



# HAPPINESS in philosophy, ethics and religion

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**Studium  
Generale**

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# Vocabulary

happiness

reason

satisfaction

well-being

cause

fulfillment

flourishing

purpose

paradox

beatitude

meaning

Take a minute to check the meaning!

# Introduction

Recently, have you been happy?

Do you think that happiness is important for everybody?

Who do you think is the happiest person on earth today?

Are material goods indispensable for happiness?

**Think about it for a minute!**

# Introduction

Talk about happiness: simple yet not banal, vague yet real...

There has always been interest in what happiness consists of, especially in recent years (Lenoir, Seligman...)

My goal is not so much to teach you something but to give you an opportunity to think about what you and other people consider important

We won't be able to deal with the history of happiness at length...

# Part 1: Why is happiness a problem?

- the talk about happiness can sound **unscientific** and it is often **taken for granted**
- when we are happy, we don't have to think about it, but when we are unhappy, happiness seems too far away to think about (cf. health)
- many people have completely **different definitions** of “happiness”
- there is something in happiness that **does not depend on us**, although without doing anything we will hardly ever be happy
- since it seems that happiness is **not completely achievable** during this lifetime, does it make any sense to strive for it?

# Part 1

*What are the difficulties when dealing with a topic such a happiness?*

*Do all needs have to be met before we can achieve happiness?*

**Think about it for a minute!**

# Part 2.1: Some approaches to happiness

- statistical research on what people consider important for happiness  
→ health, wealth, job, family, relationships, meaning in life... (**age differences**)
- countries' ranking according to "happiness index"
  1. **material prerequisites** for happiness – necessary yet not sufficient
  2. **mindset** focused on enjoying the moment
  3. problem with **comparing** ourselves with others (isolation)
- role of **religiosity**  
→ having a more universal worldview apparently helps people attain fulfillment and satisfaction



## Part 2

*Can a mere absence of problems be defined as happiness?*

*What else do the people who identify as “happy” have in common?*

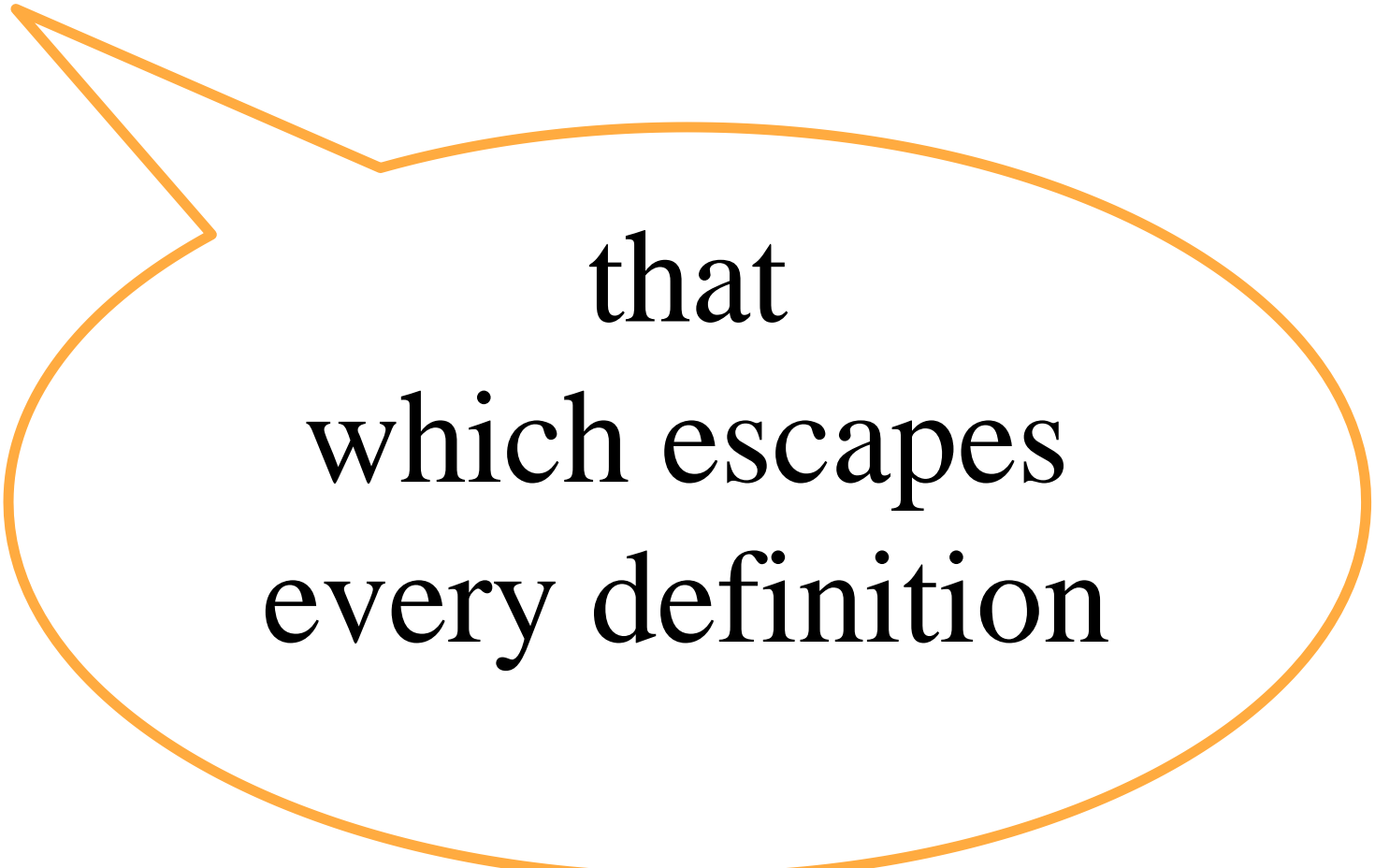
*Is there a special technique to attain happiness?*

