

# HAPPINESS THROUGH THE AGES: A SKETCH

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## INTRODUCTION

This is a sketch of the idea of happiness. The theme is the competition between two rival views of happiness: the hedonic vs. the eudaimonic. My main point is that the Heavenly Doctrines teach the eudaimonic view of happiness and that this view is superior to the hedonic for several reasons. I will examine the concept of happiness from philosophical, theological, and psychological perspectives. Aware that my professional expertise lies in only the first area, there may be errors in my conclusions in the other two fields. However, I think that the benefits of looking at the subject in a holistic manner outweigh the risks of a purely philosophical treatment.

## ANCIENT SOURCES

What is happiness? One could assert, as in fact Dennis Prager has, that happiness is a serious problem.<sup>1</sup> Judging by what we read in the newspapers, the life of just about any Hollywood movie star will confirm this. Prager is right that happiness is a serious practical problem for individuals and society. This is why theology, philosophy, and science have investigated its causes. To gain some historical perspective, let us begin with the Old Testament and the ancient Greeks.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Prager, *Happiness is a Serious Problem: A Human Nature Repair Manual* (New York: Regan Books [HarperCollins], 1998) ix–xi. Prager reports that he used to think that happiness was not a serious topic. Yet when he gave talks on it, the response was overwhelmingly positive. Based upon his experience, Prager thinks that happiness is a uniquely human aim, one that is shared by people all around the world.

<sup>2</sup> Darrin McMahan has recently provided the public with an excellent book, namely, *Happiness: A History* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006). While it includes information on several important thinkers not considered here, it does not review the developments in Positive Psychology, nor does it consider Swedenborg's view. Still, it is a well-written book and I highly recommend it.

Adam and Eve were happy at first, but as a result of their disobedience, were (putting it mildly) sad. Inside the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve effortlessly obtained all the food they needed, were not ashamed of their nakedness, lived as equals, and coexisted in peace with creation. Outside the garden of Eden, Adam would rule over Eve, who would bear children in pain, and they would toil against creation to grow enough food to survive (Gen. 2–3). This is a major theme of the Old Testament. God offers people a choice: obedience and blessings, or disobedience and curses.

A theological question I wish to put before the reader is this: Is God happy, sad, both, or neither? What is God's intention toward us? I ask this because one's idea of God and God's purpose determines much else in life, both intellectually and affectionally.

What sort of image of God do we form when we read about Jehovah in the Old Testament? When the Israelites are disobedient God is often portrayed as angry, even vengeful. Rarely is Jehovah portrayed as happy. But there is a story in which Jehovah is described as "pleased." This is the account of Solomon's reply to God's question, What shall I give you? The young king expressed his gratitude and humility before God and simply asked for "an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil" (I Kings 3:9).<sup>3</sup> This decision pleased the Lord and because Solomon asked for this virtue instead of a long life, riches, and honor, the Lord said that He would bestow these upon Solomon. The message to the reader is that if you wish to be wise and blessed like Solomon, it is best to pray to God for spiritual goods, such as virtue, rather than worldly ones.

We now move to that other source of Western civilization, ancient Greece. It is important to be clear about what Aristotle meant by *eudaimonia*. This Greek word is often translated as "happiness," but it can more accurately be translated as well-being, flourishing, or living a good life. Aristotle's concept of happiness includes such matters as one's status in society, health, luck, and virtuous acts as well as positive feelings. No matter how positive you feel about yourself, even if you are in a state of ecstasy all of the time, according to Aristotle you would not be happy

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<sup>3</sup> All biblical references are to the *Holy Bible, The New King James Version* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1979).

unless you had both certain external advantages and the moral virtues. By “virtue” or “excellence” (*arête*), Aristotle writes in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he means a habit of choice, the characteristic of which lies in moderation as determined by reason. What exactly did he have in mind? In addition to moderation, Aristotle’s list of the virtues includes courage (extremes: cowardice, rashness), liberality (extremes: wastefulness, stinginess), magnificence (extremes: vulgarity, miserliness), pride (extremes: humility, vanity), good temper (irascibility, too easy going), friendliness (obsequiousness, churlishness), truthfulness (lying, boasting), wittiness (buffoonery, boorishness), shame (shamelessness, excessive guilt), justice, and righteous indignation (envy, malevolence).<sup>4</sup> These are the character traits needed for a virtuous, or excellent, human life.

As a recent article in the *Annual Review of Psychology* states, there have been two rival views of happiness for many centuries: one is the hedonic, the other is the eudaimonic.<sup>5</sup> The second view obviously takes its name from the Aristotelian tradition. Aristotle (following Socrates and Plato) rejects various versions of the hedonic view and argues for the eudaimonic. The choice between these two ways of living, these two views of happiness, has always been with us. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, and Boethius all argued for eudaimonia and against the hedonism and relativism of the Sophists, Aristippus, the Epicureans, and the Sceptics. One side—the eudaimonic—claims that a human being’s primary purpose in life is to be good and that being good is either its own reward or leads to happiness. The other side—the hedonic—claims that our primary purpose is to enjoy pleasures of various kinds (physical and mental) and avoid pain, suffering, anxiety, and discomfort. Living a pleasurable life is as happy as a human being can get. To put it into today’s terms, one side claims that if we concentrate on being good, we will be happy and flourishing. The other side claims that concentrating on being good is no fun, and that happiness lies in pleasures and fun while avoiding pain and boredom.

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<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Martin Ostwald trans. (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1962) books III and IV.

<sup>5</sup> Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci, “On Happiness and Human Potentials: A Review of Research on Hedonic and Eudaimonic Well-Being,” *Annual Review of Psychology* (2001): 141. I am grateful to Derek Rose, student research assistant, for finding this and other articles and passages on happiness.

How did Aristotle arrive at his position on the happy life? Since his conception of flourishing for a human being is exactly that of the ideal philosophical life, one might conclude that Aristotle has simply rationalized his own way of living. While there is some truth to this charge, it is not that simple. It is clear from the *Nicomachean Ethics* that Aristotle comprehends alternative forms of living and he provides a philosophical strategy for convincing the reader of the inferiority of rival conceptions of happiness. He does this through a functional analysis of human nature. Briefly, Aristotle argues that other views of happiness will not be truly satisfying for human beings because they do not actualize the full potential inherent in the human soul. For example, he says that the life of mere nutrition and growth is something we have in common with plants. Thus, happiness cannot consist merely or only in health, body-building, athletics and the like. The least refined people suppose the good to be pleasure, but the life of enjoyment can be experienced by beasts and is not unique to human beings. It is only humans who can use reason to moderate their passions to live virtuously and use reason to understand God, the soul, and the first principles of all things (metaphysics). Philosophical reflection upon reality to understand the causes of life is a divine-like activity. So we see that Aristotle provided reasons—beyond his own way of living—to support his view that happiness largely consists of virtue and philosophical contemplation, not hedonism.

