



**UN/GLÜCK GELUECKE LUCK HAPPINESS
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«What is happiness? You know afterwards.»
(Arnold Stadler, author)

Super answer! It says almost nothing and yet a great deal. Happiness «remains silent»... because it is somehow obsolete to talk about it. What the paucity of this answer shows us: there are countless possible answers, from specific ones to the most minimal: the absence of unhappiness. The time factor - «afterwards» - offers an insight: Happiness is a fleeting episode, possibly a borderline experience. It cannot be perceived without something to compare it to - this gigantic or minuscule «happiness thing». As a result, we only realize it in retrospect. It is hard to imagine that in moments of happiness, the word «happiness» flashes in the brain. Herein lies the paradox: If we talk about happiness, it is shy, absent. («He who says he is happy lies», as Adorno pronounced so severely.) Once it is here, it cannot be named because it is beyond language. Perhaps it is a moment of feeling one with the world - talking about it would make it banal. After all, it does not have to do with particular «states-of-affairs in the world» that we can easily grasp, but «statements about the world» (Wittgenstein) that drift through the entire complicated philosophical history of ethics and the art of living. For the ancient philosophers, the art of living had nothing to do with the fortunate moment, but with leading a happy life. To be honest, we usually get bored rather quickly if someone talks about how happy they are. Or even worse, we soon feel bad, déclassé, because we start to make com-

parisons, what Kierkegaard called «the end of happiness and the beginning dissatisfaction».

According to the Viennese, happiness is like a bird, a weightless feathery thing that cannot be caught. Birds rarely seek a cage... Seen this way, the ephemeral experience of happiness always contains an aspect of regret, something plaintive, almost of missing something, «Oh, already over...» Childhood is considered the quintessence of happiness, a time we like to remember, returning to its safe alcove. Never again do we discover the whole world so directly. There is a very Austrian statement in the *Fledermaus* by J. Strauss: «Happy is he who forgets what can't be changed.» The message: a resigned strategy for preventing disaster. Karl Valentin, the famous Munich comedian, said something similar, although with more personal resoluteness: «I'm happy with it [the world] as it is, because if I were not happy, it would still be so.»

There are many elements swimming in the diffuse concept of happiness, the whole spectrum of questions about human existence. And an essential aspect is unhappiness. According to Camus, Sisyphus rolling the stone up the mountain every day only to see it roll down again in the evening, the hardships of life and the futility that lie therein, should not make us unhappy. On the contrary, we must imagine that Sisyphus was a happy person...

To wish someone the best of luck, to be lucky, to become or be happy... The idea of happiness, as a thought or an aspired state, haunts us like an apparition in our (Western) minds, whether this is because there is genuine desire for happiness, which

in reality means meaning in life; or because «the pursuit of happiness» is anchored, for example, in the Constitution of the United States; or because the whole happiness industry – with its self-help books, seminars and videos – constantly bombards us with slogans like «my better life», in the sense of self-optimization. (The sociologist Eva Illouz refers to this as the «tyranny of happiness» in her book *Happycratie*, published in 2018.) Imagine – even an International Day of Happiness has been proclaimed. If you don't know it already, it's on the 20th of March.

I consult a German bestseller self-help book with an attractive subtitle: *Happiness – Everything you need to know about it and why it is not the most important thing in life* (2007). Here, Wilhelm Schmid differentiates between «luck», «feeling good» and the «the wealth of opportunities». We experience a combination of all three forms of happiness, but what is interesting is the emphasis: happiness should not be the most important thing!

Even being lucky, the result of random processes, is a tricky thing. Just consider where and into what circumstances we were born... «Random luck» befalls us and can give life a decisive turn: the well-known idea of being in the right place at the right time... A trivial example of this is the comic figure Gladstone Gander, the cousin of Donald Duck: «Luck is lying in the street, all you have to do is pick it up.» In a strict sense, this is where the concept of luck collapses: can you still call it luck if someone is always lucky...?

