority of deities. Humans are not only expected to step back in favor of deities. They are expected to actively contribute to deities' happiness as top priority in setting their own objectives and conducting their pursuits. Human behavior is then judged by religions' imaginings of how deities require humans to behave in reverence and service to the deities. Even though religions make such absolute claims, they commonly assert to compensate them. Most benefits religions offer to followers for their subordination and service are said to be triggered by these very acts of granting deities priority. Religions commonly claim that true or supreme happiness can only be gained from an unqualified



*David Ricardo
(1772-1823)*



*Democritus (460 BC - 370 BC) and
Heraclitus (ca. 535 BC - ca. 475 BC)*

safer grasp of religions on subjects' commitments without honoring their end of the bargain. They still may have to give something to hold or increase their power. But the importance of non-secular means of happiness may let them get away without conceding much or anything of secular value. This threatens to drive the power imbalance they wield to extremes. And, of course, their religious services are hollowed out by their secular or sectarian activities as well. Thus, they stand to substitute benevolent religious domination with selfishness, edging out their happiness at the cost of subjects' happiness. In this process, they can build on the already existing objective of religions to minimize secular happiness. This objective springs by implication from the absolute priority of deities and the related subordination and servitude of humans. To optimize the benefits of gods pursuant to these objectives, rational principles concerning human happiness are only sanctioned to the extent they enable or do not distract from them. To effectively submit and serve, humans must be permitted to secure their existence and their means of service. But optimization of the relationship with gods requires humans



*Denis Diderot
(1713-1784)*

to be limited to necessities of common pursuits so they will generate and deliver a maximum of services and goods to the deities. This is usually tolerated since gods are believed to compensate for the loss through divine rewards. The great majority of religious rules deals with these imagined benefits and the obligations for which they claim to compensate. Religious affirmations of human happiness are for these reasons typically sparse and cut to basics. Illegitimate conversions of religions pick up on this consensual reduction of secular happiness to justify the selfish maximization of their abuses.

Followers may accept that limiting secular happiness entails the issuance of restrictive rules on objectives and pursuits. However, all too frequently, religions leave it at detailing these rules and only generally restate the common principles of happiness that remain still permitted



*Democritus
(460 BC - 370 BC)*

surrender and service to their deities. Such happiness is said to flow from the relationship itself and from more palpable benefits that emanate from resulting divine protection and care. Religions regularly assert that these benefits not only compensate followers for their sacrifices, but elevate their happiness to formerly unfeasible heights. The subordination and subservience commonly advocated by religions are thus said to promote the happiness of followers as well, creating settings in which both deities and followers can be happy.

Usurpers, on the other hand, mostly tend to view happiness as a zero-sum game due to their single-minded intent of maximizing their happiness in and through power. Following this objective, they may try to use the deeper and

subject to these rules. Despite a clear shortage of practical guidance within this sanctioned space, one might argue that the inclusion of common rules of happiness by religions has surely advanced these rules. I think such an argument is mistaken. It appears unlikely that nobody would have thought of common principles to be good ideas before the religions stating them were conceived. It seems unlikely because general principles showing promise for elevating human happiness are commonsense principles. They can be simply derived from the human condition. And there is proof in many cases that they had been thought of in same or similar form where a certain religion was previously unfamiliar. Religions co-opted pre-existing ideas about happiness for several good reasons. Confirming existing attitudes of people religions courted as followers was important to avert conflict. It made authority they asserted more palatable by



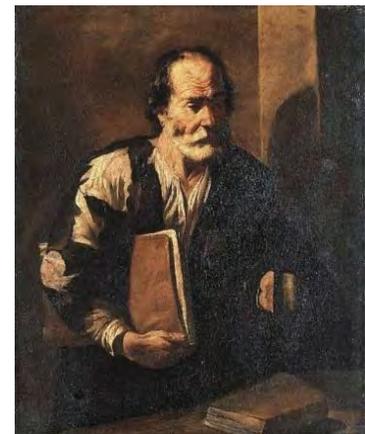
Dignāga
(ca. 480 - ca. 540)



Diogenes Laertius
(ca. 180 - ca. 240)

signaling they could be trusted in other principles they taught. Incorporating commonsense ideas would in addition have made them more relevant and complete. But another purpose was that religions had to include rules about commonsense ideas to effectively assert domination over them. Claiming universal application, they could not let secular happiness stay outside of that claim. They had to regulate secular happiness to be certain that secular ideas and practices were in conformance with their teachings and to root out sources for independent consideration and potential dissent.

Soon, the assimilation of commonsense principles of happiness by religions made it appear they had come up with them and were the chief authority on them. The commonsense general nature of shared principles and the eagerness by religions to incorporate them made discussions about them initially unlikely. Still, there were bound to be questions and diverse views on or surrounding the incorporated commonsense principles and their practical applications. Such issues are often still subject to ongoing debates. This is so because common rules of human happiness by their nature do not describe ideas with much practical particularity. But most of such discussions had and still have to be conducted outside of religions. This is because rational analysis and independent thought do not mix well with belief-based dogma. Following their dogma, religions issue edicts how commonsense rules are to be interpreted. These edicts are not open to discussion. But chances are that they do not satisfactorily resolve the issues they address because their primary intent is to be true to and defend religious dogma. Dogmatic restrictiveness and defensive attitude have the innate tendency of erring on the side of caution. That seems to be especially so when it comes to secular happiness so as not to detract from the transcendental happiness that forms the dedicated focus of religions. The application of dogma to secular happiness then tends to prevent, delay, and constrict rational perception, consideration, and interpretation of basic propositions regarding human behavior.



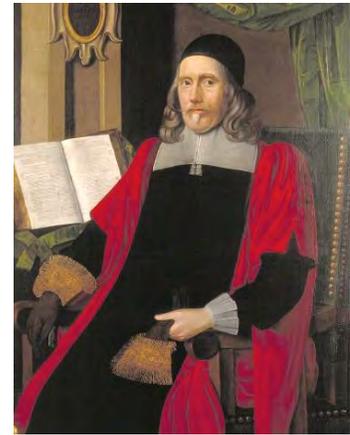
Diogenes of Sinope
(ca. 412 BC - ca. 323 BC)



Dogen
(1200-1253)

Dogmatic strictures tend to aggravate circumstances of followers who already suffer from religious minimizations of their secular pursuits. Together, the transcendental minimization of secular happiness and the dogmatic interpretations of remaining common principles of happiness have led many religions to lose touch with everyday concerns and regular life. Followers are continually tempted to flout these limitations on their secular happiness because they contradict the urgencies and rationales of their natural needs, wishes, and pursuits. This can be counteracted by religious policing and punishment of noncompliance. But doing so may require a degree of intrusion that is either impossible to sustain or bound to meet popular resistance. Beyond that, the denial of secular happiness and the curbing of fundamental concerns may raise chronic discontent and opposition that religions may wish to avoid or at least minimize.

To address these problems, religions may employ the preinstalled psychological mechanism of conscience, which causes followers to police and punish themselves. This natural mechanism deterring humans from conduct that causes unhappiness already is an important regular aspect of religions. However, religions may augment this mechanism to enhance compliance with their rules and secure their authority. They may do this by instilling a mindset that humans are weak by their nature and therefore prone to violating principles of good behavior. They may portray humans as incapable of living a successful life without religious prohibitions and guidance. They may institutionalize the problem of straying from correct behavior by labeling it chronically inherent in the human condition. This notion can be reinforced by their declaring an extensive catalog of normal human objectives and pursuits to be violations of religious mandates. The proscription of secular objectives and pursuits is then not only the reason why this control mechanism is necessary. It is also an integral part of making it work. This adds a perilous element of self-reinforcing ratcheting of restrictions. The oppressive fencing of prohibitions that religions tend to erect makes run-ins with it likely or even unavoidable. Such rules may serve to test followers'



Edward Coke
(1552-1634)



Empedocles
(5th century BC)

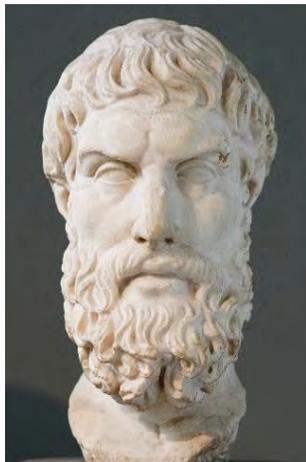
dedication. They may also serve to intimidate followers by calling them out for violations. But more than that, oppressive rules help religions to institutionalize guilt in their subjects. Their difficulties or inability to live according to these rules consistently confirm perceptions of unalterable and continual inadequacy. These in turn institutionalize fear of punishment and prompt surrender to such punishment as unavoidable. The targeting of secular needs, wishes, and pursuits as violations of religious rules causes ongoing cycles of violation and resulting guilt. This is all the more so since suppression increases their urgency, which increases the chances they will find one way or another expression in human behavior. Unable to cope with these religious curtailments and their effects on their own, followers may be motivated to entrust themselves

to religious supervision, even in basic secular domains of their lives. They may be driven to subject themselves to, or to give in to religious demands for supervision, confession, repentance, and compensation to obtain absolution for inevitable transgressions. By such increased involvement and influence, religions can curb violations of their code and expand domination over their followers.

This mechanism of guilt, admission, humiliation, and policing can control disallowed secular objectives and pursuits to an extent. However, their continual oppression combined with their built-in risk of escalation may increase the urgency of the suppressed attributes of happiness to levels calling for additional containment measures. This escalation seems inevitable since, however astute mechanisms for oppression might be, followers stay unnaturally intimidated and abridged in following natural objectives and pursuits. This discontent joins a related, general secular discontent concerning the demotion of humans and their happiness to sacrifice for and to serve religious



Epictetus
(ca. 50 - ca. 135)



Epicurus
(341 BC - 270 BC)

overlords and their happiness. Followers see significant measures of their efforts and means that could have benefited them systematically redirected. They are aware that although these are earmarked to serve the happiness of gods, this happiness is largely administrated by religious administrations in their place. While they may approve of uses that assist the religion or that flow back into secular needs, they may also witness appropriation of their resources by clergy. They may have misgivings that the prerogative of gods' happiness is exploited by their human representatives to enjoy a catered and protected existence. Religions may preempt related mistrust and criticism by disciplining representatives more harshly in their worldly happiness to focus their efforts more zealously on divine service. The dedication and fitness of clergy is thus regularly measured by renunciation of personal happiness and sacrifice for the purported greater happiness of serving deities. In this denial, they are not unique among followers but they are held to higher standards.

While this may quiet reproach, the resulting burdens on clergy join underlying pressures of instrumentalization at lay levels to require enforcement beyond impositions of guilt.

To maintain stability and to compensate for the organized deprivation of their administrators and subjects, religions have an ultimate tool at their disposal that by itself can assure victory. For this they focus attention on the most basic and prominent human need, the need to stay alive. They utilize the categorical denial of this need by inescapable death and the connected desperation and fear. They make a case that life after death is possible and promise such continued afterlife conditioned upon compliance with their



Euclid of Alexandria
(ca. 450 BC - ca. 350 BC)



Euclid of Megara
(ca. 435 BC - ca. 365 BC)

demands. They pair this promise with a threat of punishment in this or the promised afterlife in the event of a subject's non-compliance. With this promise and threat looming, they may get their administrators and subjects to voluntarily subordinate their needs, wishes, and pursuits to the need and pursuit of ultimate survival. Since such ultimate survival is only available to those who genuflect to the mandates of the religion, these mandates become solidly entrenched. The ultimate importance of survival may relegate all other concerns of happiness and motivate followers to subordinate, curtail, or sacrifice their happiness if they are so instructed by a religion. Followers may devalue their own happiness and happiness of other humans. Depending on the severity of religious utilization, the depreciation of secular happiness may deteriorate to existential levels. Religions might engage such attitudes to encourage service to them. They may enhance commitment by leading followers to view their life as a trial stage whose purpose is to qualify for the promised veritable life. They may provide guidance on which services in derogation of followers' happiness count toward that qualification. They may promise that righteous suffering in this life translates into an all the more glorious afterlife. This may prompt followers to do more than just lower the importance of their happiness. It may incite them to actively seek secular misery in sacrifice to earn such rewards. This is likely to spread misery to others in the process, either as a byproduct or in an effort to impose the same path to salvation on them. Thus, religions that once cared for ultimate happiness of current and potential followers can develop to produce opposite results for secular happiness. It can weaponize happiness to commit followers and make them willing to offer any, including their and other persons' ultimate, sacrifice.



Fa-Tzang (Fazang)
(643-712)

Encouraging or insisting on dereliction of secular happiness and instead a perverse pursuit of secular unhappiness advances the potentials of religious privileges of absolute domination and instrumentalization of subjects to their logical conclusion. It may also connect religions back to a past when these potentials led to cruel practices of coercion, exclusion, or extinction. Current religions may try to distance themselves from such archaic practices. They may declare that they have reformed or represent a contrasting new beginning. But their reality may not or not sufficiently bear out these differentiations. There may be justification for claiming this is due to conversions or perversions of religions that do not keep with their teachings or intent. However, religions cannot be excused from such deviations because they may enable them. We already looked at organizational susceptibilities to secular and sectarian takeovers. Another danger is that the spiritual nature of religions attracts delusional minds who search for explanations for their experiences and who are likely to misinterpret religious guidance. Religious dogma may be open to erroneous interpretations, or a dogmatic apparatus may not stand up clearly enough to misinterpretations. Whatever the particular grounds might be, a long



Eugen von Böhm-Bawerk
(1851-1914)

history of religious enforcement and strife that reaches into current events stands witness to the destructive effects religions and their usurpations have had, and to some extent continue having, on the secular happiness and very existence of followers and others.

It then becomes clear that religions possess a far-reaching array of tools to gain control of human longing for happiness and supersede or abuse secular happiness for their purposes. Whether and how they apply these utensils at their disposal may depend on their dogma, its management, and the resistance they encounter. It also depends on how much they have been able to foil conversion by secular or sectarian forces. Religions might not apply each of the described instruments, or not apply each to its maximum. They may give their subjects some leeway in carving out areas of secular happiness that are not tightly controlled. However, we can see that human happiness in its secular sense is not as important to religions as their assimilation of and to popular concerns, and their giving back of resources in the form of social services, might suggest. Most charitably, the contributions made by religious teachings to secular happiness can be



*Francis Bacon
(1561-1626)*



*Francis Hutcheson
(1694-1746)*

described as rudimentary, unsurprising, and incomplete. Initially and over time, their assimilation and preaching of valid commonsense ideas might have given these ideas additional clout. However, overall, religious influence has been an obstacle to humanity's development of rational principles of happiness. True to name, commonsense norms of happiness make common sense by themselves. They therefore would have naturally found growing acceptance and practice independent of their inclusion in religious teachings if rational discussion had been allowed let alone fostered. One cannot help but assume that humanity's development and implementation of these principles would have been more advanced by now if their rational consideration had not been stifled by religions. The systematic demotion and deferral of human secular happiness by religions has damaged its understanding, appreciation, and pursuit for millennia.

Religions may assert that such negative effects on secular happiness are insignificant compared to the additional sources for happiness revealed through the expansion of the human horizon into the divine. Such arguments speak to causes and experiences of happiness beyond those we can rationally know and consider. For this reason, they lie beyond the purview of philosophy of happiness. The review of religions in this presentation is therefore limited to possible and actual effects on secular happiness as a general phenomenon. None of my comments are directed toward the validity of spiritual beliefs or the happiness anybody might derive from such beliefs or their practice.