### MEDIEVAL SOURCES

When Christianity dominated Western society during the Middle Ages, the concept of happiness underwent three important changes. First, the concepts of bliss and grace were strengthened. Second, the focus changed from the happiness or unhappiness of this life to considerations of happiness in heaven or unhappiness in hell in the next life. Think of all the times that Jesus refers to rewards in heaven. Consider also what He said about the rich man's fate in hell and St. John's description of hell in Revelation. As one can see from Medieval and Reformation-era artwork, the other-worldly nature of happiness and unhappiness provided a rich source of imagery for artists. Yet we must qualify this general truth by adding that for some philosophers, such as Plato and Cicero, consider-

ations of the state of one's soul in the afterlife did have an impact upon moral choices and ultimate happiness. Nevertheless, there was agreement among Christians that perfect happiness was not attainable in this world, only in the next. Third, the arguments about happiness were, for the most part, *within* the house of faith. Aquinas asserted that beatitude consists of the intellectual vision of truth and the contemplation of God. St. Bonaventure and Duns Scotus, on the other hand, insisted that blessedness is primarily a matter of the heart and loving devotion to God. The sixteenth century Spanish Jesuit Suarez maintained that both vision and love are needed. There are many interesting Medieval thinkers, but we will confine our examination to the eudaimonic view espoused by the "angelic doctor."

Aquinas is a figure that represents the Medieval synthesis, that is, the blending of two rivers of Western civilization that originate in Athens and Jerusalem. Aquinas accepted much of what Aristotle had to say about the good life for human beings, including the satisfaction of certain desires associated with the natural part of the self. However, above the nutritive, sensitive, and intellectual levels of the human soul, Aquinas added a spiritual one. This changes the ancient Greek's functional analysis in such a way that complete virtue—and thus happiness—are not achieved until and unless a person acquires the three well-known theological virtues: faith, hope, and love (or charity). Aquinas, taking his lead from the famous Pauline letter to the Corinthians (chapter 13) asserts that human beings are not truly happy until they have achieved their spiritual potential and, through a right relationship with God, have received His blessings.

How did people's idea of God change during the Middle Ages? As Jaroslav Pelikan has shown in his book *The Illustrated Jesus Through the Centuries*, the Lord can be portrayed in many ways: from a rather distant cosmic Christ or regal king, to a curious boy and the symbol of Everyman.<sup>6</sup> However, when we think of Jesus, we often picture Him suffering on the cross. It is a profound understatement to say that at this moment, Jesus is not happy. Sometimes we see Him portrayed in a rather emotionally neutral way, but rarely do we find Him with a smile on His face. The Gospels, especially Mark, reveal that the Lord experienced a wide range of

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<sup>6</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Illustrated Jesus Through the Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

emotions, from the “exceedingly sorrowful” state of mind in the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:34) to His confident assertion of Messiahship in front of the Sanhedrin at His trial. It is in the Gospel according to Luke that we find the Lord portrayed as happy. In chapter ten, after Jesus sent out 70 apostles and they returned with joy, “in that hour Jesus rejoiced in the spirit” (Luke 10:21). In addition, from the three parables in chapter 15 about the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son, it is easy to see how God rejoices over sinners who repent. Yet, the happiness of Jesus is rarely captured in art; almost exclusively, it is His suffering. While it is essential that theology help people make sense of, or at least cope with, their suffering, this emphasis in Christianity fell out of favor with many people in the modern era who went from believing in the happiness of virtue, to the virtue of happiness.

### MODERN SOURCES

With the fall of Medieval Christianity came the rise of modern philosophy. Here the debate between rival visions of happiness recurs. Some Enlightenment thinkers, such as Immanuel Kant, Adam Smith, and Benjamin Franklin argued for and promoted the eudaimonic view of happiness, often developing a list of virtues influenced by both a waning Christian culture and an appreciation for certain ancient Greek and Roman authors. Other philosophers, such as the French *philosophes* Diderot, Helvetius, and (in England) Jeremy Bentham promoted the hedonic view. As Bentham wrote in chapter one of his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* of 1789 (the manifesto of Utilitarianism):

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure.

By utility is meant that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness, (all these in the present case come to the same thing) or . . . to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness. . . .<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Jeremy Bentham, *The Principles of Morals and Legislation*, (1789, New York: Hafner, 1948), 1–2.

Notice that the good is equated with pleasure and evil is equated with pain. Bentham was concerned only with the quantity of pleasure or pain. His follower, John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), added the notion of quality of pleasure to the happiness calculus. Mill, the Victorian gentleman, felt that mental pleasures and the pleasures of a refined upper-class life were better than other pleasures. From the standpoint of the Heavenly Doctrines, Mill is right that some pleasures are better than others. For example, the delights of true marriage love surpass the delights of all other loves (*ML* 68). In fact, there is recent empirical confirmation that it is not just that happy people find each other and then marry, rather, formal marriage actually causes a husband and wife to be happier.<sup>8</sup>

But there are problems with the Utilitarian approach to happiness. By identifying happiness with pleasure, the Utilitarians hoped that happiness would be anchored to a scientific basis and thus end centuries of debate. (It would also give them and other social scientists tremendous influence over social policies.) The problem is that it is very difficult to compare widely different pleasures and displeasures, and difficult to compare people's subjective experiences of pleasure. Another problem, identified by Aristotle and the philosopher Henry Sidgwick (1838–1900), is known as the paradox of hedonism: "a rational method of attaining the end at which [egoistic hedonism] aims requires that we should to some extent put it out of sight and not directly aim at it" (*The Methods of Ethics*, p. 136).<sup>9</sup> Nicholas White states that the reason Sidgwick called this a paradox is to

show that if the goal is to gain as much pleasure as possible, deliberation about how to do so can get in the way of attaining that goal. That's because of a fact about human beings: they can't readily enjoy themselves when they're thinking about how to enjoy themselves.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See M.D.R. Evans and Jonathan Kelley, "Effect of Family Structure on Life Satisfaction: Australian Evidence" in *Social Indicators Research* 69 (2004): 303–349. They report that "divorce without remarriage, or long lasting cohabitation without formal marriage, reduce the lifetime sum of subjective well-being by 4–12% for both women and men" (303).