The happiness of «feeling good», of «well-being» (an expression that unfortunately sounds very much like «wellness») is the hedonistic endeavour of people to

always have happy moments, to put the bird of happiness in a cage ... the Freudian pleasure principle of wish fulfilment, which, if it fails, can make us dissatisfied with the whole world. This «pleasure programme» is not feasible; it constantly collides with reality, with societies that demand our successful socialization. Yes, it is painful to become mature, and possibly we are always in the process... Only with difficulty do we learn to have an autonomous relationship with our own desires and thereby more independence. It is tedious and very difficult to reflect on the limits of possible self-awareness ... and to acknowledge the irreducible importance in a successful life of the negative aspects of existence. Schmid calls this the «wealth of opportunities», his third form of happiness. This does not have to do with claims of maximum happiness, nor with eliminating distress... It has to do with the diversity found in life, living with the extremes of happiness and unhappiness, with life's contradictions and imperfections, overcoming challenges and finding meaning in them. Moderation, humility, modesty, balance, reflection ... a return to the ancient art of living. Maybe it is just these truisms that are an effective means for purging the overloaded concept of happiness, as Schmid has attempted to show. His success proves him right... Happiness is not a goal we can strive for, it is more «an incidental circumstance and a minor matter» (Nietzsche) that can be adapted to our efforts. So don't take happiness so seriously.

To better understand our «hodgepodge of happiness», a great deal of research on happiness has been undertaken, including research on the brain. Neurologists have re-

ported that a fleeting state of «happiness» is created by a mixture of reward sensations plus a cocktail of semiochemicals, neurotransmitters and hormones. Will the same thing happen if I just eat some chocolate? Unquestionably only if I have «earned» it... In any case, the brain's chemistry can't be wrong, and so it must be possible to measure happiness. There is also no such thing as a happiness gene, there is merely a cognitive core mechanism that distinguishes optimists from pessimists. It is well known that there are different kinds of people – but optimists are supposedly happier... This is where behavioural scientists are digging deeper: Being more optimistic, and therefore happier, can be learned by positive intervention. An example: thinking more every day about good things and ignoring bad news... Good-bye media world... Behavioural economics collects and compares worldwide economic data and uses surveys to compare personal happiness. It is certain that this gives rise to questionable country rankings, rankings that supposedly tell us where the happiest people in the world live. (I once read with astonishment that Bangladesh was in first place. A woman living on the street was quoted as saying, «I am alive and above me is the sky.» It's a nice response, but maybe only a fabricated one. I'm afraid that unhappy people were hardly polled.) There is now more restraint on this uncertain terrain: Instead of happiness, it is now called «satisfaction with life». Measurable parameters are used as indicators for satisfaction, such as legal security and opportunities for education, housing and work. Under these parameters, the Scandinavian countries are at the top of the list, Japan lies only in the middle. – Various countries have established «happiness

commissions», perhaps following the example of Bhutan, which introduced a gross national happiness index in lieu of its GDP (gross domestic product). Questionnaires have been created and distributed, eager officials have busily evaluated their nation's happiness. Well, 70% of civil servants are happy, but only 30% of the rest of the population... Governments should not interfere in matters related to happiness; it is certainly sufficient if they create a framework offering opportunities for the individual development of all their residents.

Back to Wittgenstein. His diary entry of 6 July 1916 reads: «The man who is content is the one who is fulfilling the purpose of existence,» since he needs no «purpose other than life itself». It seems to me that for such a person, the concept of happiness is superfluous. But – how do we get there? He also wrote that the world is growing for those who are happy, while for the unhappy, it is shrinking towards nothingness.

It is my hope that everyone's world is growing.