And even my comments concerning religions' correlations with and possible effects on secular happiness call for differentiation. "Religion" is an imprecise term and in other definitions may be more encompassing than the types of organizations that I have characterized. Material differences could be pointed out between religions that make my characterizations apply less or not at all. Not all religions have had opportunity or time to develop to display



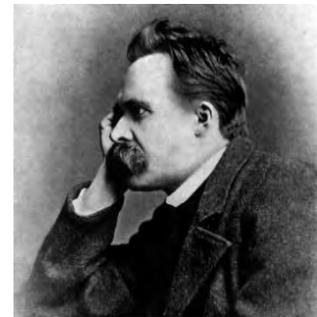
*Friedrich von Hayek
(1899-1992)*



Friedrich Hölderlin
(1770-1843)

the problems I described, and some may have been able to control them. But differentiation may also be due to their substance and related conduct. Some belief systems are less domineering and do not display problematic qualities I pointed out. Some may not be organized in manners that enable the sorts of developments I outlined. Some may set forth spiritual concepts or approaches that differ from the ones I described. Some may allow exchanges of views and rational argument concerning human happiness. They may contend or admit that humanity by its observable given nature is meant to freely live up to its potential, and not linger in subordination or servitude. They may reason that, however one might believe humanity came about, it seems difficult to argue that happiness is not part of the creative reality that led to us and leads us. They might ask why we were instilled in our creation with secular desires and capacities to build a better world if they were to be superseded by spiritual

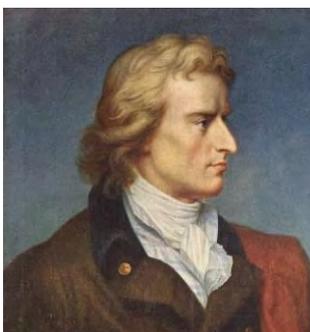
intervention. They may argue or concede our freedom to connect with and explore the creative logic of happiness in whichever way we find this works for us. They may ponder whether rational systems of happiness and spiritual systems can merge. Such belief systems that champion fulfillment of human potential may be categorized as spiritual philosophies or as humanist belief systems because they amalgamate rational aspects of, or a focus on, secular happiness with speculative elements. And even regarding those that include aspects of, or focus on, transcendental happiness, there is powerful evidence that they can have significantly constructive effects on secular happiness by inspiring good deeds that protect existential concerns. Their charitable work recurrently gives examples of some of humanity's finest qualities.



Friedrich Nietzsche
(1844-1900)

Still, however varied the stances and ambitions of religions regarding secular human happiness may be or may have been, history reveals religion overall as a blight on secular human happiness for as far back as records go. Admittedly, the negative effects have attenuated over time by internal reforms of religions and by the secularization of societies. But secular happiness is not likely to fully develop until humanity takes rational control of its concerns and develops sufficient self-confidence to master them.

6. Philosophical Authorities on Philosophy of Happiness.



Friedrich Schiller
(1759-1805)

To help us in this undertaking, we may look for rationally based authorities on happiness. We may hope to find them in academic philosophy, recalling what we have been told about it as standard bearer of enlightenment and humanism. And indeed, we can readily identify tendencies and movements in academic philosophy that have been instrumental in placing humanity and humans at the center of inquiry. Still, inadequacy in rational exploration is not restricted to popular and religious propositions concerning happiness. Theories of happiness in philosophy can and do limit themselves as well to favorite themes or tones, neglect aspects of happiness, claim commonsense insights as if they discovered them, and try to sell us on proposals that do not meet our desire for happiness. In many ways, such discussions are just

haughtier versions of their self-help cousins, hiding their prejudices and incompetence under a mantle of purported scientific respectability. But then again, they also have surprisingly much in common with a religious approach. A first sign of this is the strange persistence of philosophies of happiness through the ages up to current times with no or little change in these philosophies or attitudes toward them.

Arguably, this could be based on the fact that these philosophies of happiness are ageless for the ages and nothing about them warrants criticizing, adjusting, or developing. However, this is not what I observed. I observed a virtually complete absence of serious attempts to do any of the like. In contrast to other sciences, I could not see any sustained effort to improve the philosophy of happiness by developing it or superseding simpler or incorrect treatments of subjects with better insights. This does not mean that academic philosophy of happiness has not accomplished a progression of thought. It did occur because later philosophers considered work of their predecessors. But in very few instances is this progression documented to scientific points of actual advancement that improve on prior stages or leave them behind. Rather, authorities stand typically detached adjacent to all that came before and followed.



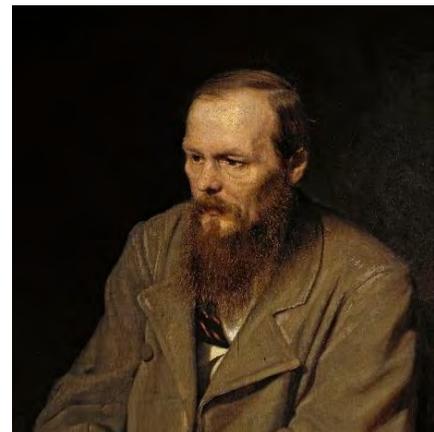
Friedrich Schelling
(1775-1854)



Friedrich von Schelling
(1775-1854)

Apparently, philosophers and their works, once they entered the pantheon of authority, became untouchable. Serious investigations into the relevance of their statements have been replaced, if they ever existed, with inferences of relevance based on that they made them. This pantheon of recognized authorities has been closely protected by a small community of academic gatekeepers who have been resolutely opposed to seriously criticizing any of its members and only accepting new pantheon members and gatekeepers who agree. As a result, philosophical treatments of philosophical authorities mostly bow to them in great reverence, keep them enshrined, and only dare to add translations, respectful comparisons, or interpretations to fix gaffs or gaps. Similar to the administration of religious belief systems, the principal objective of philosophical gatekeeping regarding happiness appears to be a

defense of the authority and the purity of its teachings at any cost. With this restrictive stance, institutional philosophy has become a musty, rationally disguised religion in its small, sequestered world, complete with gods, priests, dogmas, denominations, seminaries, confirmations, and ordinations. Its loyal canonization of venerated philosophical authorities and teachings has stifled discussion and progression regarding the philosophy of happiness. In comparison with religious belief systems, this has occurred with a less open but not any less effective passive-aggressive enforcement. As a chosen consequence, academic philosophy has generally reduced itself on the subject of happiness to endlessly ruminating and teaching its history. For any other theoretical or practical concern, philosophy of happiness is a dead science, if it ever was alive. All arguments in self-interested justification to the contrary fail for lack of evidence.



Fyodor Dostoevsky
(1821-1881)



Gaudapada
(ca. 6th century)

This self-disqualification of the philosophy of happiness as conglomerate of quasi-religions might in some respects be connected to the self-preservation of its institutions and their representatives. But it also has an important tradition in the circumstance that philosophy of happiness has had a most difficult time over the millennia to rid itself of religious domination and interference. Until recently, rational arguments had to be consistently and carefully clad in religious sourcing and affirmation to keep their authors out of trouble and to give their assertions any chance of finding consideration and acceptance. There is also broad indication that philosophers themselves restricted and filtered their thoughts and findings through the optics of the religions they embraced. Others were theologians and developed philosophical thoughts based on their belief systems. A third variety of philosophers established, intentionally or unintentionally, new religions or creeds. Even attempts to escape religious control were frequently affected by religious principles in that such attempts deemed it necessary to assume drastically opposing stances of beliefs to overcome religious control. By the sum of these religious influences, beliefs restrained and skewed the philosophy of happiness as a rational science and kept it from developing. By the time the philosophy of happiness had a healthier chance of developing independently, the traditions of philosophical institutions had already been firmly established. This explains in part why it continued in the same canonized vein by only selectively including contributions that developed within its traditions and did not rock the boat of past teachings.

Some may argue that, regardless of the past problems and current state of a philosophy of happiness, there is a prolific and long tradition of venerated minds deeply searching and thinking about rational answers to problems of happiness. Why should we not trust them to have discovered most or all of the answers when they and many others say they did? I once had those exact convictions and attitudes as well. I believed in the ordering powers of philosophy. However, my exhaustive search for theoretical and practical guidance on happiness among these supposedly great authorities resulted in almost complete disappointment. A disappointment so great that it caused me to lose interest in philosophy altogether for some time.



Georg W. F. Hegel
(1770-1831)



George Orwell
(1903-1950)

Let me tell you how this disappointment came about. When I started studying philosophy at the University of Heidelberg, I did that in support of my legal studies, not to find any answers regarding happiness. I was interested in philosophical foundations of laws and legal systems, going by the name of legal theory or philosophy of law. And I found these foundations of law in my studies of philosophy. But I rapidly understood that many of my fellow students were studying philosophy to find answers to questions about their lives, were looking for, if not specific answers, at least for a guiding framework. I recall my favorite professor responding to that expectation, stating in an introductory course that philosophy does not provide such guiding substance. Rather, he said, it teaches us analytical tools, mental flexibility, and tolerance for the validity of alternative approaches. I liked the mental gymnastics aspect. But philosophy not offering

substantive answers to humanity’s problems seemed to betray what I had been told throughout my life previously. I had grown up with the idea that philosophy was the fountain of wisdom for the improvement of the human condition. I had thought of legal organization as an important part to this improvement. But if there were no substantive values at the basis of legal arrangements, they could easily decline into detrimental states of all sorts. This concern made me realize that my interest in philosophy motivated by legal concerns had to be at its core an interest in human happiness. I could not accept the professor’s pronouncement and was determined to prove him wrong. In following years, I read every book and article I could find on the philosophy of happiness in the library of the Philosophical Seminary, at times branching out to the Theological Seminary nearby. Along the way, I became friends with the lady guarding the library entrance in the evening and the janitor assuring nobody was locked in at closing. But as much as I tried, nothing I read impressed me that philosophy had produced an authoritative understanding of happiness beyond rudimentary concerns at the basis of legal order.



*Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz
(1646-1716)*



*Gotthold Ephraim Lessing
(1729-1781)*

One of the most surprising results of my intense research was that philosophers could rarely agree on a definition of happiness. Many recited obvious basics. But almost as many discussed these basics only to derive or validate reductions, particularizations, perversions, and exaggerations they could use to build idiosyncratic versions of happiness. Others did not dwell on fundamentals, advancing straight to favored premises and explanations. Reading these definitions suggested to me they were competing who could come up with the most eccentric distancing from experiences of happiness. Many of them made a point claiming regular experiences do not qualify as happiness or at best at a lower echelon. It was therefore not very surprising that the authorities coining these disparate definitions would arrive at very different, often absurd instructions on reaching or maintaining happiness.

Another result of my research was that apparent summaries in secondary references were often pretty much all there was to the original texts. The reasons for this were many times not to be found in their authors’ intent. Rather, I discovered that sadly scores of texts authored by acknowledged authorities had not survived. At times, the only way one would know about these texts or even their authors is by reference or citation in other authors’ writings that did survive. One can only speculate about the loss humankind incurred from losing these texts. However, to the extent there was a record of the titles or subject matters of these texts, I could not see much of a loss for purposes of my research. And reading surviving fragments and attempts to piece them together to a philosophy did not impress me either. On the contrary, it made me wonder why so much attention has been given to them by institutional philosophy. I suspected this was due to a transfer of status from famous philosophers who cited them. Even where classic or other works were intact, most addressed issues of happiness in summary fashion. For commonsense principles, this was par for the course. But most authorities were not content stating those but tried to add a twist or derivative theory. However,



*Gratian
(11th century - ca. 1159)*



*Guru Nanak Dev ji
(1469-1539)*

they did not bother much with legitimization or expression of their premises, working out their arguments, or consequences of their theories. Rather, most introduced nonobvious premises for their theories, or theories themselves, as plainly observable truths. Numerous stances were not clearly expressed, many arguments never completed or advanced to a full theory. Thus, their modifying or additional points appeared like cursory outlines of ideas. In many instances, the fragmentary and poorly constructed arguments destroyed any credibility that their authors' recognition of commonsense general principles might have built. Credibility was also diluted by a pervasive failure to establish reasonable connections of philosophies of happiness to a universe of general principles, beyond some of them that were picked and interpreted in support. Reading these treatments of happiness made me wonder how they could have risen to such prominence and reverence in philosophical circles.

Then I found quite a number of philosophers who thought to have discovered the key to happiness in one or a few aspects of the human experience or in certain virtues. Quite a number of them seemed to give such arguments their all, writing extensively, at times obsessively, to demonstrate the reasonability of their partiality. Often, a reasonable argument might be made that there was something to what they advocated. Some were even brilliant in analyzing and describing subjects of their research. But their quite obviously unsupportable insistence that this relatively narrow slice was the whole pie or close to it, and their desertion and disregard of major aspects of human happiness made them appear pitifully limited. Here again, I wondered how such obviously deficient theories could find reception, respect, and even applause.

Still, such miscues could not equal works by acknowledged authorities that, with exception maybe of a few hints regarding their general concepts and intent, just did not make sense or were so ambiguous that they could serve as grounds for incongruent varieties of interpretations. Stylistically convoluted, bizarre or undefined in their language, and devoid of serious attempts to make themselves understood, these ramblings made me question their seriousness and the sanity of their authors. Reading their translations into other languages confirmed an exponential compounding of their mystery for readers. The enormous difficulty or sheer impossibility of deciphering



*Hanna Arendt
(1906-1975)*



*Henry David Thoreau
(1817-1862)*

much of what these texts state has protected them from criticism. It has also protected those who claim to understand them, making others who honestly cannot fathom these writings feel like there must be something wrong with their intellect or learning. For fear of being branded as imperceptive, honest readers are tempted to chime in with those who falsely claim to comprehend the works. They might even elevate their pretense and take advantage of the confusion by feigning additional insights in attempts to acquire indisputable cachet. As the number of disingenuous scholars and readers increases, soon nobody might be left with the courage or standing to state the truth. Or many who know better keep silent since the vague, incomprehensible, and absurd cannot be intelligently discussed. The result is vain foolishness, not science.

Reviewing these works or fragments of works, I could not help noticing that a sizeable share of the philosophical authorities had failed for whatever reason to sufficiently state or support their theories or even ideas on happiness. For some this was an obvious side issue they came across in other pursuits and felt compelled to remark something about in passing. But, surprisingly, others who made happiness an important ingredient or the focal point of their attention also allowed themselves shortcuts in their premises and deductions. Their apparent reliance in assertions about happiness on their personal impressions and hearsay of their own authority disqualifies their attempted contributions as opinions. Interesting as they might be, they fall short of the requisite that extraordinary claims must be backed by extraordinary evidence, including clarity



Heraclitus
(ca. 535 BC - ca. 475 BC)



Hermes Trismegistus
(2nd or 3rd century)

of such evidence. Others may grant to such authors more benefits of the doubt. They may pick through works to construe something worthwhile where their authors could not be troubled, or were incapable of, doing so. Some secondary writers have made careers from trying to join loose ends, fill voids, or reconcile contradictions through interpretations and reasoned speculations. Valiant as these attempts might be, they cannot make a sensible whole of something ill-conceived or incomplete.