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in *A Brief History of Happiness*, by Nicholas White (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 62.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

Yet the biggest problem is that Mill and Bentham, are, as are all hedonists, profoundly mistaken in equating pleasure with goodness and evil with pain. Hedonism confuses how we *feel* with what is really *good*. We experience some pleasure in almost all deeds and some delight in all loves, and we tend to call “good” anything that gives us delight. However, just as there are evil loves and good loves, there are evil delights and good delights, and these are opposites (*TCR* 38). It is for this very failure to distinguish between what feels good and what is good, (that is, between good affections and evil ones) that Epicurus, the father of classical hedonism, is not in heaven (*ML* 182; he is “at the border to the west”).

Indeed, the resurgence of Epicureanism in the eighteenth century in combination with Darwinism of the nineteenth, has been identified as the main reason why “we are all hedonists now.”<sup>11</sup> Yet, as McMahan has noted, the controversial doctor, Julien Offray de La Mettrie (1709–1751), went beyond Epicurus.<sup>12</sup> Whereas the ancient sage urged people to prudentially limit their desires, La Mettrie encouraged their expansion. He justified severing the age-old link between reason, virtue, and happiness. As the most “enlightened” of all, he “liberated” happiness from God and the soul by means of his sensationalist philosophy. Whereas the classical sages had aimed to cultivate happiness among an ethical elite, the Enlightenment visionaries dreamed of bringing happiness to entire societies and even humanity as a whole. The “heavenly city” of the philosophes was to be constructed not by theologians, but by “experimental philosophy,” that is, a scientific approach to morals and legislation as expressed by the Utilitarians and Positivists.

The rise of modern science has had a profound effect on our culture, from our daily habits to our philosophy. After repeated attempts by Enlightenment thinkers (such as La Mettrie and Bentham) to make philosophy more scientific, philosophers in the late nineteenth century gradually abandoned this and turned the subject of happiness over to the social sciences. I will briefly examine one philosopher who illustrates this trend

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<sup>11</sup> Benjamin Wiker, *Moral Darwinism: How We Became Hedonists* (Downers Grove, IL: InverVarsity Press, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> McMahan, 229–30.

as well as the increasing secularization of the topic, namely, Bertrand Russell.

Russell (1872–1970) was born in England and educated at Cambridge. His book *The Conquest of Happiness* was first published in 1930.<sup>13</sup> While critical of Sigmund Freud for not being “sufficiently biological in his outlook,” there are many places where Russell shows that he was strongly influenced by the father of psychoanalysis, even to the point of uncritically accepting his concept of the Oedipus Complex.<sup>14</sup> Russell sees himself as a defender of the rational scientific approach to happiness against the irrationalities of religion, romanticism, and unprogressive society. Like the Modern philosophers before him, Russell writes to show us how we can conquer unhappiness without these outmoded crutches. He even anticipates the day when biochemistry has made enough advances that “we shall all be able to take tablets that will ensure our feeling an interest in everything. . . .”<sup>15</sup>

There are, however, several claims made by Russell that are unsupported by any scientific studies. At one point he claims, without evidence, that among the highly educated sections of society, “the happiest at the present day are men of science,” while “artists are on the average less happy than men of science.”<sup>16</sup> He also predicts that “the new world [of the Soviet Union] will almost certainly, when created, make the average Russian happier than he was before the Revolution.”<sup>17</sup> Again, he does not refer the reader to any psychological surveys of the population to support this assertion. And Russell’s empty scientism is only made worse by his naturalism and hedonism.<sup>18</sup>

Yet for all its faults, *The Conquest of Happiness* contains many astute observations concerning human life and true statements about the causes of unhappiness and happiness; Russell realized the existence of what we now call the hedonic treadmill, that is, our ability to adjust to and therefore

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<sup>13</sup> Bertrand Russell, *The Conquest of Happiness* (1930 New York: Liveright, 1971).

<sup>14</sup> Russell, 154; 19, 81, 139–40.

<sup>15</sup> Russell, 128.

<sup>16</sup> Russell, 115–6.

<sup>17</sup> Russell, 117.

<sup>18</sup> Russell, 84, 190.

become bored with pleasures. Most importantly he recognized the problem of Narcissism, and, in a rather witty manner, advises against it:

The man who loves only himself cannot, it is true, be accused of promiscuity in his affections, but he is bound in the end to suffer intolerable boredom from the invariable sameness of the object of his devotion.<sup>19</sup>

While he has correctly identified the primary source of unhappiness, what Russell lacks is any non-finite means for helping people overcome this barrier (selfishness) to happiness.

I think that many of the truths in *Conquest*, as Russell at one point admits, come from the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers and not from modern science.<sup>20</sup> Even though Russell sometimes gives good advice, he clearly looks forward to shifting the problem of happiness onto psychology. As philosopher Richard Brandt wrote in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, published in 1967, "The question of what conditions are necessary for happiness is manifestly a question for scientific psychology."<sup>21</sup> Well, how has scientific psychology answered this question?

## PSYCHOLOGICAL SOURCES

Let's start with a recent book entitled *What Happy People Know: How the New Science of Happiness Can Change Your Life for the Better*. It is published by Rodale Press in 2003 and written by Dr. Dan Baker, Director of the Life Enhancement Program at Canyon Ranch. (Canyon Ranch is a comprehensive wellness center.) The first thing that struck me about this book is that it opens with a quotation from a philosopher! It is from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*: "Happiness is the whole aim and end of human existence." I thought to myself: "So much for the 'new' and the 'science' in the title of this book!"

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<sup>19</sup> Russell, 187.

<sup>20</sup> Russell, 129.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Brandt, "Happiness" in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol.3, edited by Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 414.

Consider three fascinating features of this book. First, Baker is very critical of Freudian psychology, both its theory and its practice. Second, Baker is not afraid to use the terms “spirituality” and “God” in a book that purports to be about a practical new science. Third, Baker defines life this way: “life is love: bittersweet, vulnerable, ever-changing, imperfect and eternally worthy of unbounded appreciation.”<sup>22</sup> Sounds like the beginning of the book *Divine Love and Wisdom*, doesn’t it? “Love is the life of man” (DLW 1).

One author that Baker refers to and aligns himself with is Martin Seligman. Who, you may ask, is Martin Seligman? Seligman is one of the founders of the Positive Psychology movement. And what is positive psychology? In his book *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment*, Seligman says that Positive Psychology consists of three pillars:

1. the study of positive emotions (such as confidence, hope, trust, joy)
2. the study of positive traits including strengths, abilities, and virtues
3. the study of positive institutions, such as democracy and strong families that support the virtues which in turn support the positive emotions.<sup>23</sup>

Seligman lays out his project this way:

So Positive Psychology takes seriously the bright hope that if you find yourself stuck in the parking lot of life, with few and only ephemeral pleasures, with minimal gratifications, and without meaning, there is a road out. This road takes you through the countryside of pleasure and gratification, up into the high country of strength and virtue, and finally to the peaks of lasting fulfillment: meaning and purpose.<sup>24</sup>

Seligman could hardly have selected a better metaphor to describe our journey in life. According to Plato’s *Symposium*, Seligman has described

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<sup>22</sup> Baker, 102.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Seligman, *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment* (New York: Free Press, 2002), xiii.

