

Plan of Life

Aimed at Happiness

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The following Plan of Life Aimed at Happiness comes from the Cave's *Happiness—What the Ancient Greeks Thought and Said about Happiness*.

As with any other plan, a plan of life is made to accomplish many goals or possibly just one significant goal. The following presents a plan of life aimed at happiness—a plan representing ancient Greek wisdom and practice from the course of a thousand years.

- 1. Be happy. Follow the happiness imperative.** Be convinced that happiness is the goal of life, what we humans shoot for in everything we feel, think, say, and do. Seek happiness, the goal of life. Knowing the goal, take care to look for happiness in the right place.
- 2. Understand happiness.** Realize what happiness is and why and how we are happy. Recognize that happiness can be different for different people and yet, on a deeper level, similar or the same for everyone. Try to summarize what happiness is. Know the formula(s) for happiness. Identify your own happiness formula—what happiness is for you, a more subjective formula. Try to live by it. At the same time, identify a more objective happiness formula—what happiness is for all people. Again, try to live by it.
- 3. Desire well. Grasp that happiness is the satisfaction of desire.** Seek a deeper understanding of desire—what it is and why it is, its different kinds and how it operates. Identify what you truly desire—deep down, from yourself rather than desires externally imposed by others, by convention, social pressure, marketing, and the like. Try to satisfy desire at the right time and place and in the right way. Follow natural and necessary desires.
- 4. Experience delight. Seek the true pleasure that is happiness.** Explore the relationship between happiness and pleasure. Realize that happiness both is and is not connected to pleasure (at least every pleasure). Distinguish between true pleasure, a sustaining tranquility and simple joy, versus pleasure that is sporadic, intense, and (possibly) disruptive, often ending in pain and dissatisfaction or a craving for more. Let go of some pleasures.
- 5. Seek happiness that is stable (at least more stable).** Recognize the—at times—up and down nature of the pursuit of happiness. Be aware of the instability of certain kinds of happiness and the greater stability of other kinds. Since human life is often unstable, our pursuit of happiness will likely also be unstable. Internal happiness that is “up to us” is more stable than external forms of happiness that are not always up to us. Seek the former over the latter.
- 6. Be virtuous.** Be convinced that happiness is a life lived in conformity with virtue, which is a life lived in accord with nature. Happiness is goodness. As such, happiness is an act—the ongoing act of living well.
- 7. Grasp how happiness is tied to virtue.** If virtue is,

as Plato says, “the means by which a thing performs its function well,” then happiness is the excellent performance of our natural human functions given by the creator—or, if you prefer, by nature. These functions are physical, psychological, spiritual, relational, and the like in dimension—who and what we are meant to be as human beings (in general) and as specific human beings (you, me, us).

8. Practice happiness. Do happiness. As said, happiness is an act. Know that happiness often requires effort and hard work. We must train to be happy. Just as we lift weights again and again to build muscle, so we must do that which leads to excellence or virtue again and again to be happy. As Crates of Thebes

puts it, “The path that leads to happiness through the practice of daily deeds is short.”

9. Be a friend. Do happiness with others in friendship. Though it is possible to experience a certain level of happiness without friends, friendship is an essential dimension of a fuller happiness. Reach out to others. Be a friend.

10. Explore the transcendent dimension of happiness. For some, happiness is a participation in divine mysteries. Happiness is a journey into divinity. Happiness, therefore, is a profound transformation of human into divine being—what some term *theōsis*.

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“He who lives well is blessed and happy.” —Socrates

“Long is the path that leads to happiness through words alone. But the path that leads to happiness through the practice of daily deeds is short.” —Crates of Thebes

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