Without doubt, some traditional philosophical authorities offer general insights and principles that could be, and some of which have proven, beneficial. But having a significant philosopher state them does not add to them because they are observations of common phenomena and derivative commonsense considerations. Like in religious doctrine, these observations and considerations are nothing more than restatements of principles that were preexisting in some expression and tradition. As beneficial as collecting and stating such general insights might be, they do not mend unknown holes in human knowledge. Arguably, the restatement of basic principles by philosophical greats added authority to these statements. In that sense, philosophy may claim to have added to human organization around basic needs. However, this involved a process across the span of human civilization in which incomplete, incorrect, and rough statements of fundamental principles cumulatively began to show definition. Though far from perfect, this contributory genesis was to be preferred to enable the emergence of common basic principles in the definition and pursuit of happiness. Too much authority along the way could have cast it into a mold that could have hindered or blocked its development. And in a few cases philosophical authority did have this effect temporarily. Deference to authority might have kept, and during some periods did keep, subjects from questioning its statements and from referring to their own general

of such evidence. Others may grant to such authors more benefits of the doubt. They may pick through works to construe something worthwhile where their authors could not be troubled, or were incapable of, doing so. Some secondary writers have made careers from trying to join loose ends, fill voids, or reconcile contradictions through interpretations and reasoned speculations. Valiant as these attempts might be, they cannot make a sensible whole of something ill-conceived or incomplete.

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Hiram Abiff
(10th century BC)



Hsun-Tzu (Xun Zi, Xun Kuang)
(3rd - 4th century BC)

experiences and considerations as comparable humans. The restatements of commonsense observations and derivative principles by acknowledged philosophical authorities could then have been counterproductive.

As it was, the commonsense nature of basic principles was mostly able to break through faulty interpretations and leave them behind. Where statements by philosophical authorities regarding fundamental principles are apposite, their general nature does not tell us much beyond basics of happiness. Their usefulness is exhausted by cataloging the common nature of humans, including their basic needs, wishes, and pursuits, and deriving therefrom the foundations for individual and social organization. Individual organizational foundations are about the essentials of arranging needs and wishes and their pursuit in a setting marked by individual effort. The social organizational foundations include a basic legal order and basic rights and

obligations that are derived from the common nature of humans. As important as these principles are, their commonsense nature made them easily detectable, especially for professionals looking for them. Nevertheless, it took philosophy millennia to collect these insights to some level of maturity and systematic classification. This may suggest that philosophy did more to misguide or hinder human development than contributing to it. But this suggestion may grant philosophy too much credit for affecting humanity's development. Apart from some temporary exceptions, it appears to have been ignored in the past as much as it is unnoticed today. Then again, even if it did not have much authority over how humans acted at any time, it could have arranged itself to speak clearly with a common voice on basic human rights and obligations. That this did not happen for such a long time until rather recently speaks volumes about institutionalized philosophy of happiness. In fact, it supports significant indications that these principles have become widely recognized and entrenched by action of other social forces, and only were picked up by philosophy as signs of the times. Still, social movements may have benefitted from the reinjection and voicing of their concerns and possible solutions through philosophies.



Hugo Grotius (Huigh de Groot)
(1583-1645)



Immanuel Kant
(1724-1804)

We may then give some credit to recognized philosophies of happiness for humanity's advancement toward a vital milestone, even if their contribution was slow and marred by misdirection. But we should further acknowledge that this is merely the starting point in the liberation and empowerment of individuals to dream and to pursue their dreams. Basic principles are by their nature not much addressed to assisting us in selecting our objectives and pursuits as individuals beyond commonalities. In this respect, philosophies of happiness have given even less guidance. In as far as philosophies focusing on human basics have commented on individual pursuits, this occurs mostly in arguments identifying them as building blocks of a societal scheme, to describe them as examples of aberrations

from favored practices, or to prove a point of philosophy not for their individual sake. Despite some acknowledgement of individual aspects to happiness, the institutional philosophy of happiness has thus failed to significantly contribute to helping individuals in developing them.

The poor performance of philosophy in advancing philosophy of happiness has not kept it from regularly congratulating itself on the subject. Despite the various shortcomings of philosophical writings on happiness, a limited number of them are endlessly cited, interpreted, listed, and compared in academic circles for their incestuous purposes or to elicit interest in non-academics. This frequently involves claimed actualizations of classic philosophies by more contemporary beliefs or insights. Few months pass by without an embellished reworking of the usual theories that never had much taste to begin with. This seemingly endless caravan of iterations what philosophers or confirming current authorities claim to have found out about happiness evidences how little they bear upon our reality and are able to advise on it now. There is good reason why most recited philosophies failed to find traction outside academic or selected other circles and remain largely inconsequential. The real world has passed on, and passed by, these philosophies. They will never earn much acclaim there because they are patchy, trivial, or unrealistic.



Isidore of Seville
(560-636)

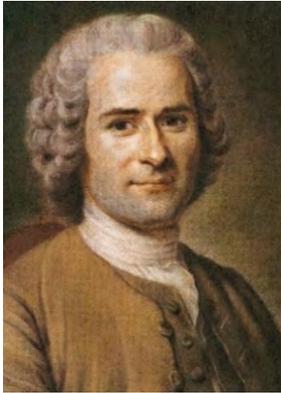


James Mill
(1773 -1836)

For those new to these purported authorities on happiness, it may be of some initial interest to find out what famous philosophers have said about happiness. And it may be cool to tell others about what one read to take and hold one's place in an educated conversation. But think about this: If there was practical substance to any of these classic teachings or claimed actualizations, why are they not widely practiced after leads of hundreds or sometimes thousands of years? Why do they require desperate repetitive marketing? Where is the result of any of them in the real world, in the lives of people, in their happiness? I have not heard of anybody saying, "I read about this philosophy, applied what I read, and am so much happier now." And why is it that we see the same old philosophies of at least the last two and a half thousand years regurgitated and compared without any serious attempt of developing them? Does that fact not bespeak that they are dead ends incapable of development? These stale, geriatric philosophies still carry a historical interest and may provide plentiful material for further research by such interests. But for someone trying to find a philosophy of happiness that gives practical guidance, these teachings are with very few exceptions a thorough waste of time and effort. They are intellectual placebos that cannot address the malady of human unhappiness. Apparently, many who have sampled the classics have arrived at this realization. This is why these philosophers and their works on how a human life should be organized are largely missing from contemporary discourse and why so many who look for answers are turning to other authorities.



Jean-Baptiste Say
(1767-1832)



*Jean-Jacques Rousseau
(1712-1778)*

what happiness is and how it should be pursued in generally acceptable ideas. But they spin them into directions or add to them in self-serving ways. To not give away the subjective character of their spin, they regularly attempt to sell it as a general principle or a derivative of recognized general principles. Only some may openly advocate others comply with their idiosyncratic standards. They may be able to afford this if they can attract followers by qualities that make followers long to be like or with charismatic creators or spokespersons of an ideology, or if they long to be part of an ideology's membership.

However ideologies may ingratiate themselves, they are intrinsically flawed because they dismiss and try to override the extensive uniqueness of happiness. For the sake of justifying their idea of a larger system, they have to fight the idea that happiness is subjective and individual in nature. They must fight the notion that telling others what happiness is and how to pursue it is



*Jinul Puril Bojo Daesa
(1158-1210)*

No harm no foul then. But this is not the entire history or present of philosophy of happiness. Philosophies that actually did or do have effects are regularly excluded from philosophical showboat reviews since they did not do well for humanity. These black sheep in the philosophy of happiness family are called ideologies. Their source is a conviction that other people should be like their creators and promoters or should adopt what these deem worthwhile objectives and pursuits. Although ideologies reflect subjective mindsets and preferences, they are comprehensive teachings that seem to have answers for all or most issues of human existence. If an ideology does not already contain comprehensive coverage of its subjects' concerns at its creation, it regularly develops such coverage. It does this to disguise its subjectivity and to prevent subjects from turning to their own judgment or to other influences. To assist themselves with this objective, ideologies embed idiosyncratic philosophies of



*Jean-Paul Sartre
(1905-1980)*

denying them their individual dignity and reality. To attend to the subjective ideas of their creators or promoters, they must convincingly argue happiness can be found in conformance with their subjective ideas as common ideals. Set on suppressing or manipulating us toward that objective, ideologies are keen on preventing subjects from unfolding distinct paths toward happiness. They may therefore induce or preserve conditions that keep us preoccupied with securing our existential requirements. Even by placing or keeping us in apprehension of insecurity regarding fundamental needs, they may have us switch to an emergency mode in which we give up on our particularities and fall in line. Understanding and controlling common fears and desires enables ideologies to make masses of subjects think, feel, and act according to their ideas. Ideologies take hold by suggesting to address our existential concerns through their ideas. To supplement their domination of our ways, they often suggest that individualized pursuits of happiness are pointless or harmful. Or they try to funnel or shape the individuality of our pursuits into conforming activities. They may also use archaic tribal and hierarchic notions that make us subordinate to and serve the greater good they purport to represent.

The essential lie of ideologies in trying to sell their subjective stance as generally indicated, objective truth makes them worthless. It also makes them dangerous because it produces oppressive ideas. Followers are likely to believe that people who disagree just have not seen the light of what is good for them and can justifiably be forced into happiness. Or they may turn the idea against themselves and resolve to subject themselves for their own good to the objectives and pursuits of an ideology even against their inclinations. Thus, ideologies incite zeal to convert oneself and others. They must do this because their objective is a practical implementation of their vision, and achieving this by artificial alignment demands comprehensive domination and management. It is then not a coincidence that ideological ambitions, strategies, and potentials resemble those of religions. To assert a comprehensive coverage of all concerns of their subjects, ideologies must not only suppress, but fundamentally replace, religions as contenders. To succeed at this, but also as a



*Johann Adam Weishaupt
(1748-1830)*



*Johann Georg Hamann
(1730-1788)*

individuals who build and administrate a comprehensive control apparatus to implement their doctrine closely resemble the hierarchy of some religions. And like some religions, ideologies are susceptible to be hijacked by interests intent on abusing ideologies for their personal interests. In this usurpation, impostors can take advantage of the fact that the underlying philosophies of ideological movements and these movements themselves already constitute reflections of subjective viewpoints claiming objective applicability. They can therefore rather easily assume power under a pretense of perpetuating the ideology or saving it against internal or external enemies. They may use gaps, limits, or ambiguities in the original dogma to expand or fill these with their ideas, at times perverting ideologies or propelling them to extremes. Or they may introduce more efficient or effective ways to exert power.

In an ultimate semblance to religions, and as a direct consequence of their thriving on exigencies, ideologies have divided humanity in tribal camps that are ill-disposed to one another without much ability to reach out across dividing lines. Their members are largely locked into their ideologies because their stances are not based on their sound judgment, but dogma that does not allow them to think or feel independently for themselves. This separation not only prevents people from cooperating. It also creates the source for endless conflicts in the defense of the dogmas and tribes formed around them. This is particularly so because ideological dogmas claim absolute truth. They cannot admit that there are other ways to define and pursue happiness, because this is the essence of their claim to power. Resulting adversities are not dreaded but welcomed by ideologies because they cement the exigencies they require to obtain and maintain their hold over subjects. Their insistence has cost humanity a persistent denial of happiness, and has inflicted pervasive misery and death. Even where an ideology is able to implement its



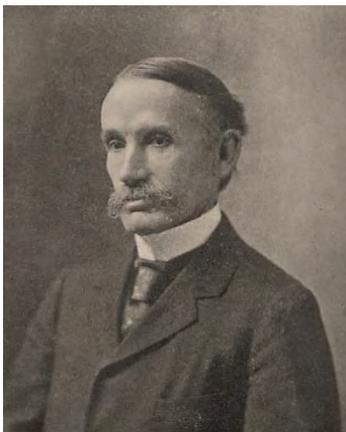
*Johann Gottfried Herder
(1744-1803)*



*Johann Gottlieb Fichte
(1762-1814)*

ideas undisturbed, these consequences tend to follow. They may follow even more severely because an ideology in this situation possesses the luxury of implementing its subjectivities to their bitter end. The assertions by authors of ideologies that they are bound to result in happiness for subjects assumes responsibility for the happiness of these subjects. This raises a duty in these authors to foresee and forecast negative potentials of their ideologies and to close the door on such potentials even if they benevolently believe the world can benefit from their ways. Authors of ideologies regularly fail such caution or courage to describe possible or actual downsides of their ideologies. Their failure may be due to lack of impartiality that led them to conceive of their ideology in the first place, and the resulting lack of foresight. But it may also arise because they quite rightly fear that raising caveats would weaken the adoption of their ideologies. So instead of creating ideologies that might be manageable because they incorporate some elements of truth, they bring to life monstrosities. By this lack of self-criticism, most ideologies become unviable and destroy any chance of lasting influence. This chance seems slim to begin with. Because of their idiosyncrasies, the required numbers of followers may not materialize. Even if they succeed, followers will find out sooner or later that the represented objectives and pursuits do not match theirs. Ideologies may then follow an inherent logic of burning out. This may occur by gradual decline and peaceful transition to a more popular movement. All too often, though, ideologies continue their rigid trajectory and burn out in an inferno of their insistence.

Even where such consequences have not yet occurred, ideologies are systemically incapable of improving the happiness of their followers. The benefits they might offer come at a disproportionately high cost even under the best circumstances because of what ideologies require for their own sake. In many ways, they resemble religions without the dimension of transcendental happiness. Their negative effects compound for people outside of the ideologies who have to endure their overbearing nature as



*John Bates Clark
(1847-1938)*

adversaries. Intentionally or unintentionally, they serve somebody else's needs and wishes first. Subjects' needs and wishes are regularly allowed only in conformance with ideologies. This may not be by direct mandate and enforcement, but indirectly by way of settings ideologies create for individuals within which to pursue their happiness. Subjects may be self-policing to get along and not imperil the happiness and security they have achieved or can achieve in the system. This may reserve intervention by the system to disturbances that do not resolve themselves at the subject level. More advanced ideologies also permit subjects to carve out pieces of self-determination in some aspects of happiness that do not contradict the system or are negligible to it. This creates valves for unhappiness that subjects experience from compliance against their wishes. And it serves as distraction to the detection of and resistance to a regime's oppressive nature. It permits systems to claim with superficial justification subjects

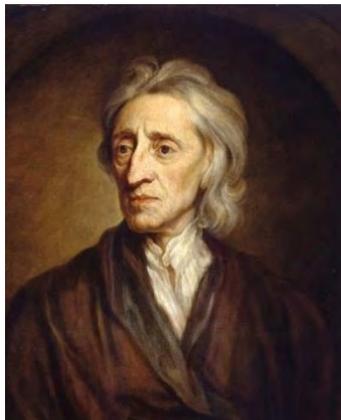


*Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
(1749-1832)*

are able to secure happiness their own way within the system. The indirect nature of a system together with the small pieces of freedom it allows may help to make subjects lose sight of how firmly embedded they truly are. If managed sensibly, such strategies can add to the longevity of an ideology until the system encounters or produces conditions that reveal substantial differences of objectives and pursuits between the regime and its subjects.

