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REFLECTIONS ON HAPPINESS

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“Folks are usually about as happy as they make their minds up to be.”
Abraham Lincoln

The article is a short overview of philosophical beliefs on happiness over the centuries – from antiquity to the present day. What is common in the discussed concepts is understanding happiness as the highest good. The article also includes the references to the contemporary scholars whose views on happiness are various. The author outlines the value of happiness in the original ethical concept by Grzegorz Grzybek – “the ethics of development” – which confirms the variety of contemporary literature on this issue. Nevertheless, the article does not end at the theoretical reflections since its further part is devoted to the meaning of happiness for the young generation desiring to pursue it, but not at the expense of other person.

Key words: happiness, highest good, goal, value.

The essence of happiness bothered ancient philosophers and ethicists. Starting with the pagan era one should mention Democritus (5th – 4th century BC). According to him the highest level of human happiness, *euthymia*, is a state of undisturbed piece of mind – joy of heart – which can be achieved by obeying a set of moral directives, e. g. “education is better than wealth”, “not only word and deed, but also will should be righteous”, “do good not for a reward but through the love for good”. Another one, Socrates (5th – 4th century BC) defined happiness as *eudaimonia* – the highest human good. It is something different than pleasure, *hedone*, and therefore simultaneously it is true good since it is independent from tangible goods. A human achieves happiness by means of self-improvement. The main obstacle to happiness is lack of knowledge and ignorance. Knowledge, i.e. wisdom is an intuition of what is good. On the other hand, Plato (5th – 4th century BC) believed that what gives a human happiness is born of love pursuit of Good which is, in turn, the core of the virtue of wisdom, composure, justice. Happiness is real and moderate pleasure, inner order and spiritual harmony comprising the effect of counterbalance of these virtues. Plato’s pupil, Aristotle (4th century BC) identified happiness with improving the rational nature of a human. This improvement consists in possessing certain goods. That human is happy who actualises noble and valuable goods. Pleasures are a part of happiness but they are secondary and dispensable. Happiness is possible only on the basis of virtue, beyond it there is no real happiness. Happiness consists in virtuous life that is pursuit of wisdom, being guided by reason and logic and the feelings and passions that stay in accordance with them, namely prudence, moderation, courage, justice. Epicurus (4th – 3rd century BC), similarly to Socrates, associated happiness with the highest good. Nevertheless, he understood experiencing happiness in a different way. According to his teaching it consists in experiencing pleasure while fulfilling the needs, mostly in experiencing the consciousness of life while resting, in feeling of inner peace and joy of spirit and freedom from any suffering [see: 1, p. 11–39].

Christian era of antiquity and the Middle Ages are predominantly the work of philosophers and ethicists connected with Church – St. Augustine, Boethius, St. Thomas, Blessed John Duns Scotus. The teachings of all of them could be summarised in the form of a thesis that happiness is the purpose of human life whereas God – infinitely perfect good. They differed in a specific approach to happiness as such. First of them, St. Augustine (4th – 5th century) taught that happy life and the state of perfect happiness can be obtained only and exclusively by the unity with God – the highest, infinite and eternal happiness. Pursuit of happiness gives the meaning to human life. The continuator of his philosophy was Boethius (5th – 6th century). According to St. Thomas (13th century) happiness is not union with God but achieving the vision of God. Worldly goods have the power of making happy but not in a complete way, hence motivating to make further efforts in this direction. Blessed John Duns Scotus (13th – 14th century) placed the possibility of achieving happiness by a human beyond their abilities and predispositions. For a human happiness depends on God, it is a sign of His goodness and love towards a human. What is within human power is only the realisation of worldly happiness which is highly diverse [see: 1, p. 35–58].

During the Renaissance, philosophy focused more on the issue of state and society. The subject of happiness was reconsidered in the Enlightenment period. Descartes (16th – 17th century) stated that human happiness is for them the highest good and it means conforming to God's image by acting in accordance with His will. Baruch Spinoza (17th century) made the feeling of happiness and contentment conditional to better understanding of the meaning of life, namely God, thanks to the power of being guided by reason and being independent from passion. Love for God makes human happy [see: 1, p. 60–81].

