

## Purpose and Happiness

People frequently ask each other for the path to happiness. Whether it be children or adults, they all seek the path to happiness, and their answers can vary from religion to achievement to simply being content. I personally think that happiness is found when you find a purpose, fulfill it, and are satisfied with it. However, I believe that another prerequisite to having long term happiness is having your basic needs fulfilled. By basic needs I mean food, water, shelter, clothing, and social health. I believe happiness is a feeling that comes after all of this, although extraneous factors can affect the duration and quality of the happiness.

First, I would like to define happiness and what it means in this essay. I view happiness as a positive feeling that is a strong satisfaction from life. I say this because I see that happiness comes from being content (basic needs met), then satisfied (secondary needs met), then happiness (tertiary needs). I would like to say that having these needs met is only part of the formula of happiness, though. Because happiness is a feeling in my definition, it is unreliable, in that what generally makes people happy may not work for some people. It can also be affected by things like other people (ie stuff you can't control like war or others harming you) or depression (your own brain making it harder for you to fulfill your needs across the board and for you to feel happy). To describe the exact feeling that I see happiness as, I see it as being deeply content and fulfilled, feeling like the moment has meaning. I also think there are two types of happiness: situational and long-term. Situational happiness can be similar to pleasure; the things that cause pleasure also can cause this sort of happiness. For example, talking to your friends is a pleasurable experience, but can also invoke a feeling of happiness. Long term happiness is the happiness you get when you fulfill your tertiary needs, which I see as finding a purpose and fulfilling it. For example, having a job you like.

I believe that in order to have long term happiness, you need to have your needs met. While people who don't have them can still be happy, the consistency and length of their happiness is hampered by the fact that they don't have their needs met. They have issues finding or fulfilling a purpose other than basic survival needs, which prevents them from having long-term, consistent happiness. For example, while people in poverty can get some happiness from having their social needs fulfilled, the happiness is largely

overridden by the looming threat of their other needs. People who have none of their needs fulfilled, like during war, are miserable and any happiness they do glean is fleeting and fragile. This is why I say long-term happiness can only really exist when your basic needs are filled. For the basic survival needs, I see it as the bare minimum needed for survival (ie, nutritious enough food, enough water, good enough shelter). From this, I define secondary needs as having your needs fulfilled beyond the bare minimum (having an excess to what you strictly need, like good-tasting nutritious food, as much water as you want, a shelter that is reliable and is pleasing to the eye). This isn't absolutely necessary, but does help with the quality of happiness.

Finally, purpose is your tertiary need. Unlike the other ones, this varies from person to person. However, like the other needs, society can affect how you view it and how satisfied you are with it. Society can affect your feelings of how happy you are by affecting your thought process and perception. For example, there was an experiment where they gave people free ice cream. People who saw others get more ice cream than them were quite upset, wondering why they couldn't also have that much ice cream. Your perception of your needs matters. If you don't care for food or how it tastes, having that need fulfilled will affect you less than someone else who loves food. In other words, this too can vary from person to person, but the idea still applies that you'd be happier with your needs fulfilled. An example of someone who has reduced need fulfillment as part of their purpose, many religious people will purposefully restrict themselves in terms of what they can eat, drink, or do. They can even find suffering to be part of their purpose, thinking it connects them to a higher purpose. Some people find it fulfilling to fill their needs to the bare minimum and focus on other things. Of course, it can also spiral out of control and lead to them harming themselves without purpose, but many people find a purpose that includes difficulty. People like Joan of Arc will purposefully put themselves in difficult situations because of their purpose. Those types of people will find great happiness in the fulfillment of their wishes, and they are happy to even be working toward it. Environmentalists frequently have to fight to help preserve the environment, but they love their job and feel a lot happier when they are able to do it. The fulfillment of purpose doesn't mean you won't feel pain, but it'll lead to more happiness.

People who find purpose in life and can fulfill that purpose are people with long-term and consistent happiness. Going back to the idea that what makes one person happy won't make another person happy, this 'purpose' component is why. A common example is that of the rich man. They keep hoarding money and yet lack a true purpose

and thus, despite the fact that they technically have everything they “need” to be happy, they aren’t. A teacher, a job that is underappreciated and underpaid, can be happy if they feel like they have a purpose. Of course, it doesn’t mean that they never get sad or frustrated or angry, but it does mean that they have a consistent and long-term source of happiness. Happiness is very personal, so you should always try to see what makes you happy instead of what society says should make you happy. It seems like it’s some sort of internal thing in humans, where each person has their own thing that makes them happy. Of course, not everyone only has one passion or purpose, like a marine biologist who also loves to teach. For those people, finding happiness can be a little harder, as their tertiary needs are harder to fulfill. However, at least trying to fulfill their purpose will make them happier than if they never tried, so it’s more about the pursuit of this purpose than the end goal. A teacher who wishes to teach enjoys the process of teaching and thus has long term happiness. A rich man who wishes to hoard money will only ever look to hoard more and isn’t satisfied with the amount of money he earns. This is a simplified version, of course, as human feelings and thoughts are influenced by tons of factors, but this is about the general idea of finding happiness.

In other words, I believe that in order to live the happiest life possible, you need to have your needs fulfilled as well as a purpose. I believe that we should strive towards finding a purpose on our own instead of looking to society for ways to make ourselves happy. Different people find purposes in different ways. Some people find themselves drawn already to certain things, but others have to live life and search hard for their purpose. A good start is introspection or observation of people you’d like to emulate. Don’t be discouraged if the search is long or hard. Humans are complicated like that.