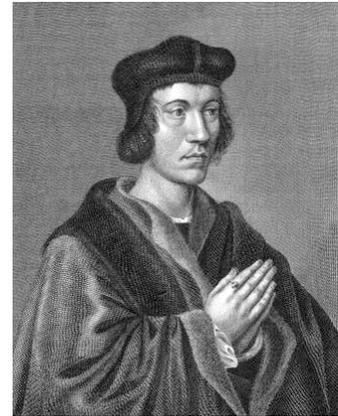
But clever strategies are not the only reasons why ideologies about happiness have successfully managed to run our lives in major aspects. The main reason is that we not only let them into the door, but welcome them. We do this because our happiness is our encompassing, overarching prime need. We chronically thirst for happiness and our inability to create or keep enough happiness may drive us into the arms of an ideology that promises to make it all good. When calamities strike that deprive us of the fulfillment

of existential needs or we suffer fear of such deprivation, ideologies find even the more self-reliant of us at our most vulnerable. These are moments when we are most ready to hand over the reigns over our life to someone who credibly promises to fix things. We already discussed that these dynamics encourage



John Locke
(1632-1704)

ideologies to create or perpetuate endangerment and its actualization. They may do so primarily to offer themselves as saviors. And these may succeed distracting us from our paths to happiness because there are now more pressing problems we need to solve. However, such intrigues may be unnecessary and their grand scale makes them difficult to implement anyway unless an ideology has already ascended to power. It seems much more widespread that ideologies emerge when, or bide their time until, calamities arise from extraneous sources. And even in the absence of a notable calamity, we may be receptive to the lure of ideologies. We may consider them because we always look for a better life and ideologies try to make us believe they have it all figured out for us. This becomes more likely if we identify parts of their teachings as applicable to us or parts of their system as helpful. We may concede some tradeoffs or baggage that trail along if an ideology seems capable of helping us produce happiness in sizeable ranges of our concerns. And we may like the idea that all concerns are taken care of in an ideology even if we will have to press ourselves into its mold to meet this goal. Ideologies might need this attractant to establish their rule because no sufficient exigency exists or can be created. They might at least initially play to these concerns, which tend to hide their less agreeable aspects, risks, and ultimate intent. They may encounter diminished thresholds in people looking for guidance to subject themselves willingly or allowing ideologies to take over. However, once we allow a system to take hold that obstructs or prevents our choices in parts where we disagree, we have sold parts of our souls. We might think we will be able to examine and modify the system or remove us from it and pursue our own path if we deem the price becoming too high down the road. The problem with



John Fortescue
(1394-1477)

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John Maynard Keynes
(1883-1946)



*John Rawls
(1921-2002)*

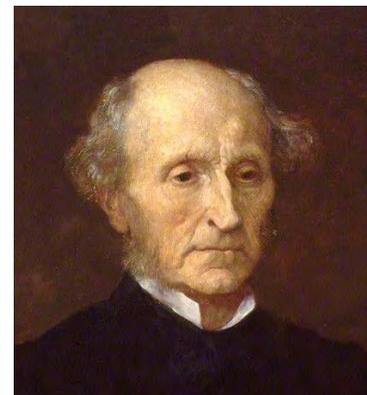
this is often that systems may charge a discouraging high price for not going along or forbid noncompliance altogether. Then again, we may already have resigned to continue in a system after becoming embedded in it since extracting ourselves from it might be too painful or if there is no viable alternative for us outside the system.

All these issues suggest that following ideologies originating in the minds of others is generally a foul idea to pursue one's happiness. Once we understand the track record of ideologies, it may not take much more to have us realize that they cannot lead us toward happiness, at least not the best happiness we can reasonably imagine. But what alternative is there beyond the sources we already considered? Maybe we need to replace our emotional intuition with scientific evidence.

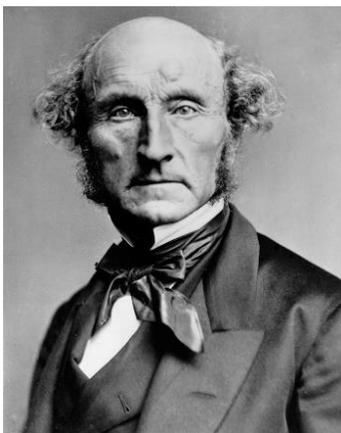
7. Happiness Studies by Sciences Beyond Philosophy.

Relatively recently, sources cited as authorities on the subject of happiness have included contributions from empirical sciences beyond philosophy. True to their creed, these so-called "happiness studies" try to define happiness in ways that can be quantified and qualified. Because of their sourcing in science, they promise objective insights into happiness. Their claimed innovation gave hope, and for a number of years the media were filled with their findings, and best-selling books about them were flying off the shelves.

The big hoopla about this purported new science made me look at its approaches intensely. I was hoping it might give me answers where self-help recipes, religious teachings, and institutional philosophy failed. But this optimism did not bear out because happiness studies make the same cardinal mistake the failed prior approaches have made. They are not giving sufficient credit to the fact that happiness is a highly complex personal and idiosyncratic experience that hinges on a myriad of factors in each individual's past, present, and expectations for the future. This reality of happiness simply does not lend itself to the kind of abstractions happiness studies are trying to establish. Trying to ignore this accuracy problem, they attempt to classify and measure experiences of happiness



*John Stuart Mill
(1806-1873)*



*John Stuart Mill
(1806-1873)*

and their causes and to derive generally relevant principles. They only seemingly achieve success in this because their objective of generalization coincides with the coarse and blunt approach of which they are capable at this time, and which they must follow to make any applicable statement. In other words, an empirical scientific approach can currently only survey human happiness from generalized viewpoints and can only provide generalized results. It has to generalize disparate individuals and their circumstances into common categories to be able to compile and evaluate data elicited about happiness. The best results this can yield are general types, ranges, or averages of reactions to causes or types of causes. A realization of this limitation seems to have been the main cause why the widespread initial enthusiasm that empirical sciences could significantly contribute to an understanding and improvement of happiness has quickly faded.

The underlying reason for this limitation is that the objects of study are intertwined with an entirety of exterior and interior circumstances of persons and subject to interactions between these circumstances. These individual sets of circumstances and interactions constitute diversified settings in which happiness studies try to quantify or qualify occurrences of happiness. The vast particularities of these entireties stand to affect the happiness or unhappiness individuals draw from particularized events or situations. And because these entireties are likely to vary from person to person, they stand to affect their happiness or unhappiness differently. But happiness studies do not possess a sufficient understanding how the details of such entireties of settings affect results they are trying to assess. All they can do is assess partial or complete commonalities of the human machine of happiness. This works well for fundamental, common needs and wishes and the commonsense principles humans have already derived and of which they can be accurately aware by their own observations and insight. But it does not work well at all for higher hanging fruit of insight about our personal happiness of



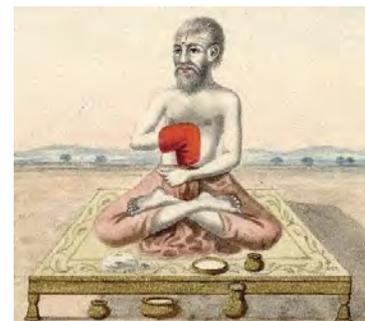
*Joseph Butler
(1692-1752)*



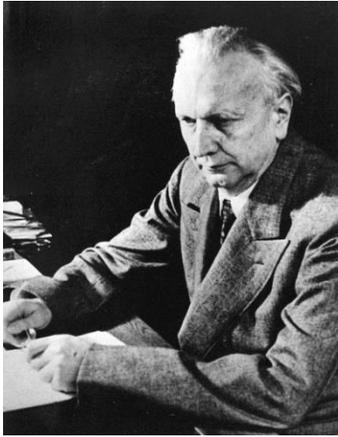
*Kabir Das
(1440-1518)*

which we may not already know. Happiness science inquiries into these areas have to allow for possibilities of and deviations by idiosyncrasies in their descriptions of results. To say anything approximately valid about personal happiness at all, happiness studies must generalize something distinctly individual. They must operate within margins that allow for great varieties of possibly changing circumstances to be included. Happiness studies might try to order and narrow this variety of circumstances for which they must make allowances by types of circumstances whose presence or absence they assess. But there are multitudes of types, selections, constellations, and possible interactions of relevant circumstances. Many cannot be excluded since they are regularly present in humans, just not likely in same or similar articulations or configurations. Including them despite variances does not advance the accuracy of happiness studies much. And marking differentiations among the various types, constellations, and possible interactions of relevant circumstances as relevant particularities causes countervailing loss of general authority. And it still must sacrifice exactitude since many remaining dissimilarities must remain grouped together. This may make us question the justification for differentiation. But without it, generalizations fall flat as commonplaces.

The most this typology allows is to show general correlations of some very few types of individual circumstances. So happiness science might be able to describe universal or weighted relationships between selected causes and effects. It also might describe in general terms the dynamics of what happens at what rate when we add or subtract one or the other circumstance. But it cannot establish useful answers beyond pointing out general relationships between a few crudely circumscribed causes and effects. It cannot tell us how we might cope with our much more complex reality of human happiness. As a new science, this may be all it can try to do at this time. Maybe someday there will be a way to account for and to comprehend every factor and occurrence entering individual happiness and unhappiness. But with currently primitive tools and methods, happiness science cannot tackle this complexity. What are these tools and methods and why are they so imprecise? Answers to these questions emerge when we review the practical challenges which happiness science must face.



*Kapila
(6th - 7th century BC)*



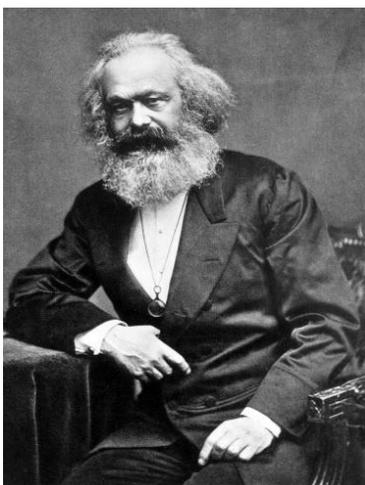
Karl Jaspers
(1883–1969)

One intractable problem happiness studies face is making certain that circumstances or events they observe can be controlled or otherwise standardized. Already occurring circumstances, events, and constellations among them may be too untidy. In real life, external occurrences and their results may overlap with other occurrences and their results and may play out differently depending on such overlap. And how subjects perceive and react to them is bound to be as different as individuals and their previous and concurrent experiences. To reduce this complexity, happiness science may conduct experiments in which defined circumstances are introduced to selected individuals who carry certain characteristics. The experimental constellations may progress to add or subtract factors so that the bearing of each can be studied. But what really can be extracted from the isolation of occurrences if it introduces artificiality into the experiment. Subjects may react differently if they can distinguish the experiment from real life.

Beyond that, reactions to isolated events may be very different because real-life events do not typically occur in isolation. Even if such isolation could be created for the moment, the overlap of occurrences before the experimental isolation may not be controllable in their lingering effects on the subject. More realistic insights might be gained by introducing real events into real life. But then we are back to the messy disorder that makes it difficult to ascertain causes and effects. Even selecting individuals for their similarity threatens to introduce too many remaining variables into observations to draw conclusions that exceed the mundane. Similar individuals may still carry so many interfering distinctions that results must still be generalized. If sufficient similarity can be established, selecting similar individuals diminishes the applicability of conclusions to dissimilar individuals. And how do we determine and gauge relevant similarities and dissimilarities in the first place? It appears we run into the same problems we encounter with nonexperimental research.



Karl Leonhard Reinhold
(1757-1823)



Karl Marx
(1818-1883)

Both external and personal circumstances seem to possess too many variables among individuals that in themselves are subjected to variability to find out anything beyond very rough conclusions, even in experimental settings. Without having studied these variables, and the differences in the presence and articulation of variables probable to be different for and in each person and constitute moving targets within persons, one does not know which ones influence the outcome in what way. This is of course the objective of research and experimentation, but one would need at least some of this clarity beforehand to create studies that can draw useful conclusions. And what conclusions can one reasonably expect to make even if one has ascertained all participating factors. And what are we even measuring? Are we looking for absolutes or relative quantifications? How can we detect common denominators among persons? And how do we compare their measurements? These issues beg a larger question what happiness science can accomplish.

Of course, one could study humans like one would study an animal in its natural habitat. This approach is nothing new. But such studies deal with simpler subjects and circumstances and aim lower in the knowledge they wish to distill from their studies. Happiness of animals stands to differ from the happiness of humans as a consequence of both physiological and environmental differences. While some animals display happiness in ways humans can recognize, the happiness of most animals may be determined by whether they diverge from their ordinary behavior, have a lesser than average life span, or exhibit physiological changes. These are important pointers regarding human happiness. But the complexities of humans, their happiness, and their circumstances far exceed the parameters of animal studies. One would be hard pressed to define humans' natural habitat and their typical behavior in it because they live in so many different areas and conditions, undertake so many different, specialized activities, and because



*Karl von Hartmann
(1842-1906)*



*Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel
(1772-1829)*

they have augmented mental capacities that can react in so many ways to a great variety of influences. Whether as a cause or as a consequence, differentiations among humans as individuals are generally much more pronounced than among individual animals. And so is what makes them happy or unhappy, how happy or unhappy it makes them, and how life aspects work together to determine overall happiness or unhappiness.

Still, empirical happiness researchers seem to believe they can draw some valuable conclusions about human happiness from analyzing cumulative data. This belief is based on the fact that, as members of the same species, humans share fundamentals of how they must, and how they like, to live their lives. The belief that useful insights can be obtained seems supported by the facts that humans can reflect on their happiness and can communicate about it in absolute and relative terms. Based on these abilities, happiness studies are putting their subjects to work asking them to describe what is going on inside of them regarding their happiness. Yet, one soon realizes that human capacities to communicate about their emotions of happiness and unhappiness are limited. Nor are they always aware how they arrive at their specific or general state of happiness or unhappiness. To describe in some detail beyond good and bad how we feel generally or about a certain occurrence, we may deem it necessary to resort to flowery language. But words are poor transmitters of emotions, and so we must hope that others can and will reconstruct the emotional qualities we try to describe with rational words. The metaphors and nuances of such emotional translations appear to be more at home in the province of art. Happiness seems similarly difficult to categorize and quantify as love, which does not appear to be a coincidence because these emotions are closely intertwined. Immediate subjectivity permeates them and anything we can say about them. It seems therefore difficult to base scientific insights, which must by their nature be characterized by rational assessments and comprehension, not compassion, on their expressions.



*Lao Tzu (Laozi)
(6th - 4th century BC)*



Lao Tzu (Laozi)
(6th - 4th century BC)

Empirical science then deems it necessary to retreat to communications about happiness that reflect a rational approach. The closest happiness science could get to communications of happiness in rational terms has been an intensity scale that ranges from very happy to very unhappy in conversational increments. Subjects are asked to qualify their impressions as happiness or unhappiness and quantify their strength. While this sounds simple enough, how does one assess what people mean when they say they are happy or unhappy or express any state in between or at the extreme ends of this scale? How does one assess whether subjects are honest with themselves or with the person asking? How does what subjects say and feel in terms of happiness and unhappiness compare to what other people say and feel? The characterizations that happiness science is using are very imprecise descriptions to reflect what people are feeling and there is little telling if they communicate or even can communicate what they are feeling. And these characterizations are all the more imprecise since we do not know about possible differences among individuals in the range or relative weight in scales.

Problems with the verbal expression of happiness go beyond imprecisions in expressing points on a scale or the comparability of scales. Before we even get to these difficulties, we must define what happiness is because different ways of defining happiness are bound to yield different answers to the above stated questions. Since both researchers and their subjects use this term in happiness studies, one should describe happiness according to the scientific definition and compare this definition to what happiness means to the subjects of a scientific study who communicate about it. Obviously, insights are best obtained if the definitions match. Situations where they do not match introduce additional complexities that science must handle in its quest for useful statements and conclusions about happiness.