The Enlightenment utilitarianism and criticism were a departure from identifying happiness with the essence of God and moving towards natural law and social justice. Jeremy Bentham (18th – 19th century) associated happiness with producing the greatest amount of pleasure for the greatest number of people. In order to do so one should be guided by prudence, ability to anticipate, thinking straight, and particularly the knowledge of the laws governing human actions. Immanuel Kant (18th – 19th century) confirmed that a human in their life is guided by self-interest, and particularly by a desire for happiness. Kant detached good from happiness – he believed that the most valuable motive for fulfilling a duty, the greatest virtue is the willingness to fulfil it because it is a duty. Law should be obeyed because it should be obeyed. Bernard Bolzano (18th – 19th century) as an opponent of Kant called for always choosing from all the possible actions only the ones which after considering all the possible results will fulfil the virtuous life and common happiness [see: 1, p. 85–91].

19th century is the time of the teachings of John Stuart Mill, the Vienna Circle, neoscholasticists. John Stuart Mill, similarly to J. Bentham, confirmed the rule of the felicific calculus (producing the greatest amount of pleasure for the greatest number of people). Moreover, he divided pleasures into lower- and higher-quality ones. The Vienna Circle neopositivism was created by the works of Moritz Schlick, Otton Karl Wilhelm Neurath, Ludwig Wittgenstein. According to their teachings, human happiness depends on practising true values. Social motives aiming at the general good also lead to the highest personal happiness. Neoscholastic ethics, on the other hand, generally reminded us about the existence of the final goal of human life, capable of fulfilling the human pursuit of worldly and posthumous happiness [see: 1, p. 92–118].

20th century brings plenty of reflections in terms of happiness, mainly the common one. Paul Ricoeur, for instance, believed that there is a dialectical relationship “I – you” involved with combination of fundamental human pursuits – “happiness – respect for the law”. Władysław Biegański wrote that the highest goal of the life of an individual depends on the exercised occupation and in a dynamic sense is a factor of pursuit of happiness of the whole

society in the course of development and improvement. Czesław Znamierowski began the reflections on happiness with admitting that values have the power of giving meaning to human life and enriching it. The particular value is common kindness, which is the source of moral judgements that create moral order producing general happiness [see: 1, p. 119–137]. Henryk Elzenberg differentiates between happiness and the most intense pleasure or delight since it embraces the whole human. Even very strong pleasure is felt as one of the components of all experiences in a given moment – a human possesses pleasure, experiences it but it does not possess and embrace him. Happiness, on the other hand, is not a sensation, it is not positioned. It embraces, pervades a person, it is spread over the whole spectrum of the state of mind. Happiness is a motive – a goal of fulfilling values. Happiness is a positive state felt as a permanent one, alternatively as such when the thought about the passing time fades. Hence, this state can be achieved only after death. Elzenberg understood happiness in this way constantly comparing it with the state of “human self-deification”, sainthood, immortality, salvation. Eternal happiness can be earned by creating good and beauty. Thus happiness is being valuable – absolutely valuable, communing with the Absolute, since in this state there is no chance of lost or change [2, p. 241–245].

As we can see it, across the centuries happiness was understood differently. Nevertheless, it was always perceived as the highest good. Specifically it meant:

- pure peace of spirit achieved through obeying certain rules,
- inner order and spiritual harmony,
- pursuit of wisdom, being guided by reason and logic,
- wisdom, intuition what is good, contrary to achieving pleasure,
- experiencing the consciousness of life identical to feeling pleasure while fulfilling needs,
- union with God,
- achieving the vision of God,
- conforming to God’s image by acting in accordance with His will,
- love for God,
- producing the greatest amount of pleasure for the greatest number of people,
- increasing positive social consequences by one’s own actions,
- fulfilling the life goal,
- moral order caused by mutual common kindness,
- a positive state experienced as permanent, everlasting.