Karin Ruprechter-Prenn (2019)
[translation from the original German: Cynthia Peck]

Open your Eyes - The Notion of Happiness

How is happiness defined when it is anchored in law, as it is for example in the American and Japanese constitutions? Here, various notions of what entails happiness come together, on one hand, those having to do with the general public and community, on the other, those promising individual happiness. The legal claim to and importance of the pursuit of happiness often go hand in hand with idealist notions of happiness. Happiness then becomes a social norm and duty, and is used to define one's social status. Not being happy is interpreted as a personal failure, and since unhappiness is considered a burden on society, it is avoided. If someone is unhappy in our achievement-oriented society, it means they are functioning abnormally and thus are less effective. To counteract unhappiness and quickly get back to normal, there are countless self-help books and workshops offering mental and physical «formulas» for avoiding unhappiness, with instructions on how to become happy, how to change things to let happiness surface, even when starting at the point of absolute zero. English expresses this at different levels: we distinguish between «luck», which is random fortuitous chance, «happiness», which is hypothetically lasting contentment, and «bliss», a rapturous moment of awareness. Happiness is thus considered subjective contentment with life, characterized by the longing for and promise of good fortune and felicity. This is where ideologies come into play: they create mental images and narratives defining happiness, they explain how happiness can be reached, or what ideals of happiness should be pursued as the goal in life.

The promise of happiness

What does the promise of happiness have to do with the obligation to be happy? The promise of happiness is linked to dreams of a better life, such as hopes of rising to a higher social bracket, or being successful professionally and privately. By defining happiness as self-fulfilment or as belonging to a community, not only are norms shaped, but this also determines how such promises of happiness can be realized. This can be seen in ideological structuring of social behaviours, as well as in the hype of self-help books, coaching bubbles, or workshops for self-discovery or healing. Even in our leisure time, body and mind are being optimized to work more efficiently.

On the other hand, evaluating data involving happiness parameters—as for example physical and mental health, prosperity, social justice and equality, balance between work, leisure and pay, education and environmental factors, etc.—offers a basis for analysing and comparing happiness. Such calculations of happiness correspond to the postmodern command to «be happy», which puts still more pressure on the individual, since it means that everyone is responsible for their own happiness. This propagates self-centred, self-involved concepts of happiness that are constantly competing with each other, as seen for example in rating systems on social media networks.

Being unhappy

The greater the social pressure to be happy, the more need there is for psychiatric medications and opioids, for self-help guidebooks, etc. If happiness is understood as an achievement, then unhappiness and depression arise from the inability to meet

expectations, from the feeling of being excluded, from the lack of happiness. Ever more demands and ever higher expectations bring the fear of failure, leading in the worst case to phenomena such as *hikikomori* or suicide. Alternative ideas of what might be considered happiness are often rejected. A collective notion exists, above all in Western societies, of the autonomous and absolute happiness of the individual, rather than happiness as a community, unlike in Japan, where the community as a factor for happiness has traditionally held an important role.

The expression of happiness

On certain occasions, expressing happiness is considered a social duty. This is done through certain gestures, exclamations, facial expressions, etc. By expressing happiness, the performative representation of happiness, by telling someone about our happiness or sharing it with others, we assure ourselves that our happiness is real. Happiness arises when anticipating or expecting an event connected to an image of happiness. On the other hand, the speculative character of happiness makes it unstable. In our subjective imagination, happiness is both possible and impossible. Happiness lies in the future and becomes manifest in the memory. That is why we try to attract luck and not to tempt fate. We try to win over the gods.

It is also thought that behaving morally makes one happy; there is a «moral» compulsion to be happy, something deeply rooted in neoliberalism. If a person is defined by what they accomplish and possess, happiness is reduced to material values. What falls by the wayside? Are truth and happiness mutually exclusive? And if so,

how is true happiness different from false happiness? How deceptive is happiness?

