

Points of Wisdom Related to Happiness

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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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Note • The following points of wisdom come from the Cave's *Happiness—What the Ancient Greeks Thought and Said about Happiness*. Points are organized by general topics (in **bold**). Speakers or sources are given in *italics* at the beginning of each quotation.

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Seek the goal of life—happiness.

Aristotle Happiness is the goal of human life. . . . It is evident all men shoot to live well and to be happy.

Epictetus God made every human being to be happy.

Julian (the Roman emperor) Every living thing naturally yearns and stretches out for happiness. . . . The aim and end of . . . every philosophy is to be happy.

Happiness is different for different people.

Homer (Odysseus is speaking) "Different men delight in different things."

Archilochus of Paros There is no single kind of human nature, but different things warm different people's hearts.

Aristotle The crowd of men and the few who are educated and refined call the highest good that action can achieve happiness, and they assume that "living well" and "doing well" is the same thing as "being happy." But they argue about what happiness is. The account given by the many is not the same as that given by the wise.

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Be aware of the instability of human happiness.

Simonides of Ceos You are a man—so don't ever say what will happen tomorrow. Or when you see a happy man, don't ever predict how long he'll be happy. The long-winged housefly doesn't even buzz off so fast.

Euripides (the chorus leader is speaking) "Happy is the mortal man who can manage life with gladness and without suffering misfortune."

Realize that happiness equals the satisfaction of desire. Therefore, know what you truly desire. Furthermore, know what is best to desire. Look for happiness in the right place and activity.

Homer (the hero Odysseus is praying for his son, Telemachus) "Lord Zeus, may Telemachus be happy among men, and may everything happen as he desires in his heart."

Dionysus Chalcus (the Bronze) From beginning to end, what is better than that which a man longs for most?

Epictetus People want things that produce happiness, but they search for them in the wrong place.

Isocrates Happiness is not merely the ability to do whatever you want. . . . Freedom is not the same as licentiousness.

Diogenes Laertius Menedemus heard someone say that the greatest good for a man would be to get what he longs for. . . . Hearing this, he said, "It is a much greater good to long for what is proper."

Happiness is Earth-provided abundance.

Homeric Hymn 30 to Earth, Mother of All Happy is the man who you—Earth, the mother of all—readily honor in your spirit! He has an abundance of everything.

Friendship is key to happiness.

Epicurus Of all the means that are procured by wisdom to ensure blessed happiness throughout the whole of life, by far the most important is the acquisition of friendship.

Epicurus Friendship dances around the world of men calling out to all of us, "Rise up to happiness!"

For some, happiness is a participation in divine mysteries.

Pindar Happy is the man who beholds the mysteries at Eleusis before going beneath the earth. He knows the end of life and its god-given beginning.

Happiness is the satisfaction of certain desires for certain pleasures.

Plato (the Athenian is speaking) "Pleasure and pain are two streams released by nature to flow. Whoever draws the right amount from them, at the right place and time, is happy."

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Isocrates Hunt after pleasures that enjoy a good reputation. For enjoyment with honor is the best thing—but without it, enjoyment is absolutely worthless.

Diogenes Laertius (stating the Cyrenaic philosopher Aristippus' position) Happiness as a whole is made up of particular pleasures.

Epicurus We must consider that of the desires, some are natural, and some are groundless. Of the natural desires, some are necessary, and some are merely natural. And of the necessary desires, some are necessary for happiness, some for freeing the body from disturbance, and some for living itself.

Epicurus We say that pleasure is the beginning point and goal of living happily. We recognize that pleasure is our first good. . . . When we say that pleasure is the beginning point and goal of life, we do not mean the pleasures of decadent men or the pleasures of sensuality, as some ignorant persons believe. . . . Rather, by pleasure we mean the absence of pain in the body and of trouble in the soul.

Happiness is *not* about luxury or pleasure.

Xenophon (Socrates is speaking) “My dear Antiphon, you appear to imagine that happiness is living luxuriously with extravagance. As for me, I hold that standing in need of nothing is divine.”