Nowadays happiness can be understood in numerous ways. A contemporary philosopher Leszek Kołakowski considers a possibility of identifying happiness with the Buddhist state of nirvana. This state is compared by him to salvation in the Christian faith. The philosopher states that in both religions it means perfect peace of spirit. “And perfect peace of spirit is the same as perfect stability” [3, p. 139]. Since humanity assumes taking part in suffering and joy of other people, we cannot achieve the peace of spirit during earthly life. This state is possible in case of some children up to 5 years living in a loving family and not experiencing any worries. Having crossed this age limit, “we are supposedly too old for happiness, although we are of course able to experience temporary pleasures (...), we can know love and joy. Happiness as a stable condition is not available for us anymore, apart from, maybe, extremely rare cases of truly mystical souls. This is true in case of human condition” [3, p. 139]. Thus happiness, according to Kołakowski, is something imagined but not experienced. And if we imagine that all the people were saved, they did not suffer from any shortage or pain, it would be a realistic but assumed state since such a condition has never been seen before [3, p. 141]. By this statement, Kołakowski is close to the definition of Elzenberg’s eternal happiness.

Concluding the theoretical reflections on happiness it should be noted that it can mean one-time success, short-lasting well-being, permanent life satisfaction, life in accordance to preferred values, maintaining certain life standard in terms of tangible goods or eternal life. Regardless of the way in which we understand happiness one can definitely state that it is an effect of one's own activity, therefore it depends on an individual, their efforts and attitude, taking a stance in case of one's own actions and approach to the world. The ability of appreciating positive phenomena in a natural and social environment (e.g. beautiful weather, kind people around) is conducive to experiencing and achieving happiness, while habitual discontent, constant dissatisfaction, endless feeling of the need to possess hinders, even prevents us from being or feeling happiness. Therefore the worth of happiness as such consists of both "being" and "having" since "to be" and "to have" complement each other – "being" happy means "having" not necessarily tangible goods but primarily reflective life attitude, good will in relations with another human.

Happiness is – apart from wisdom, freedom, love and dignity – a basic value in Grzegorz Grzybek's "ethics of development" [4, p. 31–46]. This scientist defines happiness as "arranging one's own desires, relationships with other people and environment so that one can enjoy learning about the world, interactions with other people and fulfilling one's own life goals and achieved successes in a possibly undisturbed way" [4, p. 44]. It, in turn, should constitute a basis for the contemporary teachers being aware of the challenges, which are posed to them by the changing educational reality. The purpose of the "ethics of development" is proper development of a pupil–student and self–development of a tutor–teacher since the intrinsic human life goal is personal development. Because of it valuable acting and experiencing happiness is possible. Happiness is here a guiding value and it depends on the realisation of basic values. A human (here: a tutor, a pupil) cannot not desire happiness. Pursuit of happiness is as important as fulfilling an obligation (here: occupational, school, study). Happiness requires crossing the borders of animalism. Education consists in assisting in getting to know oneself and one's own abilities, in supporting the development of the pupil's ethical personality. The condition of that is guiding oneself and the choice of the standards of one's behaviour with respect to others [4, p. 126–139].

What is understood as happiness by a contemporary young person is certainly an issue that absorbs quite a few parents or guidance counsellors. Especially facing the variety of attitudes presented by teenagers – being clearly influenced by media and an immediate environment – it may be assumed that the answers will be both surprising and different from the expected ones.

Contrary to appearances, young people somehow find the meaning of life in the world, which shows conflicting values. On the one hand the circle of educated people call for and remind us about the importance of ethical values, on the other hand media and "show-business" together with all its atmosphere supports consumer, hedonistic values. What is required from an ordinary citizen is staying in the mainstream, keeping up-to-date, pursuit of possession, gaining wealth, standing out, developing, simultaneously presenting – proper for a true patriot – attitudes appropriate for average people, conformists, supporters of collectivism, for whom the common well-being is important.

Young people, in spite of often severe image which is supposed to mask inner sensitivity and create the appearance of a light-hearted approach to life, in fact appreciate the basic values and are not fully aware of what is appreciated by their peers. Youth wants to be happy because pursuit of happiness gives the meaning of life.