<sup>24</sup> Seligman, xiv.

the soul's effort to climb up the ladder of love.<sup>25</sup> From Swedenborg's perspective, Plato has described our ascent by degrees, from the lowest of worldly pleasures to the highest (correspondentially speaking) experiences of blessedness in love to the Lord. Here is a chart I have made based upon several passages from the Heavenly Doctrines.

Hierarchy of sense of well-being or satisfaction<sup>26</sup>

<i>How long it lasts</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Perception of while on earth</i>
Eternal	Soul	blessedness	least
	Mind	happiness	more
	Mind	delights	more
Temporary	Body	pleasures	most

Let me make two observations about this chart. First, if we aim for happiness, we are not actually aiming for the highest state of which a human being is capable. Even though we cannot experience it while on earth, at least not in its fullness, blessedness is a state beyond happiness. To have happiness as an ideal is fine, but as religious traditions have taught for millennia, blessedness is even better. Second, even though blessedness is a superior state of satisfaction, it is also what we experience least while in this world. So to have blessedness as an ideal also requires the spiritual virtue of faith, that is, a trust and confidence that what the Lord says about human nature (specifically the soul) is true, even if we can't experience it while in our earthly body. Unlike Freud, who thought

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<sup>25</sup> Plato, *Symposium*, Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff trans. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1989) 210–211.

<sup>26</sup> This chart is based on the following books and paragraphs from Swedenborg's works: *Married Love* § 16:2 with ML § 183:7 (the play, or sport, of love and wisdom in use appears as blessedness, happiness, and delight), ML § 335 (celestial blessedness, spiritual happiness, natural delights), *Arcana Caelestia* § 1470 (two kinds of happiness: good and truth), and a list in *Divine Love and Wisdom* § 47.

that religion was an illusion, today's Positive Psychology takes such transcendental satisfactions seriously.

Like Baker, Seligman is very critical of Freudian psychology. In fact, Seligman is critical of Darwin and Marx too.<sup>27</sup> The reason is that the determinism (lack of free-will) in these theories encourages us to believe that we cannot shake our past, that we are not responsible for our actions, and that hope for improvement in the future is unwarranted. As with behaviorism, these "imprisoning views" support victimology and sap our ability to liberate ourselves from negative events and emotions, all of which leads to unhappiness. Not that we can completely escape the consequences of our past actions or our heredity: Seligman reports that hundreds of studies agree that about "50 percent of almost every personality trait turns out to be attributable to genetic inheritance. But high heritability does not determine how changeable a trait is. Some highly heritable traits (like sexual orientation and body weight) don't change much at all, while other highly heritable traits (like pessimism and fearfulness) are very changeable."<sup>28</sup>

Again, like Baker, Seligman also makes use of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. At one point he praises Aristotle for realizing the difference between pleasure and happiness.<sup>29</sup> At another he praises Aristotle for asking the right question:

When an entire lifetime is taken up in the pursuit of the positive emotions, however, authenticity and meaning are nowhere to be found. The right question is the one Aristotle posed two thousand five hundred years ago: "What is the good life?"<sup>30</sup>

If you examine the aforementioned chart of the hierarchy of sense of well-being and satisfaction together with the observations from eudaimonic philosophers and professionals in Positive Psychology, what you will find is an enormous amount of agreement upon the requirements for experi-

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<sup>27</sup> Seligman, 66–68, 127.

<sup>28</sup> Seligman, 47.

<sup>29</sup> Seligman, 112.

<sup>30</sup> Seligman, 120–1.

encing happiness. From recreation, positive activities, virtues, time for reflection and satisfying occupations to mutual love, love in marriage, and unselfish good deeds, the theological, philosophical, and now psychological experts are giving us the same advice about how to achieve happiness.

There are many interesting features to Seligman's book, especially the various tests you can take to discover your strengths, your level of optimism, and your attitude toward forgiveness, but I want to draw attention to something else. About half-way through the book, Seligman makes this fascinating statement: "With life and liberty now covered minimally well, we are about to witness a politics that goes beyond the safety net and takes the pursuit of happiness very seriously indeed."<sup>31</sup>

This statement is significant for two reasons. I think as far as life in America is concerned, he is right, and, the same year that Seligman's book was published, Dan Savage published a book entitled *Skipping Towards Gomorrah: The Seven Deadly Sins and the Pursuit of Happiness in America*.<sup>32</sup>

## Happiness and the Culture War

If Seligman's book represents the eudaimonic tradition, then it is clear that Savage's book represents the hedonic tradition. In *Skipping Towards Gomorrah* (the title is a play on the conservative Robert Bork's book, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*) Dan Savage, a journalist and radio personality, chronicles his observations of people committing the seven deadly sins in cities across America. (Let me be clear about one thing: I do *not* recommend this book to anyone.) He writes about greed and the thrill of losing money in Las Vegas and Dubuque; of lust and "swinging" (that is, adulterous) couples in Las Vegas and Chicago; of sloth and why we should legalize marijuana; of gluttony and the National Association for the Advancement of Fat Acceptance convention in San Francisco; of envy and a pricey spa for the wealthy outside of Malibu; of pride and a gay pride parade in Los Angeles; and of anger and learning how to shoot a gun in

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<sup>31</sup> Seligman, 166.

<sup>32</sup> Dan Savage, *Skipping Towards Gomorrah: The Seven Deadly Sins and the Pursuit of Happiness in America* (New York: Dutton [Penguin], 2002).

Plano, Texas. At the end of the book Savage flies to New York city (America's Gomorrah) to commit all seven sins in one weekend.<sup>33</sup>

Yet Savage's book is not just a sleazy kiss-and-tell; it is also a political diatribe. In addition to attacking the "virtue-crats" (such as Robert Bork and Bill Bennett) and conservative scolds by using *ad hominem* fallacies and dubious statistical information, he constantly invokes his right to the pursuit of happiness. Interestingly, nowhere in the book does Savage mention any of the research that has been done in Positive Psychology, and (strangely) this includes David G. Myers' 1992 book *The Pursuit of Happiness*.<sup>34</sup> This book by an award-winning professor of psychology summarizes hundreds of studies which support the eudaimonic path as the way to fulfillment and personal joy, amounting to a science-based refutation of the hedonic path urged by Savage. One would think that a professional journalist like Savage would have read Myers' book.