Leonardo Bruni
(1370-1444)

So how should one define happiness for purposes of scientific qualification and quantification? Happiness feels different for each need and thus each combination of needs. If this were not the case, fulfillment of one need would satisfy other needs. People feel a variety of states and types of happiness or unhappiness contemporaneously according to the satisfaction status of each



Lev Shestov
(1866-1938)

of their needs. But how different are these sensations of happiness and in what way can they contribute to an overall sensation of happiness? Although there are different types of happiness, their states seem to have an effect on one another. To what extent is it possible for individuals to sense different kinds and express the states of happiness? Can subjects sufficiently distinguish among them? How do types and levels of happiness interact? Can subjects be aware of and express this interaction or its components adequately in context or isolation? Or should we look at happiness as a composite? Should a definition recognize a hierarchy among different kinds of happiness in correspondence with a hierarchy of needs? Should needs be categorized according to whether they are capable of producing unique or interchangeable happiness? Do assessments of happiness allow for

particularizations of needs in wishes? Defining happiness as the securing of basic needs in a generic fashion will yield different results than defining it as a more elevated or individual matter. Covering basic needs that allow people to do what they really want might be seen as only a starting point for happiness, a milestone, or the ultimate destination. Should happiness be distinguished according to whether it describes different stages of happiness reflecting its pursuit, gratification, and memory? How do we account for diverse and sometimes contradictory phenomena in the accrual, presence, and fading of happiness relative to inducing events? Individuals can be happy looking forward to prospects that may not materialize. They may also be happy with pursuits without knowing or reaching a result. They may be happy with their aspirations even if they have not started pursuing them or experience setbacks. They may not be happy with reaching a goal because it is not what they imagined or because they might already have set their sights further on



Lucius Annaeus Seneca
(4 BC - 65 AD)



Ludwig von Mises
(1881-1973)

new objectives. They may look back in nostalgic happiness and it may not correctly recall their former happiness or its causes. Once people reach their objectives, they may be unhappy with nothing much else left to do. They may be unhappy if everything they desire is just handed to them. So happiness changes in the anticipation, course, and accomplishment of pursuit. At what point in this development do we measure happiness? Is the absence of happiness or unhappiness their respective opposite or should it be a neutral state? Do definitions depend on the factors defining each individual? Should resulting differences be taken into consideration or ignored? Can a common definition excluding people's peculiarities be found? Do definitions evolve as experiences develop and should such an evolution be taken into account or discounted? Do subjects even have a firm idea of their happiness and should they be allowed or even encouraged to consider their definition? Should they instead be asked to relate unreflected, immediate impressions? How do we account for differences among individuals in their reflections about happiness?

All these definitional questions cause problems for the scientific study of happiness. This untidiness may lead scientists to reserve the definition of happiness for themselves. How much confidence can they have in their scientific abilities if they admit not having a firm grasp on what happiness is. But scientists involved in happiness studies often cannot agree on a definition of happiness.

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Mahavira (Vardhamana)
(6th century BC)



Maimonides
(1138-1204)

In many instances, they try to support philosophical theories they follow by empirical evidence. Such efforts may be regarded beneficial because so often philosophies of happiness are deficient on empirical reflections of their theories. However, the hoped-for empirical founding or firming up of philosophies rarely materializes. Even their invalidation may not be pursued or obtained. Too often, researchers follow the prejudices of philosophical schools of thought to a fault. They tend to focus on partial aspects of happiness that they postulate to be the entirety, leading to a byzantine mess of differentiations and debates. Though they may make valid points, their partiality would have to be balanced and they would need to be joined and reconciled to correctly reflect the phenomenon of happiness. As it is, research methods and results of happiness science

are tainted by incomplete horizons. Going down different rabbit holes, their outlooks and outcomes are difficult to reconcile. Maybe defining happiness could be an objective of research and not necessitate definition at the beginning? But then how does one know what subjects and researchers are talking about when they discuss happiness and unhappiness? And how does one make sure they have the same ideas about what happiness is? Maybe it would help to share a definition of happiness with subjects and ask them about their happiness as defined in the question? However, that may not match subjects' understanding. Questions may then not elicit responses following the definition implied or expressed in the asked questions. Should subjects be permitted to state their own definitions of happiness as they perceive happiness or should they be permitted to choose from a menu of definitions? If these definitions are not the same, can subjects accept, and respond according to, a definition that differs from theirs? Does it even make sense to ask that they adjust their definitions of happiness to those given to them? Should multiple definitions be permitted to coexist and grouped together? What would it mean to exclude incongruencies



Marcion of Sinope
(ca. 85 - ca. 160)

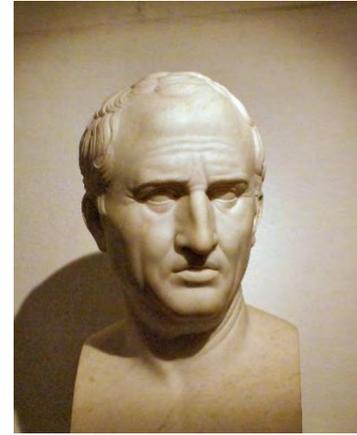
from a scientific survey of happiness? Should science just take in the encountered range of subjects' definitions and attempt to sort out their variety after collecting responses? And how can scientists ascertain valid reconciliation processes? These are some of the questions this type of research would have to answer to claim validity but generally fails to do so.



Marcus Aurelius
(121-180)

One could try to circumvent these issues by finding and measuring a physical response that regularly occurs when people say they feel happy or feel any other level on the scale. Such an indicator may be a precursor, a participant, or effect of happiness. For any of these, it would be difficult to equate its presence with the emotion of happiness itself, its type, or its intensity. Assuming correlations to physiological indicators can be established, can we conclude anything from them but

that the totality of circumstances bearing on happiness has coalesced to result in certain levels of an indicator. Arguably, the happiness caused by an occurrence can be measured by physiological deviations caused by its introduction, and different physiological indicators are identifiable for a number of different needs. However, the effect of such an occurrence cannot be measured without its correlation with all other factors in a person's life bearing on their happiness at that time. It is therefore bound to fluctuate with the person's situation and disposition. These personal details can work as reinforcements or as depressants on happiness and its physiological expressions. Also, identifying physiological indicators for happiness does not necessarily assist us in defining happiness. Rather, the opposite is likely to occur. We can only accept a physiological indicator as reliable if it indicates incidents we already otherwise identified to induce happiness and if it matches their communicated scale. And assuming one



*Marcus Tullius Cicero
(106 BC - 43 BC)*



*Martin Heidegger
(1889-1976)*

succeeds correlating physiological markers with what people say about their happiness, how can we confirm that they correctly quantify happiness? We may display a certain percentage more or less of a substance that has been found to increase or decrease with happiness. But how can we prove a direct relation of a physiological measure to happiness? Can we feel quantifications in sufficient detail? And can we match this detail to the rough quantifications by which people communicate their levels of happiness? These questions make it appear that physiological indicators of happiness are subject to similar criticisms of imprecision and possible error as their verbal counterparts.

But physiological indicators carry an additional risk because they may give rise to the idea that their manipulation or artificial induction can produce happiness. Mistaking happiness as merely a good feeling, such an approach short-circuits the joint purpose of happiness in correlation with unhappiness to motivate and steer us in securing our existence and thriving. Preventing our exercise of these essential functions by simulating them or their results constitutes an ultimate betrayal that places us in danger of unhappiness and death. Shortcutting us to a mere feeling of happiness helps us as much to achieve happiness as any other mind-altering drugs. They are matched or exceeded by extreme unhappiness when we wake up from the fake euphoric dreamworld they temporarily instill and discover that nothing we experienced was real and that we have wasted precious time to secure a basis for actual happiness. But rather than rue our betrayal, the harsh contrast of our reality may make us yearn to go back under the influence of happiness-inducing drugs. They are then opposites of medications that fight imbalances preventing people from the production of happiness-inducing events.

For lack of notable answers about causes or influences of happiness, happiness science concentrates on phenomena not triggered or affected to an expected extent. It points out as a major revelation that many of us spring back to their normal levels of happiness after events cause variances. Or that



*Max Horkheimer
(1895-1973)*



*Max Weber
(1864-1920)*

a variety of people do not let a variety of events affect their happiness much in the first place. They conclude that some individuals are more susceptible in their happiness to life's ups or downs. They pronounce that dispositions run by inheritance or influence in families. They report that people's outlook on, or experience of, happiness can be predisposed by settings and by prior experiences. As if we did not already know this. Research telling us that our observations in these respects are accurate does not help us. And generally quantifying and qualifying these phenomena of susceptibility, bounce-back, resilience, and normalcy does not matter much for our individual happiness. They result largely from deeply rooted personal factors that are complicated or impossible to adjust, and happiness studies offer very little in this respect.

On an even higher level of generalization, copious attention has been given to comparing the relative happiness of countries and cultures and to the issuing of rankings in a few selected categories of happiness as well as overall happiness. However, the dullness of qualifying and quantifying happiness and following its causes only permits vague comparisons. Results are of even less utility than those derived within a country or culture. This is so because these competitions of who is happier and who is the happiest compare expressions and concepts of happiness from a range of different cultures and languages, and bunch together individuals with at times very different settings within the areas they compare. Without a precise understanding of resulting differences and making corrections for them, such studies compress massively different circumstances into biased and misleading denominators and judgments.



*Mencius (Meng Ke)
(4th century BC)*

All these issues encountered by empiric research of happiness limit anything one can tell based on broad scientific studies about the causes of happiness. They limit happiness studies to correlations that are so pronounced that they become clear despite these problems. Being limited to general observations and deductions that are shared prominently by humans through their accumulated everyday experiences, this kind of science must as of yet omit individual parameters of happiness and their complex interactions.

Its outlook and methods must focus on measuring the general modalities of basic needs satisfaction and dissatisfaction with an only limited review of articulations of such needs into wishes and manners of pursuit. What it reveals then are common denominators for basic happiness and general statements about what makes some, more, most, or all people happy or sad combined with statements about distributions over ranges indicating the intensity of happiness or unhappiness. This gives rise to a question how superior such insights are over the commonsense insights they trace.



*Michel de Montaigne
(1533-1592)*

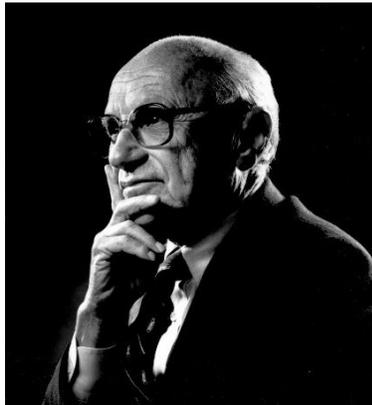
Arguably, happiness science offers a significant advantage beyond commonplaces in being able to quantify happiness as a matter of scientific insight. It can determine what types of causes make what percentages of what types of people happy to a roughly expressed level of happiness. In other words, one might be able to say that individuals of a certain profile have a better or a lower chance of generating generalized types or levels

of happiness from certain types of objectives or pursuits. This may be an insight whose exact quantification we did not know. But such an increased accuracy on something of which we had a rougher idea based on our experiences does not help anybody with their happiness. For one, it does not benefit someone who does not fall within the indicated research categories. And even for persons who qualify under researched categories, the insight from happiness research is not worth much. That there is a certain percentage of people similar to me in certain respects can be useful or disturbing. But it does not help me in my interactions with other people because I will have to gauge, and react to, each of them on their own terms. Nor does it help me to improve my happiness because chances are that I might not fall within the percentages of the researched categories that have experienced a described effect. And because effects and their indicators are vague, I may have difficulties relating them to me. I also may have distinguishing other characteristics or circumstances that lead to a different ultimate result for me. Giving me exact polling on what others find more or less happiness inducing or unhappiness inducing and what they do to what percentages is



Mikhail Bakunin
(1814-1876)

unhelpful since I do not know how their dispositions and circumstances differ from mine. I might use scientific insights of what makes others in similar classes happy to see what it does for me. But this is information I can collect simply by being attentive to me and my surroundings, and with much better acumen because I can compare detailed personalities and situations. And such information is useless to me if I have tried or considered acting according to it and already rejected the proposition.



Milton Friedman
(1912-2006)

The only benefit of such research I can perceive is informing someone to use such information in dealings with multitudes of others. Much of happiness science seems therefore like polling by a different name. Individuals and associations whose success depends on certain quantities or qualities of people acting, or viewing things, a certain way may use data and conclusions of happiness studies. They may use them

to target identifiable individuals, or individuals as unidentified members of statistical groups. One might think this is not objectionable because it stands to give people what they want. But such information is as easily accessed to make people unhappy or to exploit their unhappiness, and even their happiness, or potentials, for manipulative purposes. Even without a lot of sophistication, happiness research can be converted for propaganda purposes to manipulate individuals, groups, and societies into certain views and behaviors. For instance, it can be misused to tell people that they live in circumstances inducing more happiness than they actually experience. This may sound like a ridiculous proposition, but can be a powerful instrument of control. If people get the notion that others around them are happy, they may relate their relative unhappiness to personal failings or simply bad luck. They may relent on attributing fault to more systemic failings and therefore not feel systemic change is necessary to raise their happiness. This potential may tempt regimes of any persuasion to employ happiness science to assist them. It may be used not only to hone their targeting for subsequent manipulation



Mo Ti (Mozi)
(470 BC - 391 BC)



*Murray Rothbard
(1926-1995)*

but also in the manipulation. This could be accomplished by outright lying to the populace about research results. In more open societies in which such schemes might come to light, happiness research itself may be manipulated to suggest nonexistent correlations or suggest correlations that do not exist in presented quantifications. The many technical and substantive problems burdening happiness research offer many opportunities for such mischief.

A simple method to manipulate research and obtain inaccurate answers is to use variances in how subjects define their happiness or pinpoint it on a scale, giving preference to persons who would be more favorable to the government. Or authorities might attempt to suggest definitions beneficial to them and only

query about circumstances relevant pursuant to such definitions. This, like any other manipulation, would of course be particularly effective if subjects did not have their own firmly considered ideas. Apart from utilizing definitions of happiness, governments may posit questions in ways and on topics that tend to elicit favorable responses. They may over-proportionally question persons or types of persons who respond positively. They may place polled individuals in an apprehension that negative responses might have negative consequences for them. They may invoke national or tribal pride. Or, regardless of the conditions of happiness in a society, ruling elites may engage happiness polling as an instrument to show that government reacts to the needs and wishes of the populace. While there may be constructive aspects to this, the institution of such measures begs the question how government could be at such a distance from the populace to make this polling necessary. Does it not prove that government currently is not a fair or effective representation of the populace and its preferences? And could polling not be employed as a false or superficial sign that the populace is being heard? And could polling not be manipulated to skew or override elections, particularly when its immediacy favors a particular outcome? These dangers of polling in government affairs are increasingly more evident as it is increasingly employed.