The happiness of others

By generating desire through the principle of longing, promises of happiness become part of ideological beliefs and marketing strategies. Hollywood movies, TV series, YouTube and other channels have defined, and continue to define, not only the object of desire, they also shape behaviour role models, whether traditional, fictional or emancipating. The staged happiness of others becomes an unattainable ideal. Virtual channels open endless possibilities for generating and disseminating notions of happiness. Data analysis also influences these notions. From micro-targeting campaigns to influencers, happiness is used as a promise in the context of political elections, product choices and lifestyle models. Neoliberal happiness mantras—optimize yourself, market every part of your life, realize your dreams and become happy—always involve competition with others. Technology is one way to advertise one's happiness or unhappiness. At the same time, it contains one of the greatest promises for happiness.

Are you happy or unhappy only in relation to others? Or are you happy if you are not unhappy, that is, if you are satisfied? Does the process of getting what you want make you happy, or do acts that consider the well-being of others and community make you happy? Governments create the basic conditions for happy or unhappy ways of life. If a government pursues only its own or elitist interests, this results in social and ecological unhappiness for everyone else. Economic growth as the main national promise of happiness has not only finally lost its claim to being an absolute given, at the latest

since the Fridays For Future movement, but has also been identified as the main cause of environmental destruction.

The importance of happiness

How vital is happiness in different cultures or in the imagination? Why is the pursuit of happiness so important in Western countries that it is enshrined as a right, as in the Constitution of the United States? Also the Japanese Constitution stipulates in Article 13 that the right of every Japanese citizen to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness should be a top priority in legislation and all other state affairs, as long as it does not jeopardize the common good. This can be seen as an American influence on the Japanese Constitution, which came into force in 1946, a US export functioning as a basis for the American Dream.¹ The focus here is on the self-realization of the individual, in the sense of social and material upwards movement, while the pursuit of happiness for society as a whole, public well-being, retreats to the background. Removed from socialist ideologies, the traditionally high status of community in Japan, its subordination to self-interests, clashes here with personal self-fulfilment.

Happiness as meaning

In Japan the term *ikigai* (meaning of life) is used to describe the subjective realization of happiness. *Ikigai* means having something worth living for, something that brings joy and inner contentment. *Ikigai* can be based either on a sense of belonging to a group (the fulfilment of one's role in the group) or on self-realization. The Japanese psychiatrist Tsukasa Kobayashi sees a potential danger in this, especially when people identify with their company

or work. He argues that many employees succumb to the illusion that their job supports their family, their company, and even Japan, and thus, it is their *ikigai*. But if they are laid off or retire, they realize that this is not the case. In his view, the meaning of life is based more on experience and knowledge, it has more to do with realizing the fulfilment of desires and expectations, love and happiness both individually and with others, in the sense of perceiving the overall value of one's (own) life. Kobayashi's view that anyone can live or experience his or her dream through the society without being forced is, in turn, based on the American concept of happiness and the central idea of freedom connected to it. Although self-fulfilment seems to be gaining importance in Japanese society, it nevertheless must be placed in the context of the sense of belonging. In Confucian thought, what is emphasized is the collective aspect of happiness, which is seen as a result of social order. According to Taoist beliefs, turning away from wealth and comfort makes one happy, and in Buddhism, recognizing and overcoming suffering is a type of happiness. Here, karmic causality plays a role, namely, that direct and indirect causes produce physical results, that the actions of human beings directly affect the phenomena of the world.

Lucky charms and treadmills

Lucky charms, *enigmono*, are used to influence one's destiny positively. Either they invite or beckon luck, or they ward off evil. The seven gods of fortune, the *shichifukujin*, symbolize happiness in the form of wealth, food and longevity, and they combat misfortune. Lucky charms stand for individual, earthly happiness, their credibility

connected to local traditions augmented by new legends.

Among the wide range of lucky charms are *daruma* figures,² whose single painted eye represents a wish. After the wish has been fulfilled, the second eye is painted on the figure, this signifying the «opening of the eyes» and representing a Buddhist principle.³ Happiness has to do with the process of recognizing or becoming aware of cause and effect, as well as the related changes. After the fulfilment of all wishes, the *daruma* figures are collected and burned at the temple—the process is complete.