My reply to Savage's book is in three parts. First, what the founders of America meant by the pursuit of happiness is not what Savage means. Second, that according to the psychologists we've just reviewed, Savage's hedonism does not lead to happiness. Third, that even though these psychologists point toward the transcendent, it is only religion that will truly satisfy the soul of a human being, that is, bring happiness.

### REPLY No. 1: ORIGINAL INTENT

In her book *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence*, historian Pauline Maier asks, What did Jefferson mean by the "pursuit of happiness"? She answers that he meant to say

more economically and movingly what Mason stated with some awkwardness and at considerably greater length [in his draft of Virginia's *Declaration of Rights*]. For Jefferson and his contemporaries, happiness no doubt demanded safety or security, which would have been in keeping with the biblical phrase one colonist after another used to describe the

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<sup>33</sup> Savage, 261ff.

<sup>34</sup> David G. Myers, *The Pursuit of Happiness* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

good life—to be at peace under their vine and fig tree with none to make them afraid (Micah 4:4). The inherent right to pursue happiness probably also included “the means of acquiring and possessing property,” but not the ownership of specific things since property can be sold and is therefore alienable.<sup>35</sup>

When we look at the fourth chapter of Micah, it is clear that what is meant by everyone sitting under his vine and fig tree is peace and safety. Chapter four begins with those oft-sung lines “come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord” and to the house of our God. “He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths” (4:2). Then follow the famous lines about how the Lord will judge between many peoples and rebuke strong nations far off, so that “they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (4:3). In fact, the message of the prophet from Moresheth is that until Israel repents of its evil ways, it will continue to suffer from theft and violence at the hand of its own people and its enemies.

I am not claiming that Jefferson believed that unless the colonists repented they would continue to be oppressed by England. However, I am claiming that by the phrase “pursuit of happiness,” Jefferson and other colonials meant that our Creator has endowed us with this right, thus it is the responsibility of governors to conduct themselves in such a way as to protect the citizens and their property from injury. This, at least, shows that it is *not at all obvious* that invoking the phrase “pursuit of happiness” justifies the legalization of marijuana, or same-sex marriage, or the celebration of gluttony.<sup>36</sup> Darrin McMahon has argued that “pursuit of happiness” does not just mean the Lockean right to secure property, but also, drawing upon Adam Smith, the right to pursue wealth and thereby advance the public good. Yet these were not the only “harmonizing senti-

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<sup>35</sup> Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 134.

<sup>36</sup> While Savage could reply that today’s citizens should not be bound by the intentions of Americans who lived 225 years ago, the response to this would take us into hermeneutical issues concerning the U.S. Constitution that we do not have time to explore.

ments” that Jefferson wished to bring together in this important phrase. According to McMahon

“Happiness is the aim of life, but virtue is the foundation of happiness,” Jefferson observed toward the end of his career, echoing Franklin’s observation that “virtue and happiness are mother and daughter.” A commonplace of classical philosophy, as dear to Aristotle as it was to Cicero, the statement captures well what few, if any, of the Founding Fathers would have denied.<sup>37</sup>

McMahon also adduces sufficient evidence for his claim that “Jesus’ doctrines were undeniably an important element of the ‘harmonizing sentiments of the day’ and regarded by many as an authoritative guide to the pursuit of happiness.”<sup>38</sup> His evidence is from sermons given and books published in the colonies, as well as Jefferson’s own statements in his letters and the fact that he took the time and effort to produce the “Jefferson Bible” to encourage ethical living. McMahon rightly concludes that the Founders “concurred that to think of happiness without love of one’s neighbor—without Christian charity, denial, and constraint—was profane.”<sup>39</sup>

## REPLY No. 2: PSYCHOLOGY AND HAPPINESS

David Myers, Dan Baker, and Martin Seligman argue against the hedonic view of happiness, and they do so not simply based upon any stature they might have in psychology, but from experience. This experience is a combination of empirical research and their personal lives.

Seligman writes that one barrier to raising our level of happiness is the “hedonic treadmill.” This phrase refers to a person’s ability to rapidly and

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<sup>37</sup> McMahon, *Happiness: A History*, 330.

<sup>38</sup> McMahon, 323.

<sup>39</sup> McMahon, 322.

inevitably adapt to good things or pleasures by taking them for granted. He states that there is a

good deal of evidence for such a treadmill. If there were no treadmill, people who get more good things in life would in general be much happier than the less fortunate. But the less fortunate are, by and large, just as happy as the more fortunate. Good things and high accomplishments, studies have shown, have astonishingly little power to raise happiness more than transiently. . . .<sup>40</sup>

This is Seligman's summary of the research on the hedonic view, namely, it fails to produce happiness.

Baker categorizes the pleasures of leisure, status, possessions, financial security, and worldly power as things that people *think* will bring happiness, but are actually traps. Happiness cannot be bought.<sup>41</sup> The second happiness trap he identifies is the hedonic life of alcohol, sex, and drugs. Baker tells a poignant story about one of his clients, a Hollywood star, who used various pleasures as a way to hide from his spiritual hunger and psychological fear.<sup>42</sup> He warned the actor that if he didn't climb out of the pleasure trap, it would eventually kill him—artistically, spiritually, and physically. Baker reports that the star used the happiness tools and, despite pressure from his entourage and the lure of a sick but easy life, he overcame his problems. At the end of this section of his book, Baker relates an exercise that Seligman once did. He asked "a group of students to engage in two acts, one pleasurable and one altruistic. Virtually all of the students reported that the altruistic act made them happier than the pleasurable act. After the altruistic act, the rest of the day went better for almost all of them. But the good feeling from the pleasurable act faded as soon as it was over." Baker concludes by saying that "Pleasure is a good thing. But it is the dessert of life, not the meal."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Seligman, 49.

<sup>41</sup> Baker, 46–59.

<sup>42</sup> Baker, 61–63.

<sup>43</sup> Baker, 65.

Speaking of dessert, support for this conclusion against the hedonic view of happiness can even be gained from Savage's book. In the chapter on gluttony, Savage talks about attending a National Association for the Advancement of Fat Acceptance convention. While there, he encounters two women who admit that the pleasure of eating is ultimately outweighed (no pun intended) by the pain associated with obesity. Moreover, while it was not politically correct for them to say so (they would be accused of making a "sizeist remark"), they thought it best for very obese people to lose some weight—through surgical procedures if necessary.<sup>44</sup>

### REPLY No. 3: RELIGION AND HAPPINESS

Not only does the hedonic view of happiness fail according to "scientific psychology," but the scientists themselves point toward the necessity of that thing that Western civilization was supposed to have outgrown long ago, namely, religion. McMahon uses theological language to summarize the changes in the Western attitude toward happiness: "Whereas for most men and women at the dawn of the modern age, God was happiness, happiness has since become our God."<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, Martin Seligman spends the last chapter of his book attempting to wrestle a religious life of God and purpose out of the theory of evolution. So-called "hard-core" evolutionists would not accept what he does with the theory, but the fact that Seligman makes any attempt to incorporate God and religion into positive psychology is a step in the right direction. Baker also speaks openly of God:

One relationship that always gets us outside ourselves is our relationship with God. God, of course, means very different things to different people. Many people believe in a very literal, intercessionary father figure who watches over them at all times. Many others believe in a creative spirit that is far less personally involved in their own lives. Still others believe that the nature of God is mysterious—even unknowable—existing as an inscrutable positive force—perhaps love.