**Think about it for a minute!**

## Part 2.2: Paradoxes of happiness

- inner-worldly / otherworldly
- instantaneous / durable
- partial and fragmentary / total and absolute
- subjectively perceived / objectively demonstrable
- an achievement / purely a gift
- etc.

⇒ both extremes contain some truth in them!




that  
which escapes  
every definition

# Part 3.1: Meister Eckhart's insights

- German scholar, christian monk and mystic, 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century
- his writings have been of strong interest among scholars in Japan because of points of agreement with the Buddhist philosophy (cf. Kyoto school)
- some controversial statements:
  - *I pray to God that he might free me from himself...*
  - *He who wants to see God must become blind...*
  - *What is life? God's being is my life.*
  - ***Nothingness is God...***
  - *The eye with which I see God and the eye with which God sees me are the same eye.*
- Happiness??

# Part 3.2: Happiness according to Eckhart

- return to the **origin** = the unity of all things  
→ manifoldness of beings is a hindrance for happiness
- happiness doesn't consist of attaining something (self-realization, knowledge, vision of God, etc.), but in **emptying** oneself
- one has to be rooted in the “**ground**” – the very basis of one's own being – rather than scattered in activities/possessions  
→ the task: to find one's true self and essence
- **in order to be happy one has to “live without a Why”**  
→ knowing causes ≠ knowing reasons 

# Part 3

*According to Eckhart, what has to be gained and what has to be gotten rid of in order to be happy?*

*Is knowing all answers to all questions important for living a happy life?*

**Think about it for a minute!**

# Summary

Eckhart 1.0: happiness means living without a **Why**

Eckhart 2.0: happiness means to live without an “**if...**”

Doing things **for their own sake** = **love**???

→ *I love because I love, I love so that I may love...*

Importance of useless things in our life (e.g. **art**)

# Conclusion

*What is the difference between happiness and health? How can they be studied and measured?*

*Which countries rank as the happiest ones?*

*What kind of people tend to be the happiest?*

**Think about it for a minute!**

**THANK YOU**