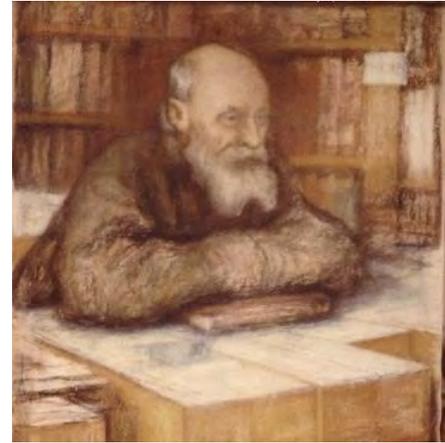
*Nagarjuna
(150-250)*

Such manipulative applications of happiness science may not only be exercised by already established governments. They may also be used in the reverse direction by oppositions aiming to govern or see a government more to their liking installed. But then again, polling has legitimate purposes simply for informational purposes to help find direction in it, and without an attached agenda other than to better represent or serve a populace, even if this benefits the inquirer as well. It may be applied to gear well-meaning programs to their requirements or best effects. This makes it difficult to distinguish manipulative uses of polling. Still, even if polling is not manipulated, what does it mean that certain proportions of types of people hold certain types of views. Does it mean minorities are recognized and protected? Should majorities dictate policy, and if so to what extent? Should minorities' happiness not count or not as much?



*Nicolai Berdiayev
(1874-1948)*

Should one try to convert minority views to align with majorities? These questions present themselves in every election. But polling allows to answer such questions more often and in greater detail and to adjust behavior accordingly. Not only governing behavior but also the behavior of the polled populace. The wish to create clear answers and directions and maximum benefit may exceed its target by focusing on bringing deviations into line. Thinking through possible consequences of happiness studies then seems vital if they are not to cause unhappiness. Polling for utilitarian or manipulative purposes has on some level occurred for some time, even with scientific involvement. Still, happiness studies grant a semblance of benevolent legitimacy and trustworthiness to such practices. A growing number of governments and organizations have taken up this mantle and are dressing themselves in it.



*Nikolai Fyodorov
(1829-1903)*



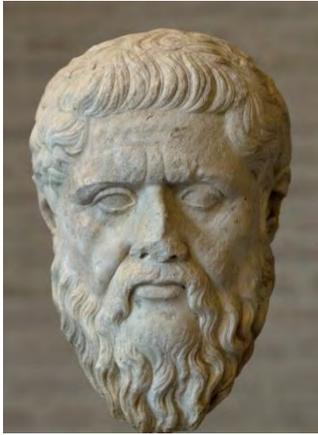
*Novalis (Freiherr Hardenberg)
(1772-1801)*

Considering the dearth of sophistication displayed by happiness studies, one might with good reason argue that they have not advanced to a point where sinister, misguided, or thoughtless forces could inflict serious damage in their use or abuse. And reviews of polls, reports, and rankings appear to confirm such an impression. But there is a much more imminent and much more dangerous aspect to happiness science. A full grasp of this danger took some time to develop in my mind because the threat involves recent developments in science and technology. As I was reading happiness studies, the question kept presenting itself whether they are not marketing studies with a slightly different angle and narrow scope. At first glance, marketing studies seem to differ from happiness studies because marketing studies are primarily interested in the sale of products. Still, they operate with an understanding that selling requires a product to address a need or wish and is able to increase customers' happiness, and that chances of success for a product rise the happier it makes its customers. Because happiness embodies the key to sales, marketing studies have already developed surprisingly sophisticated definitions of happiness for their purposes. And they have developed rather sophisticated manners how these types of happiness can be gauged and addressed. Admittedly, marketing studies are interested only in some types of happiness that are most related to sales. But their approaches can be, and have been, adapted to other aspects of happiness, not least because extraneous concepts of happiness can be employed to market a product. And with marketing studies being undertaken to cover products for about any conceivable concern, the amalgamation of these studies alone stands to tell us more in more detail about human happiness than happiness studies at their current or foreseeable states. This is also because marketing firms will not be

Considering the dearth of sophistication displayed by happiness studies, one might with good reason argue that they have not advanced to a point where sinister, misguided, or thoughtless forces could inflict serious damage in their use or abuse. And reviews of polls, reports, and rankings appear to confirm such an impression. But there is a much more imminent and much more dangerous aspect to happiness science. A full grasp of this danger took some time to develop in my mind because the threat involves recent developments in science and technology. As I was reading happiness studies, the question kept presenting itself whether they are not marketing studies with a slightly different angle and narrow scope. At first glance, marketing studies seem to differ from happiness studies because marketing studies are primarily interested in the sale of products. Still, they operate with an understanding that selling requires



*Patanjali
(2nd century BC)*

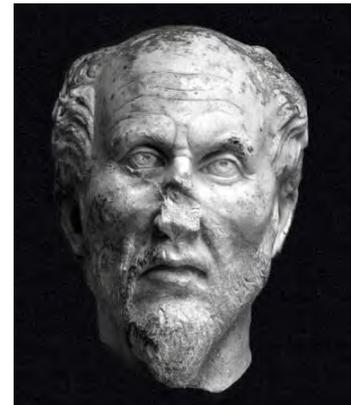


Plato
(428 BC - 347 BC)

retained or rewarded unless they succeed identifying potential customers' needs and wishes and unless they find and present to customers who might be or become interested in a product enough to make a sale. Maximizing the effectiveness and efficiency of such marketing efforts sets much more ambitious goals than happiness studies do and could reasonably entertain. Marketing has its sights set on a maximum of transparency of the populace for sales purposes. Picture what one could tell about a person if everybody participated in marketing studies for every product and if this information were widely available. An uncomfortable prospect. And yet this is where things are headed and they are on their way far beyond this exposure level because the data density, width, and depth collected about individuals by far exceeds sales-related concerns. As the scope and history of empirical data points on individuals grows, they permit a mosaic

that is gradually forming ever more exact representations of the analyzed person. This abundance of information at an individual level can be used, and in parts is already being used, to gain and exert power over individuals in any imaginable aspect of their life. And the precision and sophistication of machines in discerning and connecting data points to create individual profiles will only grow as modeling and processing powers advance.

Because happiness is the overarching, principal human concern, understanding it in all its facets forms the holy grail of such undertakings. Happiness studies then are of particular interest in the pursuit of power over individuals. That academic happiness studies are relatively immature and naive in their current state poses an opportunity to instrumentalize them. Due to their relatedness to marketing studies, happiness studies stand to advance from gleaning marketing studies' approaches, data, and insights. So, happiness studies may be keen to cooperate with marketing studies, offering happiness insights in return. This return may presently not be much. But after bringing happiness studies up to speed with more sophisticated market research, such studies and their access to subjects may become of more



Plotinus
(ca. 205-270)



Protagoras
(ca. 490 BC - ca. 420 BC)

use. And even absent such a Faustian bargain, happiness studies could not ignore the information collected and techniques pioneered by marketing studies. If happiness science won't incorporate these advances, it is likely to emulate them. And the results of its scientific treatment of them are likely to be freely available under the maxim of scientific advancement. Thus, any worthwhile insights happiness studies derive are likely to find application in marketing efforts. That happiness lack in perspective and have not succeeded more turns then out to be a blessing. Their abuse potential in case they advance seems reason enough not to drive them past their present state. In any event, the progressive insertion of marketing studies and their results into concerns of happiness seems firmly set,

with or without the participation of happiness studies. It seems only a matter of time before detailed individual happiness profiles are widely and regularly available. And it also appears to be only a matter of time before they are widely and regularly used for marketing and manipulation. The time until this becomes our reality is rapidly getting shorter and might already have passed. Having just started recently with a benevolent intent to advance humanity, maybe happiness science could be impressed to speak up against these threatened transparency and abuses. It is, as particularization of its constituent sciences, the only independent science anchored enough



Pyrrho of Elis
(360 BC - 270 BC)



Pythagoras
(ca. 570 BC - ca. 495 BC)

in concerns of human happiness to assess the threat of these abuses and speak with authority against them. This would require happiness science to reverse its direction. It would have to argue that happiness, even if it can be known on an individual level by third parties, must be reserved to each individual. It would have to further insist that such information could only be released, maintained, or used in allotments and to recipients of each person's determination and only for agreed purposes and durations. Maybe such a radical change in the direction of happiness studies is too much to hope for, especially since this movement has not already taken hold. Maybe popular movements for personal information protection will have to carry the burden alone or in conjunction with enlightened data processing experts. Either way, happiness studies seem to be holding the potential of enabling or preventing nightmarish individual transparency, exploitation, and decline of freedom. If they continue failing to take their responsibility seriously, which they assumed when they claimed charge of the science of happiness, they will be responsible for the resulting misery.

8. Independent Approaches Toward a Philosophy of Happiness.

So where does a review of self-help, religious, philosophical, and further scientific approaches toward human happiness leave us in our search for guidance? On one hand I think we have reason to be encouraged by an emerging awareness and respect for fundamental human needs and the conditions for their pursuit. On the other, I have been disheartened by the lack of universal recognition and support for resulting existential human rights. Many authorities deliver lip service to human rights, but they do not expend much effort establishing them and their modalities. The interactions, practicalities, and obstacles of existential human rights are not being sufficiently addressed by such authorities. As apparently minor application details, they are being left to societal, governmental,



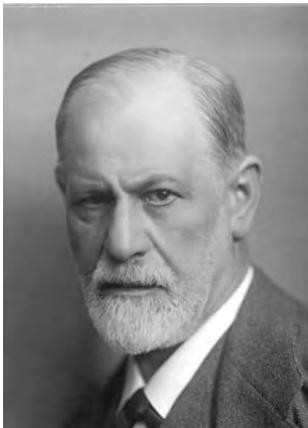
René Descartes
(1596-1650)



Rishabhanatha
(life dates unknown)

and international organizations, some of which were started by these authorities. These organizations declare basic human rights in commandments, charters, and constitutions. Yet, the application of these general declarations is habitually frayed, twisted, restricted, or ignored, by political, cultural, or personal influences. Since these rights express fundamentals defined by existential needs, they are accessible to universal insight by any human. They are also open to the direct insight that, as bare existential basics, they should apply absolute. Applications could benefit from unequivocal statements, explanations, and positions by authorities to this effect. Authoritative perseverance of what these principles are and how they should be applied would go a long way. Then again, lack of insight is not the problem in the application context. People are aware when they violate other humans' existential rights simply by the sense that they would not want to suffer the infractions they commit. The problem is rather that authorities have resigned the application of human rights to groups and organizations many of which are the primary candidates to subvert or prevent applications when it fits them. Some efforts have been made to move judgment and enforcement of human rights away from such bodies. But these measures do not have real teeth because they only exist at the permission of the very organizations they are to govern.

Hoping for a supra-national organization with full capabilities to assess, adjudicate, and counteract violations of existential human rights is unrealistic. However, the establishment of a super-authority would also be problematic because it could be hijacked by nefarious interests or give rise to tribal conflict. Instead, the universal character of basic human rights and the common access to understanding them suggests decentralization of administrative functions to each of us individually and together. If everybody who suffers a human rights violation speaks and acts up and everybody who witnesses or hears of such a violation does so as well, existential human rights will become a universal reality. Short of that, it is hard



Sigmund Freud
(1856-1939)

to say whether and how much humanity is advancing, and how much it can advance, toward universal conceptualization, affirmation, and enforcement of existential human rights. I believe this outlook on required remedies is as fundamental as the rights they are to protect. That ethical authorities have not mounted a determined, united effort to provide theoretical and practical guidance in making basic human rights the universal reality they proclaim to be due speaks for itself. Although they should muster the necessary insight and make maximum use of their influences, they mostly stand by idly or only as commentators as individuals the world over battle on their own to secure the fundamentals for their happiness. This renunciation of responsibility by authorities has a long tradition that is only sporadically interrupted by rogue elements among them. History is not in any shape to deal out merit badges to any ethical authorities for advancing basic human rights. The incomplete, half-hearted recognition and recitation by such authorities is unacceptable.



Samuel von Pufendorf
(1632-1694)

Another great disappointment in my review of self-help, religious, philosophical, and other scientific approaches toward human happiness is the lack of help for individuals to find their way beyond these fundamentals. Contrary to widespread claims and attributions of authority and substance, there is very little for us to work with at our individual level. No doubt, there are a number of good bits of advice or interesting objectives or methods that we might or even should try to see how they suit and benefit us. Some of the suggestions I surveyed might give us a temporary boost or assist us more sustainably. But in the end, these were relatively small answers to the much bigger problem of human happiness. I could not locate anything that would promote us as individuals to advance above the insecurity, error, and resulting dissatisfaction that a lack of orientation, preparation, and planning brings. Worse than this, I found that our search for human happiness in self-help, religious, philosophical, and other scientific approaches to happiness carries great potential to lead us astray and damage our happiness, down to existential levels. In terms of [Hans Christian Andersen's "The Emperor's New Clothes,"](#) all the emperor wears for his big parade is underpants. And he might be a



Simone de Beauvoir
(1908-1986)

charlatan, oppressive fraud, and an instigator or purveyor of pain and disaster. In other words, we have shamefully little to revere but much to fear about those who tell us how to live our life.



Socrates
(470 BC - 399 BC)

If you think of dismissing what I say, first think of the probability of my conclusion from a commonsense viewpoint. If someone asked us to submit our concerns to the direction of strangers and trust that they can and will look out for our interests before theirs, most of us would pause. We would have sufficient common sense to view this proposition with greatest caution. We would inquire about their motives. We would not allow ourselves to be blindsided by the fact that these unfamiliar persons

can point to credentials and authority. If anything, bragging with who they are, rather than proving to us the truth of what they say, should raise our defenses even more because it makes them more suspect in their intentions and capable to deceive or abuse us. We would not permit them to lead us without having reviewed their track record. And we would not let ourselves be swayed by the fact that many others obey them. We would not let others talk us into something that does not pass muster under our BS meter or that violates common sense. These are principles of a sound judgment most of us have learned during childhood and that we apply in everyday encounters. Why are we throwing this better sense to the wind when it comes to the direction of our life? Why would we ignore that creators and promoters of systems and fragmented ideas are commanded by their individual interests



Søren Kierkegaard
(1813-1855)



St. Augustine (Aurelius Augustinus)
(354-430)

individualized guidance beyond common principles because nothing else can in honesty be claimed to apply with commonsensical universality. Only erroneous, thoughtless, or fraudulent statements transgress this boundary. Unfortunately, such deviations abound, and we need to remain vigilant against them posturing as general principles. Establishing a firm understanding of the common basics of human happiness is indispensable because of their existential importance and



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

like everybody else? Why would we not ask what is in it for them if we follow? Why would we not see they could not tell what we want or how we want to pursue it if they wanted to?

Obvious exceptions to these issues are sources merely stating commonsense principles of human happiness. We may seek out and peruse such sources to lay open and develop our understanding of common basics of happiness shared by all humans. We should run them through our mind with judicious caution, but we have the capacity of analyzing and dismissing or confirming them with common sense. As part of our review, we need to remain guarded that the sources we accept in fact limit their scope to common principles. An honest assessment of general aspects of happiness would necessarily be limited to principles humans can recognize as common. It cannot give

because they are the foundations for launching individual pursuits. In spite of achievements in this regard, the frequently incomplete level and the persistent violations of fundamental rights prove that we must as of yet still be reminded of them to establish and preserve this common foundational happiness for every human. Sadly, societies have in alarmingly many instances not advanced to recognize all such foundations, or not to their full scope. And there is continuing and recurring justification not to take foundations for granted even if they are present at the time. In many instances, people might not generate or internalize and practice these basic principles on their own, or at least not consistently. So far, it seems necessary to cast these basics into rules supported by authority they recognize and even fear. Commonsense principles of happiness must be enforced by codes or laws to make people comply or at least not damage others with their non-compliance. But these codifications only mark outer limits imposed by mostly prohibitive laws. They cannot fill the basic principles of human happiness with the positive substance they require to benefit us by our doing or by reciprocity and mutual care. It is difficult to get people to act on principles that find their source in love, compassion, solidarity, and decency if they do not exhibit these qualities on their own. Maybe people can be convinced to display these qualities if they are hidden or inhibited



Theodor W. Adorno
(1903-1969)

in them. Maybe the types of commonsense sources of human happiness we reviewed in self-help, religious, philosophical, and empiric science contexts can play a role in this. To various degrees, this has been their function all along. But the motivation for engaging them must come from inside of us.