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<sup>44</sup> Savage, 160–61.

<sup>45</sup> McMahon, 269.

Whatever one believes, it's been clearly established that a belief system that adds spiritual meaning to life helps people thrive.<sup>46</sup>

The final chapter in *The Pursuit of Happiness* by David G. Myers is entitled "Faith, Hope, and Joy." In it Myers discusses the many ways that religion contributes to happiness. From encouraging "feel-good" habits such as generosity, to humility and an eternal perspective on the problems we encounter in this natural world, this chapter is full of individual cases and general studies which show how religion can lead us to a satisfying life.<sup>47</sup> No wonder Dan Savage avoided contemporary psychology in his book: it is leading people to (of all things) religion!

The Modernists thought that through the use of instrumental reason, we could refashion our environment in such a way that we could then change ourselves and become happy. According to the secular Postmodernists, this project failed because it made reason into a god and exchanged the tyranny of Christianity for the tyranny of the bureaucratized state and other repressive bourgeois rationalized social institutions. Their solution to these problems is to advocate a more radical freedom for individuals and groups: "anything goes" as long as it doesn't produce too much harm.

But this too has already been superceded. Interestingly, it has been superceded by the ancient past. According to world religions scholar Huston Smith, people continue to mistake happiness for a life of ease and self-expression. In *Beyond the Postmodern Mind*, Smith writes that

circumstances, however well contrived, cannot fulfill us because fulfillment cannot be conferred. By providing food, controlling temperature, and introducing anodynes [pain relievers] when needed, *comfort* can be bestowed, but not nobility or even happiness; these must be won individually. Being aware of this fact, religion can never rest its case with doing things for other people. Working on oneself—the cleansing of the inward parts—is always part of its agenda.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Baker, 246.

<sup>47</sup> Myers, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, 175–204.

<sup>48</sup> Huston Smith, *Beyond the Postmodern Mind*, 3rd edition (Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2003), 170–1.

As Dan Baker asserts, happiness is not for the weak or the lazy; happiness requires work.

While we should be grateful for the support for a religious life that comes from books by psychologists such as Baker and Seligman, we also need to be clear that what they say about religion falls short of the mark.

We need to remember that the root words from which *eudaimonia* sprang mean “having a good spirit or divine power” and while this means cultivating the potential in one’s soul, it also means being a good spirit. This is one of the reasons why it is very helpful to have so much information on the lives of spirits, angels, and devils. In Neo-Christian eschatology, angels are not a separate race of beings as they are in the Thomistic system. Instead, angels are good people who have died and gone to heaven. Swedenborg’s work, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell*, states that “heaven is so full of delights that, viewed in itself, it is nothing else than blessedness and delight.”<sup>49</sup> The happiness of the angels is very difficult to describe, yet he tries (*HH* 409). Swedenborg reports that angelic happiness is like a general affection of the heart that has within it an infinite number of specific affections arranged in a harmonious form. This general feeling radiates outwards softly through all the inmost fibers of one’s being until every perception and sensation seems to be alive with happiness (*HH* 413). And when he wished to transfer all of this delight to another person, a more interior and fuller delight flowed in! Here is a powerful case of positive reinforcement for altruism.

It is clear that the angels have many pleasures and wonderful possessions in their environment. But these don’t make them happy. Instead, these are outward signs of their inward goodness. As the Lord said, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33). Or as C. S. Lewis wrote, if you aim at heaven, you get earth thrown in; aim at earth and you will get neither.<sup>50</sup> Compared to the happiness and joy of unselfish spiritual love, the pleasures of the body are gross and pungent dust (*HH* 413).

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<sup>49</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Its Wonders and Hell from Things Heard and Seen* Doris H. Harley and J.C. Ager, trans. (1758 London: Swedenborg Society, 1966), § 397. Future references to this work will use the abbreviation *HH* followed by the paragraph number.

<sup>50</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*.

Yet if heavenly happiness is so great, then why don't more people know about it, believe in it, and try to achieve it? There are several reasons given in the Heavenly Doctrines; here are four. First, people who think about heavenly happiness have formed their opinion from the physical pleasures pertaining to the natural world and the body, and have not known about the internal human, that is, our spiritual nature (*HH* 395). Second, people who are immersed in the pleasures of the body and world, the loves of self and the world, close their interiors to the experience of delight in heavenly loves. Their sensual gratifications extinguish and suffocate the experience of angelic happiness (*HH* 398). Instead of feeling love to the Lord and the neighbor as delightful, some people feel like it is servitude (*HH* 404). What these people don't experience they are ignorant of, and what they are ignorant of, they suppose is nothing or does not exist (*HH* 412).

Third, good people rarely experience heavenly happiness while on earth (*HH* 401). Sometimes they feel a blessedness that is barely perceptible, and then it is dulled by the cares of the world. Yet, despite the relatively meager quality of our experience of heavenly happiness, I'm sure we could amass a fair quantity of experiences through surveys. Fourth, people think that unselfish love is impossible for humans, that we are just too bad to be altruistic. But Swedenborg refutes this with plenty of counter-examples in *Heaven and Hell* 406: think of a husband or wife who has died to protect the married partner, think of the sacrifices that parents make for their children, think of the dangers that friends will risk for the sake of one another and so on. The possibility of altruism was made a reality for me on a hot sunny afternoon on a farm in eastern Pennsylvania.

During college I worked on a farm over the summer months. In addition to the projects on which we labored, there were weekly and daily chores. One week it was my turn to collect and take out the trash. As I was taking out a load one afternoon, one of my co-workers complimented me on the thoroughness with which I performed my task. I think I replied "You're welcome" and then went out the kitchen screen door. Sometime after finishing my chores, the realization came to me that I had performed a task without expecting to be thanked, and then when I was thanked, I thought nothing of it (in the sense that I did not take credit for the good work that was being done). At that point I knew that not just altruistic

behavior, but altruistic *motivation*, is a reality. We are capable of acting with “forgetfulness of self.”

