

Happiness: Unlocking the Science of a Fulfilling Life

Authored by
mohammad looti

June 17, 2026

RECOMMENDED CITATION

mohammad looti (2026). *Happiness: Unlocking the Science of a Fulfilling Life*.
PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES. Retrieved from <https://scales.arabpsychology.com/?p=38678>

Happiness is a mental state of well-being characterized by positive emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy. A variety of biological, psychological, religious, and philosophical approaches have striven to define happiness and identify its sources.

Positive psychology endeavors to apply the scientific method to answer questions about what "happiness" is, and how we might attain it.

Philosophers and religious thinkers often define happiness in terms of living a good life, or flourishing, rather than simply as an emotion. Happiness in this older sense was used to translate the Greek Eudaimonia, and is still used in virtue ethics.

Happiness economics suggests that measures of public happiness should be used to supplement more traditional economic measures when evaluating the success of public policy.

Scientific views

Martin Seligman asserts that happiness is not just external, momentary pleasures. Flow (engagement) and general life satisfaction are parts of happiness too, for example.

Happiness is a very fuzzy concept and can mean many things to many people. Part of the challenge of the science of happiness is to identify all the different uses of the word "happiness", or else to understand its various components.

Studies have found that things like money, education, or the weather do not affect happiness the way one might expect. There are various habits that have been correlated with happiness. Psychologist Martin Seligman provides the acronym PERMA to summarize many of Positive Psychology's findings: humans seem happiest when they have Pleasure (tasty foods, warm baths, etc.), Engagement (or flow, the absorption of an enjoyed yet challenging activity), Relationships (social ties have turned out to be extremely reliable indicator of happiness), Meaning (a perceived quest or belonging to something bigger), and finally Accomplishments (having realized tangible goals).

There is evidence suggesting that people can improve their happiness. Mood disorders like depression are often understood through a biopsychosocial model, meaning biological, psychological, and social factors all contribute to mood (i.e. there is no single cause). The diathesis-stress model further argues that a diathesis (a biological vulnerability due to genes) to certain moods are worsened or improved by the environment and upbringing. The idea is that individuals with high vulnerability, especially if their early environment worsened depressive tendencies, may need antidepressants. Furthermore, the model suggests that everyone can benefit, to varying degrees, from the various habits and practices identified by positive psychology.

There have also been some studies of religion as it relates to happiness, as well as religious or generally philosophical notions of happiness. Research has generally found that religion may help make people happier by providing various important components (e.g. PERMA) in countries where there are many who share that religion.

Religious perspectives

Buddhism

Happiness forms a central theme of Buddhist teachings. For ultimate freedom from suffering, the Noble Eightfold Path leads its practitioner to Nirvana, a state of everlasting peace. Ultimate happiness is only achieved by overcoming craving in all forms. More mundane forms of happiness, such as acquiring wealth and maintaining good friendships, are also recognized as worthy goals for lay people (see sukha). Buddhism also encourages the generation of loving kindness and compassion, the desire for the happiness and welfare of all beings.

Catholicism

In Catholicism, the ultimate end of human existence consists in felicity (Latin equivalent to the Greek eudaimonia), or "blessed happiness", described by the 13th-century philosopher-theologian Thomas Aquinas as a Beatific Vision of God's essence in the next life.

Philosophical views

The Chinese Confucian thinker Mencius, who 2300 years ago sought to give advice to the ruthless political leaders of the warring states period, was convinced that the mind played a mediating role between the "lesser self" (the physiological self) and the "greater self" (the moral self) and that getting the priorities right between these two would lead to sage-hood. He argued that if we did not feel satisfaction or pleasure in nourishing one's "vital force" with "righteous deeds", that force would shrivel up (Mencius,6A:15 2A:2). More specifically, he mentions the experience of intoxicating joy if one celebrates the practice of the great virtues, especially through music.

Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) the Muslim Sufi thinker wrote the Alchemy of Happiness, a manual of spiritual instruction throughout the Muslim world and widely practiced today.

The Hindu thinker Patanjali, author of the Yoga Sutras, wrote quite exhaustively on the psychological and ontological roots of bliss.

In the Nicomachean Ethics, written in 350 BCE, Aristotle stated that happiness (also being well and doing well) is the only thing that humans desire for its own sake, unlike riches, honor, health or

friendship. He observed that men sought riches, or honor, or health not only for their own sake but also in order to be happy. Note that eudaimonia, the term we translate as "happiness", is for Aristotle an activity rather than an emotion or a state. Happiness is characteristic of a good life, that is, a life in which a person fulfills human nature in an excellent way. People have a set of purposes which are typically human: these belong to our nature. The happy person is virtuous, meaning they have outstanding abilities and emotional tendencies which allow him or her to fulfill our common human ends. For Aristotle, then, happiness is "the virtuous activity of the soul in accordance with reason": happiness is the practice of virtue.

Many ethicists make arguments for how humans should behave, either individually or collectively, based on the resulting happiness of such behavior. Utilitarians, such as John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham, advocated the greatest happiness principle as a guide for ethical behavior.

Economic views

Common market health measures such as GDP and GNP have been used as a measure of successful policy. On average richer nations tend to be happier than poorer nations, but this effect seems to diminish with wealth. This has been explained by the fact that the dependency is not linear but logarithmic, i.e., the same percentual increase in the GNP produces the same increase in happiness for wealthy countries as for poor countries.

Economic freedom correlates strongly with happiness preferably within the context of a western mixed economy, with free press and a democracy. "Socialist" East European countries were less happy than Western ones, even less happy than other equally poor countries. It would be inaccurate to consider the ex-Soviet states as socialist, however, as socialism indicates that the workers own the means of production, which under the Soviet Union was not the case.

It has been argued that happiness measures could be used not as a replacement for more traditional measures, but as a supplement. According to professor Edward Glaeser, people constantly make choices that decrease their happiness, because they have also more important aims. Therefore, the government should not decrease the alternatives available for the citizen by patronizing them but let the citizen keep a maximal freedom of choice.

It has been argued that happiness at work is the one of the driving forces behind positive outcomes at work, rather than just being a resultant product.