Following positive or negative events in one's life, after a certain period, a «happiness zero point» sets in. In the hedonistic treadmill theory,⁴ the pursuit of happiness is seen as one's continual striving toward happiness while always remaining in the same place. The hedonistic treadmill tries to explain, among other things, the «East-erlin paradox», that is, why more wealth or income does not make people happier, although this would be expected. But the metaphor of the treadmill is also reminiscent of the myth of Sisyphus and his punishment, which condemned him to roll a stone up a steep slope, the stone always slipping away before he reached the summit, whereupon he had to start over again. In his essay «The Myth of Sisyphus» (1942), Albert Camus re-interpreted the tedious punitive task of the myth, seeing happiness in repetitive activity and the path, indeed, in the failure to reach the goal.

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[translation from the original German:
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1 The same is found in the constitutions of South Korea, Haiti and Namibia. The constitution of Bhutan, which came into force in 2008, secures the striving for «gross national happiness».

2 The figure represents the Buddhist monk and Zen patriarch Bodhidharma (達磨, *daruma*—hence the name of the figure).

3 Buddhist Principles 2, Inchinen Sanzen: In the *gosho* «About Opening the Eyes», Nichiren states that the doctrine of «true cause» and «true effect» reveals that the nine other worlds are all present in Buddhahood without beginning, and that Buddhahood is inherent in the nine other worlds without beginning. Both «true cause» and «true effect» are contained in the lives of ordinary people. A change in the *ichinen* of a person that takes place in a moment is a fundamental change. (Daisaku Ikeda; *Lotos-Sutra Erläuterung*; Forum April 1997; p. 34): www.nonin.de/seiten/prinzip2.htm

4 Sacha Molitorisz, «Happiness is a marathon, not a sprint», 9 October 2010: «During the 1990s, a British psychologist, Michael Eysenck, devised the hedonic treadmill theory, likening the pursuit of happiness to a person on a treadmill.» See: web.archive.org/web/20101012160913/http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/society-and-culture/happiness-is-a-marathon-not-a-sprint-20101008-16bwe.html

a language game

Happiness
happiness is a mental pattern, a verbal activity, a conceptual structure
the noise of the letters
h / a/ p /p /i/ n /e /s /s
it is a no thing, a mental appearance like
unhappiness
an obstacle
a thought constructed nonsense

a product of discrimination

due to the circular flow of the mind when moving from one object of desire to the other distinctions between real and unreal arise between self and others, existence and non-existence, samsara and nirvana cause and effect, sameness and difference, whole and parts, one and many, good and bad, acceptance and rejection we suffer holding the impermanent to be permanent, the painful to be pleasant, the impure to be pure, ignorance to be wisdom

an artificial definition of happiness and unhappiness form a duality that needs to be transcended;
happiness and unhappiness cannot be split, as all duality is falsely imagined

what can we do to secure our happiness
our lives are built in the hope for happiness
but we experience physical and mental suffering
people create meaning in their lives but it is contradicted by aging, sickness and death
accepting the traumatic and the tragic we penetrate the sound of the one clapping hand

there is nothing real about our confusion
though many questions like « who am I» remain open
we are seeking rational solutions in the paradox of our perceptions

when moving through letter-fields from H to A to P to P to I to N to E to S to S
we create thought -fields to say nothing

logical extremes

the human being is composed of around twenty five trillion cells
the brain has one hundred billion neurons
how to deal with this inconceivable picture of our selves

by bringing persistently the attention back to the breath every time it wanders
we slowly abandon all misconceptions of dreamlike happiness / dreamlike suffering
by transcending all causes of pleasure and pain the cherry trees blossom (later all like a rainbow fades)

wallgazing
flowers in the sky a face in the mirror the mount fuji disappearing in the fog
zen wishy washiness to learn how to get rid of all this dualistic nonsense

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