However deficient humans have been in accepting common sources and principles of happiness, we can place hope in the recent trend of codifying and practicing human rights and obligations on the basis of a common nature as humans. We can take faith in the growing societal support for protection of, and active assistance for, the fulfillment of basic human needs. The more fortunate of us live in legal orders where such rights and societal care is more or less recognized, although there may be remaining questions to be resolved. Having this footing for our setting of objectives and pursuits is more precious



Thomas Paine
(1736-1809)

than we might realize if we have never had to fight for these basics. We have reason to be very happy about this growing achievement of humanity we get to enjoy. However, having these basics secured, we also realize that this is not the entirety of our happiness. We can have all our fundamental needs satisfied and still yearn for happiness. We can still search aimlessly not even knowing why we are restless. In fact, we may blame the fulfillment of our basic needs as a reason for our lack of fulfillment. On first blush that does not seem to make sense. When we are deprived of basic necessities, we tend to believe we could be happy once they are fulfilled. But we cannot be happy for long in a system that fulfills basic needs only generically without individualization. Without impressing our customized objectives and ways on the fulfillment of basic needs, their securing seems to lose much value for us. We do not just want to exist but want to form our existence. This is also why we cannot be happy in a system that claims existential basics of human existence to be all there is to our

happiness and that individualized paths beyond a general organization are superfluous or illegitimate. Imagining how it would be having to live in such a system demonstrates to us how important our individual articulations of happiness are and how important it is that we are involved in bringing them into reality.

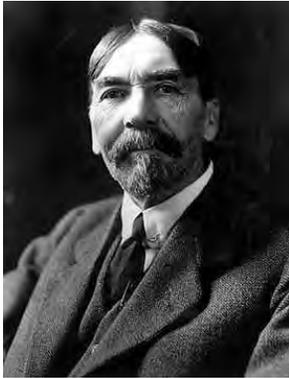
And yet most systems do not give us much of a clue about how to find our individual articulations of happiness. That may be understandable because idiosyncrasies in our setting of objectives and their pursuit might detract from the principles of systems. Most work best when their parts or members fit into predictable molds and act in predictable ways, which may therefore be the primary concern of systems. Individual articulations may be an irritant for most. This is how we can distinguish whether a system is geared toward assisting us or assisting somebody else who benefits from its order. But maybe a system knows its fair instrumental place. Maybe it only addresses the fundamentals of human needs in as far as they can be reasonably covered in a systematic way, leaving individual articulations of basics and wishes beyond to its inhabitants. This freedom may be unnerving



Thomas Hobbes
(1588-1679)



Thomas Robert Malthus
(1766-1834)



*Thorstein B. Veblen
(1857-1929)*

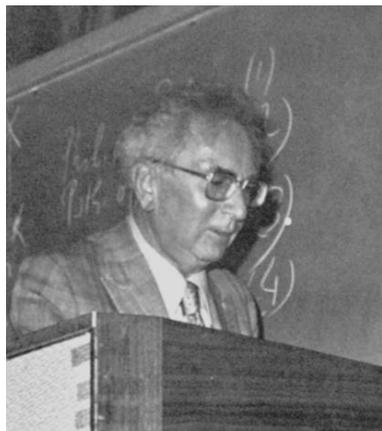
or frightening for many of us, especially if we originate from a setting where individuality was systematically suppressed, limited, or guided. Nevertheless, the opportunity to build our individual happiness is connected to the presence of this free space, this void, with all its uncertainties and insecurities.

Filling this void with independently derived strategies that maximize our happiness may be a new proposition for most of us. This is why we might look for assistance. Constructing our individual happiness does not mean that we could or should not avail ourselves of assistance, as long as we reserve a considered discretion about its utility and use. We just have to be careful that we do not fall again into a mode where we allow others to tell us what makes us happy and how we should pursue happiness. That there is very little non-overbearing assistance on finding our individual path toward happiness may sound surprising. It might come as a shock to people who like I have held out hope that the important answers to our happiness already have been arrived at and confirmed. My surprise dates back decades to the start of my studying philosophy and decades of experiences confirming that initial surprise.

It must be so much more difficult for someone who until more recently has been accustomed to trust, respect, or at least condone the system in which they live. It has to be difficult to institute the necessary judgment distance if one has grown up in, or has long been surrounded by, an established system that defines one's normal. And it may be even more difficult to find such distance when people have been attracted to such a system or found protection in it when their happiness was under threat. They might stay defensive of their familiar system in prejudiced gratitude and might fear the task of building a system of their own into a relative unknown. They might survey worse specimens of conceptual rabbit holes and come to the conclusion that theirs is not that bad in comparison. They may be swayed by the propaganda of a system. People may be particularly set in their ways if the system in which they



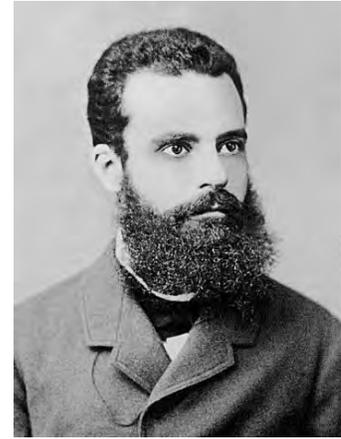
*Vasubandhu
(4th - 5th century)*



*Viktor Frankl
(1905-1997)*

live is merely interested in regulating a relatively small portion of their pursuits. Or its regulation may be so indirect that its presence may not be perceived at all or not as prohibitive obstacle. The limited nature of impositions, indirectness, or public relations of a system governing our ideas of happiness may cause hesitation appreciating its using us, its patronizing us, or its holding us back. We may not fathom that we are being kept and may behave similar to children in an authoritative household. We may not realize that we are taught and mostly accept how to conduct ourselves, what to think, and what to believe. We may be comfortable with this as a continuation of childhood conditioning, which in all likelihood already prepared us to get along in and with the system. Throughout history and modern times, humans have regularly agreed, or at least acquiesced, with paternalistic governance. But ask yourself: How has following recognized authorities worked out?

Why do so many look for answers in mostly foolish self-help books, why do scores turn on religious teachings, why do they think philosophy is a dead elitist pastime with no practical value, why do they grasp at straws of happiness studies? Why, unless these traditional sources for happiness instruction have failed them? Beyond that, do you see any followers of any recognized authority being significantly happier? Even if they should say so, their accounts are likely compromised. A lot of people stuck in a system ordering and prescribing their ways may know better. But they might be afraid of internal or external repercussions if they state or act otherwise. They might want to perpetuate or complete their delusion that someone else's ideas about happiness apply to them. And, as people walk down a misguided path long enough, they may be in too deep with their minds and life circumstances. They might not be able or dare to imagine concepts and paths of their own or admit that they have missed major opportunities of



*Vilfredo Pareto
(1848-1923)*



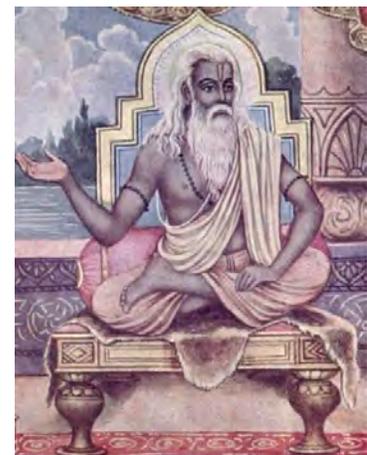
*Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet)
(1694-1778)*

self-determination along the way, major opportunities of a happy life. Admitting to themselves or to others whose opinion they respect that they took a wrong turn or never tried to take their own direction may be too painful. They may faithfully or desperately continue following tracks that someone else laid out for them. They may even deny this is occurring. So not everybody may be able or possess the courage to admit there is something wrong with how their life has proceeded so far, that something important is missing or could be improved. And maybe there isn't. Maybe they are already happy enough.

Maybe the system in which they find themselves embedded happens to match their values or has succeeded in aligning their mind. Maybe they have been savvy or fortunate enough to carve out their happiness exactly the way they see fit. Maybe they regard what they were able to accomplish in a system good enough to not risk it. They

may have managed to reduce their world to a shell in which they have succeeded to secure a measure of happiness. Maybe their happiness is reliant on maintaining structures and processes that take advantage of others in the system. Maybe they benefit from the resident type of the mental-industrial complex that has smothered, deceived, and stunted humanity in most civilized reaches of the earth. Such people may not be interested in acknowledging the emperor wears no clothes or what his qualities are for various reasons. They may rely on or be a constituent of the empire. Change may jeopardize their way of making a living. They may not see a choice or deem their contributions objectionable.

Then there are those with a closed mind who absolutely believe in the system and follow it without knowing better and without doubt. They short-circuit any criticism of rules the system has instructed them to live by to automatic rejection. Such fanatics may also pose problems



*Vyasa (Krishna Dvaipayana)
(15th century BC)*



*Walter Benjamin
(1892–1940)*

for the emancipation of others. They may be willing enforcers for a system they deem to be the foundation of their happiness and, true to its character as a system, the happiness of everybody else in its reach. They may see any disagreement with the system as attack on its working for them. Unless they encounter a systematic crisis that unbalances them, no amount of talk may be able to reach them and free them of a restrictive system because their mindset prevents them from listening and fairly considering what they hear.

But then there are those who are not in such complicit or tethered positions or are not too far invested to see that a new perspective, a new approach toward happiness may be in order. I am talking to those who have not shut themselves off and who maintain misgivings about taking someone else's word on how to live their life. I identify with all of them because I have

been in a similar situation. After all, I spent many years trying in vain to prove the emperor wore a full attire of magnificent clothes and was parading as an admired, benevolent leader. At least I was hoping I could find or maybe piece together a philosophy of happiness that could be universally shared among humanity for a better world. Nobody could have been more astonished than I to see this possibility slip successively away with every try. Not finding any satisfying answers, I eventually gave up asking probing questions and decided to look for guidance at people around me and how they coped. I resigned that my happiness would have to thrive within the framework of a solid job and my income, marriage, friendships, hobbies and other diversions, and would otherwise expand by trial and error, some good advice, some foresight, and the determination of doing my best. I created a little world for myself in which I could live a sheltered, reasonably happy existence and not worry too much about what else was happening in the world outside. This did work out to a rather satisfying extent and to where it would have seemed ungrateful to be unhappy. But my mind, my conscience kept working on me, asking me unsettling questions such as: Did the reduction to this world built around me and the people I loved make me as happy as I should be?



*Wang Fuzhi
(1619–1692)*

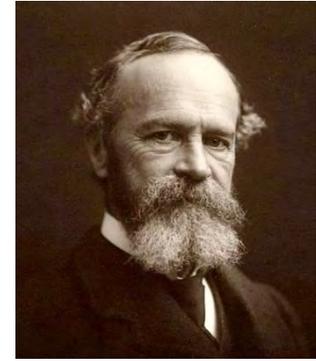
Looking forward, would other concerns eventually catch up? Looking back, was the time, effort, and faith of finding or creating a philosophy that would satisfy me wasted and better forgotten? Whenever one of these questions crept up, I regularly responded with a reminder of my blessings and increased resolve to appreciate them, even asking what more I could wish for? But that I was engaging in such a dialogue with myself showed that an increment of happiness was missing. I just did not see yet what was missing. And I was at a loss on how I or anybody could find their way to more happiness in such a nondescript situation.



*Wang-Shouren
(1472-1529)*

It took writing down this question, as I have a habit of doing, for me to figure out the response. Looking at it, the answer stared right back at me in the very words "I or anybody could find their way to more happiness in such a nondescript situation." Maybe I or anybody could

indeed become empowered to find their own way to happiness. With other people's recipes not being much help, it seemed clear we have to. But the question then was how to go about finding our way. Trying to figure this out gave me a new mission that put my studies and experiences to good use if only as examples of what to avoid. Looking back, starting this mission and pursuing it since was a big part of what had been missing in my happiness. I can also see now that the many years of frustrating research had a purpose. This was what it took to comprehend the low level at which human thought on happiness has been and what might be undertaken to raise it. They were necessary to scope out that we must take charge of our happiness because guidance by others falls woefully short. They showed me that nobody else does and can know as well as we in our own probing and insight what makes us happy. They were necessary for me to see that we must shake off what others try to make us believe, feel, think, or do, and that we must and can with confidence rely on our own capacities to figure out our happiness. They taught me that to succeed we need to grow up and learn to trust ourselves.



*William James
(1842-1910)*



*William Paley
(1743-1805)*

Simply put, my mission is to encourage the opposite of taking somebody else's word for what makes us happy. It is to assist people explore, develop, and implement their own concepts of happiness. Its guiding principle is that to be sure that our objectives and pursuits are genuinely ours, we each must find, grow, and mature our own insights regarding them. We each have to find and identify our own truth, our own understanding of circumstances, and our own path of happiness. In encouraging this leap and path of freedom, I am counting on those with an open mind that are willing to face a mirror of their happiness and look themselves deep in the eyes. Maybe the courage for facing happiness has to develop over time. And it certainly is a good idea not to rely on my or anyone else's accounts what any self-help, religious, philosophical, and scientific approaches toward happiness have to

offer. If you have not done so already, I encourage you to review for yourself writings and presentations on happiness. You may want to read and read about philosophies founded or said to be founded by the personalities whose portraits are interspersed throughout this article. Only, you might not want to take quite as long as I to arrive at a conclusion. To assist you in finding your way to and through relevant literature, I am listing key reading resources below in Chapter 9.

Let us assume you come to the same conclusion as I that there is very little useful guidance on shaping one's happiness. Once you decide to take charge of your happiness, how can I assist you? I can help you grasp the components and system of your happiness so that you can formulate strategies of pursuing it in an improved and optimized manner. You would begin this process by embarking on a mindful expedition through yourself and through your environment, visiting all parts to determine how they can contribute to or detract from your happiness. I can assist you in this by



*Władysław Tatarkiewicz
(1886-1980)*



Yajnavalkya
(7th - 8th century BC)

Maybe this freedom paired with obligation is something to get used to. So many influences have been binding us to their tethers or we have tied ourselves to them without looking much elsewhere. But our happiness is an undertaking we cannot farm out to anybody else if we want to be happy. Nor can we agree to become livestock on somebody else's farm. If we do not take our right and obligation to find and shape our happiness seriously, others will define our happiness for us. Or worse, they may deny it to us, push us aside, or use us in the pursuit of theirs. Even if that should not happen, insufficiently reflected pursuits and disorganized determinations are likely to damage our probabilities of success. Either way, we would likely find us at a disadvantage compared to those who have their objectives, and ways of working on them, figured out. We would be prone to not leading our life to its full potential. Or



Zeno of Citium
(ca. 334 BC - ca. 262 BC)

suggesting an itinerary through shared aspects of human existence in your inner and outer world. I can encourage you to take notice of these shared aspects and your personal, particular impressions and expressions of them. I can advise you to permit yourself to take in unforeseen sights you encounter on your journey and to possibly go on detours or excursions that reflect additional particularities. I can point to possible implements that might be of use in your travels and stopovers. You might think of me as a travel advisor for your mind who describes worthwhile regions for a visit and manners of getting around. But this is not a guided tour. I am not going with you on your trip. And my assistance is not geared to your particularities. I do not know you and even if I did, I could not become involved so that the experiences on your journey are truly yours. You must take this journey yourself because only you can find your understanding of your happiness in the personal sites you visit, and only you know what these are, how to find them, and what to do there. Exploring your happiness is your inherent right and also your responsibility.