For contemporary teenagers happiness is primarily love, being loved among others by parents, receiving support from the closest to them, being trusted by them. It is also an opportunity to fulfil one's interests, satisfying basic needs, treating oneself even with small things (e.g. eating sweets). For the majority happiness is the same as joy, momentary satisfaction from

success, a smile of the closest person, meeting with friends. Some of them claim that happiness is a complex phenomenon and it is not fleeting. Despite young age and apparent carefreeness in behaviour, young people are aware that health and family are something we strive for, what enables development and therefore brings happiness. A possibility of helping others, finding one's own place in the world, the other half, self-actualisation, having friends, feeling that you can count on them and talk about everything, communication with the people around, their acceptance, peace, a quality job, stable financial situation, life in harmony with oneself, with the people you love, well-being, a smile for another person, experiencing every single day, faith in God, a house in a quiet neighbourhood, television, pocket money, a pet, etc. are life components, some of them apparently of little significance, regarded as the factors of happiness.

Adolescents believe that their peers associate happiness with being rich, famous, popular and liked, while it is not the case. This demonstrates that young people follow the appearances when judging others and/or deliberate conceal one's true self. If somebody gives an impression of being a bold, uncompromising, trouble-free person and perhaps they claim so, they are perceived as appreciating temporal values. Long deep inside they desire something more, they appreciate what is the basis of life and development, and not a momentary satisfaction¹.

Adam Bytof, a personal development trainer, an author of trance self-hypnosis and meditation tapes, conducting workshops, lectures and trainings claims that the notion of happiness is carried by us. Sometimes we ask why we are not happy although everything seems to indicate that we should be happy – we have a quality job, good looks, successful private life. Therefore, we look for the reasons in the outside world, in people and circumstances. What is actually important is our reactions. When we realise that the world does not give happiness we turn towards ourselves and we discover our own subconsciousness. There are things we would like to get rid of and treasures we are not aware of. Often we would like to be happy but we believe we do not deserve it because according to us we are, for example, ugly, fat, unintelligent, etc. This is the message we convey to the world by which we are perceived. We are stuck in a symbolic morass. "Each of us (...) possesses patterns of emotional reactions shaped in childhood, passed on by parents, caregivers, teachers at school. Other people (...) install in our subconsciousness the programs which serve to assess reality and react to it. Depending on genes, environment in which we were brought up and the choices we made, we have a specific program. Favourable or not. Emotionally hurt adults install software with a toxic "virus". Since all the judgements we heard in childhood deeply code in us. (...) when I realise that in my subconsciousness there function imposed programs, as an adult responsible for myself I am able to throw them away, change, adjust them to the main life goal – happiness" [5, p. 52–53].

As we can see it, the value of happiness, what it means, that it is associated with and what is understood as a way to achieve it is a timeless, permanent and stable category, desired regardless of age. Everyone, also a young person, has their own philosophy of happiness. Which? – it is not important, but not at the expense of other person. What is important is pursuit of it.

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¹ The results of own study carried in 2012 in the group of 205 upper-secondary school students between 16 and 18 years of age.

МІРКУВАННЯ ПРО ЩАСТЯ

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Стаття містить загальний огляд філософських підходів у трактуванні феномену «щастя» в історії, від давнини до сьогодення. Спільною вихідною тезою, яка об'єднує вибрані концепції, є розуміння щастя в категоріях найвищого добра (блага). Докладніше розглянуто уявлення на цю тему вибраних сучасних дослідників, які інтерпретують «щастя» з досить відмінних позицій. Серед них виокремлено й проаналізовано етичну концепцію «етики розвитку» польського філософа Гжегожа Гжибка. Теоретичні висновки доповнено авторськими обґрунтуваннями про важливе значення «щастя» для молодого покоління, та саме тих можливостей його досягнути, які не передбачають інструментальне використання іншого.

Ключові слова: щастя, найвище добро (благо), мета, цінність.