We aren’t truly happy and eternally satisfied until we rest content in God. Our desire for happiness is good, but our desire for happiness, like our hunger for food, won’t be satisfied by transient pleasures or “empty calories.” Only the Lord can fill us with good things that last forever. The evil spirits in hell do experience some temporary delights by trying to harm others or indulge their lusts, but these experiences are followed by very painful, sad, frustrating ones. The opposite is true in heaven. When angels experience some delight and then wish to share it, this is followed by even more happy experiences.

### AUTHENTIC HAPPINESS AND GOD

We might still wonder, why is God the source of happiness? Well, we could rely on the following line of reasoning: God is the source of everything good, happiness is a human good, therefore, God is the source of happiness. This is by no means a trivial argument, but there is something more. Perhaps the real break-through concept of the new Christian theology is that a good relationship with God begets happiness because God Himself is happy. The Lord repeatedly experiences the joy of the marriage of Divine Love and Wisdom, both in Himself and in mortals.<sup>51</sup> He is happy when we enter into a wisely loving relationship with Him. Not only is God never angry with us, He can’t even frown at us! This is a radical notion for it means that when humans are good and happy, we are living authentic human lives. The Lord longs to bless us. As He said in the first sermon that He preached on the mountain when He was on earth, if we do our part to live rightly, He can bless us in many ways (Matt. 5: 3–12). Happiness is not a sham.

This explains what (for me) was a puzzling aspect of Seligman’s book. Why does he entitle the book *Authentic Happiness*, and what does he mean by authentic? In the Preface Seligman discusses some of the barriers to the notion that happiness can be lastingly increased. The “most profound

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<sup>51</sup> I owe this insight to my brother in law, Rev. Grant H. Odhner.

obstacle” of all, he claims, is the “belief that happiness . . . is inauthentic.”<sup>52</sup> He calls this pervasive view about human nature the “rotton-to-the-core” dogma. This is why he is critical of the doctrine of original sin and Freudian psycho-philosophy. “I cannot say this too strongly: In spite of the widespread acceptance of the rotten-to-the-core dogma in the religious and secular world, *there is not a shred of evidence that strength and virtue are derived from negative motivation.*”<sup>53</sup>

While I can’t vouch for Seligman’s claim about the state of scientific evidence concerning this aspect of human nature, I can state with certainty that it agrees with what some philosophers taught and what the new Christian theology teaches. As we have seen, Aristotle thinks that the whole point, the end or *telos*, of human life is happiness as well-being. So humans are not rotten-to-the-core and of course an authentic human life is one of happiness or well-being.

The modern philosopher Immanuel Kant was not as much of a teleologist as Aristotle, nor a eudaimonist as his contemporaries understood that term, and his ethics emphasize the importance of doing one’s duty in order to be worthy of being happy. However, Kant recognizes that it is our duty to make other people happy and we have what he calls an “indirect” duty to make ourselves happy.<sup>54</sup> This is done in order that we can retain our moral integrity and perform our duties to other people. Kant also recognizes that it is part of the “moral order” and not merely the “order of nature” that we feel pleasure after having determined to compel ourselves to obey the moral law.<sup>55</sup>

The teachings for the new Christianity rejected the rotten-to-the-core dogma over 225 years ago. Instead of the doctrine of original sin, the Heavenly Doctrines teach that while we have inclinations to evils of every kind, we only suffer from actual evils that we, ourselves, commit. We are not responsible for what we have inherited from our ancestors. Moreover,

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<sup>52</sup> Seligman, p.xii.

<sup>53</sup> Seligman, p. xiii, emphasis in original.

<sup>54</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Doctrine of Virtue, Part II of the Metaphysic of Morals*, translated by Mary J. Gregor, (Philadelphphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 1964), Introduction, [391–92], 51–54.

<sup>55</sup> Kant, [378], 35.

along with inherited tendencies toward evil loves, we also receive tendencies toward good loves (remains) and God is continually giving humans affections for good deeds and true ideas throughout their lives.

### AUTHENTIC HAPPINESS AND HEAVEN

The new Christianity teaches that we are created to be angels in heaven and that heaven is a state of happiness. Therefore, we are created to be happy and a happy life is an authentic human life. Indeed, the whole purpose of creation is the development of heaven from the human race. This is a profound teaching with many significant consequences for our lives. Yet there is a problem with linking heaven and happiness.

When reading books on happiness, even ones by religious people, heaven and angels are often not included. The absence of heaven might indicate what has for some time been an embarrassment to those who believe in an afterlife, namely, that heaven is boring. One of my philosophy professors said that compared to the way heaven has been described, hell seems like a much more exciting place. And in a recent (December 2005) ABC television special on heaven, journalist Barbara Walters asked the President of the National Association of Evangelicals if heaven is boring. Tellingly, he did not directly reply in the negative. He and the Catholic priest that was also interviewed talked about how we are “with God” in heaven. I’m afraid that to the average viewer today, this sounds boring. And how hard are people willing to work to get to a place, or more accurately, achieve a state of life, that is boring? And boring forever!

“Boring” is a relative term. Bertrand Russell wrote that

We are less bored than our ancestors were, but we are more afraid of boredom. We have come to know, or rather to believe, that boredom is not part of the natural lot of man, but can be avoided by a sufficiently vigorous pursuit of excitement.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Russell, *Conquest of Happiness*, 50–51.

Boredom is therefore a vital problem for the moralist, since at least half the sins of mankind are caused by the fear of it.

I think Russell makes a salient point. His solution to this problem is to show that some boredom is useful, that perpetual excitement is unsustainable, and to assert that “A happy life must be to a great extent a quiet life, for it is only in an atmosphere of quiet that true joy can live.”<sup>57</sup> I don’t think that life must be to a great extent quiet, but it is true that one can experience a state akin to heavenly peace in the quiet moments of life.

I recall a time when my wife and I, along with our two young children, had just moved from an apartment into our house. It was an evening in late June, when the weather was warm, but not hot. The furniture was in place, but several boxes still needing to be unpacked were strewn about the living room. The children were sleeping in their beds to the soft chirping of crickets. As my wife and I sat on the couch enjoying the stillness in our little part of the world at the end of a busy day, suddenly a sphere of utterly calming peace enveloped me and I was momentarily filled with a delight that I had not previously experienced. I got the feeling that this was a taste of what heavenly happiness is like. While I think this intuition is correct, this experience was nothing compared to the peaceful happiness that one experiences in heaven. Swedenborg said heavenly peace cannot be described by any words, that it is beyond any idea derived from this world (*AC* 8455). How intensely real and satisfying must heaven be!