Teles the Cynic I do not see how someone will live a happy life if he really must measure it by an excess of pleasure.

Happiness is something internal rather than something external.

Julian (the Roman emperor) We must not be busy about happiness as if it were hidden away outside ourselves. . . . Is it not laughable when a man tries to find happiness somewhere outside himself, and thinks that wealth and birth and the influence of friends, and, generally speaking, everything of that sort is of the utmost importance? . . . We must say that happiness resides in our minds, in the best and noblest part of us. . . . *Diogenes of Sinope* himself professed this belief.

Crates of Thebes Take care of your soul—but your body only so far as what is necessary, and externals not even that much. I say this because happiness is not a pleasure that requires external things, nor does perfect virtue require these.

Epictetus If a man believes that his good and his interest is found only in those things that are free from hindrance and in his own power, he will be free, flowing well with a good life, happy. . . . But if he believes that his good and his interest are found in externals and in things that are not in the power of his will, then he will necessarily be hindered, impeded, and a slave to those who have power over the things that he wonders at and fears.

Plato (the Athenian is speaking) “I would never agree that a wealthy man is truly happy if he is not also a good man.”

Happiness is a good soul and mind; it is living well; it is a life in conformity with virtue.

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Aeschylus (the chorus is speaking) "Happiness comes from a healthy mind and heart."

Pythagoras The most important thing in human life is persuading the soul to be good or evil. Happy are those men who acquire a good soul.

Plato Socrates: In whatever he does, the good man does well and nobly. And he who does well is blessed and happy.

Plato The Athenian: One kind of life is sweeter than the other . . . In comparison with a vicious life, the virtuous life in body and soul is not only more pleasant, but it also rises above the other in terms of beauty, correctness, excellence, and good reputation. Consequently, if a man lives with virtue, he will live with complete happiness.

Plato Socrates: Virtue is the means by which a thing performs its function well. . . . The function of a thing is that which it alone can do, or what it does better, than anything else. *The most important virtues are wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice.*

Xenophon (Virtue personified is speaking to the hero Heracles) "I associate with the gods and with good men, and no fine action, whether the deed of a god or of a man, is done without me. . . . So, Heracles, . . . if you toil hard along the path that I, Virtue, have mapped, you can acquire the most blessed happiness."

Aristotle Happiness is an activity of the soul that accords with perfect virtue.

Crates of Thebes We Cynics say that the good and excellent man, and no other man, is called happy.

Zeno of Citium (the Stoic) Happiness consists in virtue, which is the state of the soul that tends to make the whole of life harmonious.

Diogenes Laertius (giving the position of the early Stoics) The virtues are goods that have both the nature of ends and means. Inasmuch as they produce happiness, they are means to good things. On the other hand, inasmuch as they are the fulfillment of happiness, being a portion of happiness itself, they are ends.

Practice happiness—happiness is something we do. Happiness requires education and training.

Xenophon Socrates judged that education and training would make men not only happy for themselves, . . . but it would also help them make other men happy, and to even make their cities happy.

Epicurus We must practice those things that produce happiness since if happiness is present, we possess everything, and if it is not, we do everything to acquire it.

Crates of Thebes 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.

Xenophon (Socrates is speaking) "Do you not know, Antiphon, that by training, practice, and exercise, those who

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are by nature weak in the body grow mightier than the very strongest man who doesn't train, practice, and exercise? And that the training itself becomes easy and bearable? Since, then, I am always training my body to bear patiently whatever happens, don't you think that I am more able to bear everything with ease than you are without training?"

Happiness is serious business.

Aristotle The happy life is a serious life spent in effort rather than a less serious life engaged in various amusements.

Aristotle Amusement is a kind of rest or relaxation. We need rest because we cannot work continuously. Rest itself, then, is not an end or goal; rather, we rest for the sake of further activity. . . . In this way, Anacharsis' maxim seems right: "Play and amuse yourself in order to be serious and busy."

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