Yang Zhu
(440 BC - 360 BC)

we would not even be leading our own life if we take somebody else's word for what happiness is and how to pursue it. And we would run the risk that our lack of self-care could place us in circumstances that cause compounding unhappiness and further attenuate our hope.

When we imagine what might happen if we fail to take charge of our happiness, we realize that this is not just about whether we are feeling sad or glad. It greatly matters for our existence and ultimate satisfaction in reflecting on it. And when we understand our happiness and what it takes to be happy, we also realize that happiness matters beyond our immediate self because our existence is not isolated. In a connected existence, the unhappiness of others reflects on ours and vice versa in a circular motion. Similar statements can be made about our more extended environment. When we act in consideration of this

interactivity and apply the resulting respect, unexpected degrees and ranges of harmonization in us, our surroundings, and between them set in. Mindful attention to our happiness affects us in ways that advance not only our own well-being but also the well-being of our human and nonhuman environment. Happiness turns out to be the most important guiding light for literally everything that matters to humans, or at least what should matter. Its all-encompassing quality gives us choices. If we make the wrong choices, we have the proven potential to mess things up. If we make the right choices, this world could be a paradise.

Maybe the lure of this attainable paradise is not yet within our imagination's grasp because we never experienced anything close to it. And quite possibly, we will have to experience the intensified pressure of unhappiness before we step out of our closets and routines to make the effort of actively reviewing and improving our existence. At such a point in time, our options may be curtailed by an advanced state of our deteriorating situation or desperation.



*Zhu-Xi
(1130-1200)*

This is where the program of self-empowerment I describe comes in. Rather than taking a journey into the unknown that may lead them astray, my readers may decide to use the work I have invested over the years to accelerate and more clearly direct theirs. My role is not to tell people whether or when they should review their happiness to find means and strategies for its improvement, but to assist them if and whenever they decide the time is right for them. At such point, they can pick up my Philosophy of Happiness book to serve them as motivator, travel advisor, and itinerary on their self-directed journey of self-exploration. Because this is a trip to explore the entirety of our individual world, there are no easy and quick shortcuts. But we spend all our lives in the pursuit of happiness anyway. Even if we have scaled back objectives and pursuits from our dreams, we still labor trying to make the best of our situation. Why not avail ourselves of a considered, comprehensive approach that raises our chances of succeeding?



*Zhuang Zhou (Zhuangzi)
(369 BC - 286 BC)*

Still, we can take heart in the fact that our sensations of happiness and unhappiness steer us toward an appropriate determination whether we should take action. The only question we need to clarify for ourselves is what exactly we should do to improve our happiness. The crux regularly lies in this latter problem of what to do, not in motivation, which arrives by itself when we need it. Individuals and societies are from time to time motivated to step outside of themselves when they cannot bear their pain anymore or see their hope in betterment betrayed or slipping away. The problem and pervasive tragedy for humans and humanity so far has been that people fail to act because they do not know how, or that when they take action, they select erroneous and destructive paths because of their own confusion or deception by others and pent up anxiousness.



*Zoroaster (Zarathustra)
(between 1500 BC and 500 BC)*

9. Further Reading.

1. Works Related to Philosophy of Happiness by the Author.

a) [Philosophy of Happiness Book](#). 1000 pages, Kindle, E-pub, and PDF e-book, hardcover, and paperback. Comprehensive coverage of common issues pertaining to a philosophy of happiness.

b) [Knowing Book Series](#). Six-part series of philosophical quotes and poems. 226 pages each, Kindle and paperback. Companions to the Philosophy of Happiness book that avail readers of more apportioned and casual approaches toward an exploration of their happiness.

c) [Philosophic Reflections](#). A collection of essays revealing Martin Janello's motivations, illustrations, and resulting considerations of philosophical exploration. Examples of experiences and interests that can form one's philosophy. Free of charge download of 43-page PDF e-book.

d) [Philosophy of Happiness YouTube Channel](#). Contains a video from which this introduction was derived. Regular videos on issues of happiness and its philosophy.

e) [Philosophy of Happiness Website](#). Additional opportunities to explore the philosophy of happiness with more information and excerpts of the Philosophy of Happiness book and other materials. Contains FAQ, Forum, Blog, and Contact sections.

2. **Encyclopedias.** Some encyclopedias continue in traditional parts to perpetuate false myths of separation and superiority of Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy vis-à-vis so-called Continental philosophy, let alone non-Western philosophy traditions, which were widely ignored until recently. Significant work is in process to fix this unprofessional, embarrassing parochial bias in English language resources, pushed along by the fact that English has become the lingua franca of philosophy. Inclusiveness is most effectively achieved by the worldwide inclusion of contributors and editors. I advise to look for this in your searches.

a) **Wikipedia.** Use of Wikipedia on subjects of this article is highly discouraged since its pseudo-democratic, anonymously autocratic and bureaucratic method [inherently lacks quality and reliability](#). I found its entries to be uneven, ranging from the occasionally scholarly to mostly amateurish or agenda-driven treatments beset by incomprehension, shallowness, errors, omissions, and misrepresentations. The problem is that, apart from extremes of this range, the difference may not be apparent to unfamiliar readers. The indiscriminate listing of Wikipedia on top of search engine results despite its [decline](#) makes sampling what it says enticing. However, I believe anybody trying to get to the core of happiness and its philosophy - or just casually reviewing the subject to see what they can find - would do themselves a great disservice being misdirected or discouraged by its inept, incorrect, and incomplete information. Any of the alternatives cited below offer vastly superior reliability, orientation, organization, insight, and context.

b) [Encyclopedia Britannica](#). Alright for general orientation, but varying quality level and at times odd or antiquated statements and choices of importance and language. Convolved references. Free with ads. Subscription with 7-day free trial then, \$74.95/year or \$8.99 monthly. I suggest skipping it.

c) [Encyclopedia.com](#). A better-written and better-organized up-to-date on-line encyclopedia with material from over 200 individual encyclopedias and reference books from reputable publishers, including Oxford University Press, Columbia, and Cengage. Free access with minimal ads. Recommended as a start.

d) [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#). Established in 1995. Free of charge. An on-line academic research tool with about 1600 entries. Good effort to increase coverage of non-Western philosophies. Focus on continual updating by entry authors with editor oversight. Governed by a table of contents that is really an eclectic alphabetical index. Suffers from lack of organization among articles, holes in coverage, weak cross-referencing, and insufficient contextualizing of topics. Excellent if sometimes too short on the topics it covers. Comprehensive bibliographies. A bit unwieldy for beginners. Unless you are looking for something specific that this encyclopedia might cover, you might prefer one of the encyclopedias below.

e) [Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#). Established in 1995. Free of charge. Well-written online research tool for wide range of readers. Written and maintained by an impressive roster of professionals plus an editing board from around the world. Peer-reviewed academic level information on a growing, already rather comprehensive range of philosophers and topics. Good effort to increasingly take account of philosophy as a worldwide phenomenon and discipline. Searchable by alphabetical index or categories (“browse by topic”). Excellent in the content it covers. Comprehensive bibliographies. Recommended.

f) [Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#). Originally published in 1998 in hard-copy as 10-volume set and CD-ROM, 8680 pages. Expanded on-line version by subscription to libraries only. Free search of articles, article summaries, introductory articles, and earlier versions of revised or replaced articles. Over 2,800, regularly updated entries. Impressive navigation tools, context, and cross-referencing. Summaries and overviews give good expositions. Valiant effort to incorporate non-western philosophies. Print version is getting a little long in the tooth on developing subjects. The limitation of this encyclopedia to libraries is regrettable because this is otherwise an eminently accessible, precise, and comprehensive research tool that I think is unmatched in the English language. Check with your library how you can get access.

g) [Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#). 10-volume set, 2nd edition, 2005, 6200 pages. Originally published by Macmillan Reference USA in 1967. Now only available as e-book with 7799 pages. 2,100+ entries of varied detail. Substantially updated and expanded since 1st edition, yet replacing worthwhile parts. Good non-Western philosophy content. Mostly comprehensible without any philosophical training. Includes a thematic outline of contents and solid bibliographies. Because it is much less expensive than Routledge Encyclopedia, chances are better that your local community library may have it. A good research tool. But if you have a choice, go with the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, particularly if your library makes its online version available. If you are not a library goer, you probably will be best served by the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, comparing notes maybe with the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

h) Single-Volume Philosophy Encyclopedias or Dictionaries. This compressed format can convey very general ideas of the field and elicit interest to find out more. However, its alphabetical organization confuses and hides context and development. This, together with the abbreviations and generalizations this sort of summarization requires, can dead-end inquiries more than assisting them. Conversely, readers may get the impression they grasped philosophical phenomena when this is outright impossible based on these summaries. They can only give outlines whose meaning cannot be unlocked without further study. This may be fine for mechanical school learning and testing, but not for inquisitive study. Even as a starting point, compressed encyclopedias waste time and effort in skimming that can be better spent. With this warning, here are the better ones in declining sequence of recommendation:

i) The [Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#). 1st ed. 2000, 1030 pages, hardcopy, paperback. Summaries of all 2000 entries from the 10-volume Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Good.

- ii) [The Shorter Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#). 1st ed. 2005, 1104 pages, hardcopy, e-book, and on-line. Abridged version of the 10-volume Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Selective.
- iii) [The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy](#). 2nd ed. 2015, 1201 pages, hardcopy, paperback, e-book.
- iv) [The Oxford Companion to Philosophy](#). 2nd ed. 2005, 1076 pages, hardcopy and on-line.
- v) [Blackwell Companion to Philosophy](#). 2nd edition 2008, 976 pages. Introductory text book taking a run through traditional Western philosophy, highlighting key issues and arguments. Didactic style for school and test purposes. Limited glossary and reading references. Somewhat useful. Attempts to connect philosophy with current issues, but engages in questionable categorizations and judgments.

3. Monographs, Handbooks.

a) [The Routledge Philosophers](#). A series of ca. 30 books introducing Western philosophers and discussing highlights and context of their work. Includes chronology, glossary, summaries, and suggestions for additional reading. Recommended.

b) [Cambridge Companions to Philosophy](#). 130 volumes. Introductions through conglomerates of essays, each of which authored by different scholars. Interesting assortments of views, but rather topical and eclectic. Although the style is geared toward general comprehension, the disparate content of these companions may be too disorienting for a novice. I suggest first getting a solid basis in the covered topics.

c) [Oxford Handbooks Online](#). Excellent collections of articles on themes and specialized areas of philosophy. Similar to Cambridge Companions, but aimed at more advanced readers and the propulsion of discussion. This suggests preparation at a higher level. Subscription only offered to institutions.

d) [Wadsworth Philosophers Series](#). Out of print, but many titles still available new and used. Over 100 titles on philosophers in the Eastern and Western traditions. Concise, well-written introductions to philosophers and their work with adequate but sometimes incomplete coverage of major points.

e) [Rowohlt Monographien](#). This fantastic German series is sadly out of print since 2017, but some titles still available new and many used. Online version pulled as well. Over 700 titles, hundreds of them on philosophers and their work. Excellent introductions with thorough enablement of further studies.

f) [Les Collections Microcosme](#). This great French out-of-print series of publisher Editions du Seuil contained among other sections treatises about philosophers and their works, Écrivains de Toujours (1951-1981 and 1994-2000), and about religions and their promoters, Maîtres Spirituels (1955-1998).

4. Source Texts and Reading Introductions.

a) **Public Domain Sites**. The age of many philosophical texts and secondary literature places most of them within the public domain. A great number of them are freely accessible through these sites:

[Project Gutenberg](#) / [Internet Archive](#) / [Open Library](#) / [Internet Classics Archive](#) / [Open Culture](#)

b) [Dover Philosophical Classics](#), [Western Philosophy and Religion](#), [Eastern Philosophy and Religion](#). A good set of mainstream introductions and texts. Discounted selection in [Thrift Editions](#).

c) [Oxford World's Classics Philosophy](#). About 75 reprints and translations of mainstream classic texts. Substantial introductions, notes, chronologies, and bibliographies in support of the texts.

d) [Penguin Classics](#) & [Portable Series](#). Reprints and translations of traditional texts.

e) [Routledge Philosophic Classics](#). Anthology series of traditional categories with introductions.

f) [Blackwell Philosophy Anthology](#) & [Readings History of Philosophy](#). Key texts with comments.

5. Comprehensive Philosophy Publishers.

a) [Routledge](#). 8000 titles. Clearly categorized. Gold standard in selection and quality.

b) [Oxford](#). Over 8000 books and dozens of journals, well-organized, much on-line.

c) [Springer](#). 6200+ books and 475+ series, 60+ journals. E-books and print. Some in German.

d) [Brill](#). 4250+ books, 37 journals. Some in German. E-books and print.

e) [De Gruyter](#). 7200+ books, 45 journals. Some in German. E-books and print.

f) [Bloomsbury](#). Thousands of titles. Interesting world philosophy entries. E-books and print.

g) [Rowman & Littlefield](#). Thousands of titles. Well-organized catalog. E-books and print.

h) [Cambridge](#). 3300+ book titles. Well-organized. E-books and print.

i) [MacMillan Palgrave](#). 3000+ books, 67 series, 7 journals. Basic to specialized. E-books and print.

j) [Penguin Randomhouse](#). 1000+ books, well-organized print catalog.

k) [Hackett](#). 450+ print titles. Introductions to philosophies and philosophers plus translations. Presence in classical philosophy and texts but also modern traditional philosophy.

l) [Wiley](#). Includes Blackwell. 400 titles, mostly e-books and print. Well-organized.

m) **Other Publishers.** [Harvard](#), [Yale](#), [Columbia](#), [Cornell](#), [Stanford](#), [Chicago](#), [Notre Dame](#), [Edinburgh](#), [McGill](#), [Indiana](#), [Princeton](#), [MIT](#), [Imprint Academic](#), [Polity](#), [Michigan](#), [Open Court](#), [Northwestern](#), [UCal](#).

6. Search Tools for Philosophy Publications.

a) [Philpapers](#). A comprehensive index and bibliography of philosophy. Comprehensively monitors all sources of research content in philosophy. Also hosts the [largest open access archive in philosophy](#).

b) [JSTOR](#). Digital library. Access to 12 million plus academic journal articles, books, and primary sources, including philosophy. [Basic access free, increased access through participating libraries or paid](#).

7. Popular Titles. Philosophy isles of actual and virtual bookstores have become infested with series recognizable by hooks in their name or otherwise suggesting philosophical popularization. Titles I reviewed are, with very few exceptions, caricatures with romanced catchphrases, slogans, and dumbed-down descriptions. They might impress at cocktail parties unless someone asks questions. At best, they hold some entertainment value in their over-simplifications and desperate strain for popularity and sales.