However, the main point I wish to make here is that heaven is not boring. Swedenborg describes life in heaven in a way that no previous revelator has. He found that angels are active. Angelic life consists in performing the good works of unselfish love, which are uses, and that angels find all their happiness in use, from use, and in accordance with use (*HH* 403). There are more occupations and useful services in heaven than there are on our earth, and each one carries some dignity with it (*HH* 393:3, 389). So not only do people in heaven respect each other’s use, but each person also experiences a profound sense of freedom. Because angels will

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<sup>57</sup> Russell, 56.

what is good for everyone, in heaven people are free to do what they really want to do. When angels are not working, they spend time with their friends in a society of like-minded people. They take time to enjoy sporting events, debates, and the theater. They also experience all the joys of being married to their best friend of the opposite sex. And yes, Barbara Walters, there really is sex in heaven. More importantly, there is a beautiful relationship of harmony, trust, and unselfish love between an angel husband and wife that makes such intimacy truly heavenly and meaningful.

### TECHNIQUES FOR HAPPINESS

But how, exactly, are we supposed to attain heaven and its happiness? What are the techniques that lead to happiness, and do the Heavenly Doctrines give us any special insights into how to lead a happy life? Let me answer this last question briefly.

Yes, I think there are a few special insights contained in the Heavenly Doctrines about how to lead a happy life. However, in my research on happiness, I have been impressed with the way the Lord has spread His seeds of wisdom in many texts written by people over the centuries. There are truths about how to attain happiness to be found in ancient, modern, and contemporary thinkers. While I believe that the Lord has put the most truth in the Heavenly Doctrines, thankfully and mercifully He has not just stored it there. For example, if one were to read and apply to life most of Dan Baker's book *What Happy People Know*, Dennis Prager's book, *Happiness is a Serious Problem: A Human Nature Repair Manual*, one would benefit greatly. (Since these books are readily available, I will not review their techniques for happiness here.)

Yet even these books could be improved by some Neo-Christian ideas. I will dwell on what I take to be the most significant one. According to the Heavenly Doctrines, what really begins to repair human nature, that is, one's self, is repentance. The word "repentance" is out of fashion in many circles today. For some it conjures up images of a preacher talking about hell-fire and damnation unless we give up the devil. This is followed by people weeping, wailing, and cringing with fear, over-come by their sense of sinfulness, and then, in the heat of the moment, making the alter call to be saved.

We do indeed head toward hell unless we repent, but the idea of repentance in the New Christianity is different from that of the old Christianity. First, God does not damn anyone to hell. Instead, we freely choose to let hell develop in us because we love ourselves or this world more than the Lord and our neighbor. Second, while we do have intense religious experiences that help turn our lives around, we are not saved in an instant. Instead, this kind of awakening is the start of a long process of changing the way our minds work and the way we live that takes years to accomplish. Third, there are specific steps that we can take to repent, and these involve introspection as well as emotion.

So, as a technique to attain happiness, here are the steps of repentance: examine yourself to see what specific evil actions you have taken, have intended to take, or given the opportunity would like to take; pray to the Lord for the power to resist these actions and intentions; then live a new life by breaking bad habits and replacing them with good ones (*TCR* 509–566). There are plenty of passages in the Gospels and in the Epistles that say we ought to repent (Luke 3:3,8, 15:7, 24:27; Mark 1:4, 14–15, 6:12; Matt.4:17; Acts 3:19, 17:30, 26:20, 20:21). I suspect that very few churches will nowadays advertise repentance as the topic of the Sunday sermon, but if we are sincerely interested in being happy to eternity, we should learn how to repair our faulty human nature by this means. Sure, repentance includes hard painful work, but the eudaimonic philosophers and psychologists have already told us that happiness is not for the lazy or timid. Any doctor who recommends positive changes in our lifestyle to improve our physical health will say that it requires work, some discomfort, and perseverance. The same thing applies to our mental and spiritual health.

I believe that repentance is the most effective technique for long-lasting happiness because it does not just address symptoms or superficial problems. Instead, it changes the root cause of our unhappy attitudes and behaviors, namely, our loves and desires. It provides a way for us to reprioritize who we love, what we desire, and so change who we are. Moreover, in repentance we are not dependent for change on ourselves alone. We have the help of an infinitely wise and loving God, as well as our fellow travelers on the road.

## HOPE FOR A HAPPY ENDING

Granting that happiness as a result of goodness is the Lord's intention for us and is the very purpose of creation, we have reason to hope for a happy ending to this story. In the revelation for the New Christian church, the Lord has promised that the happiness that arises from the marriage between good and truth in individuals as well as husband and wife can be realized. In the future, we and our descendents will experience happiness, for into true marriage love God has poured "all joys and all delights, from the first to the last of them."<sup>58</sup> All that is needed is our cooperation with this Divine plan. As the Lord Himself said when he was on the earth:

Do you know what I have done to you? You call me teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, *happy* are you if you do them (John 13:12–13,16–17; emphasis added). □

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<sup>58</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Married Love*, N. Bruce Rogers, trans. (1768 Bryn Athyn, PA: General Church of the New Jerusalem, 1995), § 68.

NOW AVAILABLE

## The Brain

*Trans. by Rudolf L. Tafel. James Spiers, London, 1882/1887*

SSA, 2005

In 1743 Emanuel Swedenborg completed his second major work on the human brain. Called the "Stockholm Manuscript" by scholars of his scientific works, it lay in the Archives of the Swedish Academy of Sciences until it was edited and translated into English by Rudolf L. Tafel. It was published posthumously as *The Brain* in two volumes by James Spiers, London, in 1882 and 1887. This edition is a direct reprint of those two volumes.

The Brain follows *The Cerebrum* in dealing in considerable detail with the animation, or inherent motion of the cerebrum, and the predictable motion of its membranes and the cranial bones secondary to it. But this work extends the description of this phenomenon to the cerebellum and spinal cord as well. It is here that we find an anatomical description of the "circle of life": the descent of the "animal spirit," or soul, from the cerebrum as a component of the cerebrospinal fluid, to be delivered to all parts of the body by the circulation of the blood, which, when depleted, is returned to the cerebrum via the carotid arteries. Other sections of the work describe the structure and function of the cerebellum, the pineal and pituitary glands . . . In these and other parts of *The Brain* Swedenborg clearly anticipates the discoveries of anatomists and physiologists to come.

Of particular interest is Tafel's format, chosen to present Swedenborg's manuscript in comparison with the findings of contemporary physiologists. This makes for a historical document in its own right, as this "contemporary" science will soon be 125 years old. This and Tafel's considerable commentary, however, remains useful to the purposes of modern scholarship, as he presents Swedenborg's discoveries in the context of the history of science.

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