

A Pragmatic Guide to Daily Happiness
by Clarence A. Crawford

I learned a long time ago that only a few things in life are really important, although it is easy to neglect those few things and become caught up in distractions, trivia, or old comfortable habits. And the pursuit of happiness is one of those things. Happiness is obviously fundamental to life, yet discussing happiness seems entirely presumptuous. The goal is at the forefront of our lives, yet the accomplishment often becomes secondary. Who is qualified to define such an important part of being human? However, I do think that it is frighteningly easy to lose sight of this most fundamental of all pursuits. I shall, in all humility, attempt it.

How can I be happy? What do I need to do to make myself happy? And to be able to make myself happy, how do I define it? How do I know it when I see it? If happiness is so important, why is it so rare? Is it a secret? Is it an illusion? Or perhaps it's not really in my control at all, and I'll only be happy or unhappy as chance dictates. But I want to know.

Socrates memorably said that the unexamined life is not worth living. These are frightening words. Not worth living! If I don't examine my life, I might as well be dead. Now, examining one's life can be done in several ways. For example, I can take it topic-by-topic: let's examine my marriage, my work, my friendships; my religion, my politics; my health, my fitness, my weight. But as I write these words, I realize that I am simply listing abstractions; these headings are taking me away from what is fundamental.

Another approach is to ask myself, when I am happy, what makes me so? What is the empirical experience? This is a practical, pragmatic approach. Well, I know that I am happy when I use my body. I am happy when I cycle or fish or ski or walk. I am happy when I play. Therefore, I can conclude that some level of physical activity, which level varies with the individual, must be one ingredient of happiness. This level of self-examination may seem to be superficial, but it is certainly specific and concrete, and true.

However, what else happens when I play? To enjoy the ski outing or the fishing I must think about it. I can only be happy when I am thinking about being happy. Another ingredient in happiness is some level of thought. I think it likely that this is a necessity.

At this point I am tempted to accept Aristotle's assertion that happiness is an activity. At one point in my life I thought the contrary: that happiness is a condition which I could achieve—always in the future!—and when I somehow attained that condition it would be permanent and continuous: Nirvana. I now think, after decades of experience, that I was wrong and that Aristotle was right, and if so, it is appropriate to ask again: what other activities produce happiness besides physical activity and thought?

The next ingredient must be love. Loving people and books and birds and trees and rainbow trout is surely one of the most satisfying activities that one could engage in, and the suggestion immediately comes to mind that if happiness is an activity, then loving is far more satisfying than being loved. Perhaps those of us who seek love should give it up and start loving instead, since being loved is not an activity and therefore cannot lead to happiness. Perhaps the activity of loving is what is satisfying, and being loved is merely a consequence, since loving can only be done well by a mature and selfless individual, while the craving for love is somewhat infantile. After all, most of what we love can't love in return. My birch trees can't love me, nor can the Chugach Mountains, but I love them and I want to treat them well. Perhaps this capacity to love without a return is one of the activities which helps to define us as humans when we are at our

best.

What else makes me happy? When I was young I had a nagging fear that if I failed to attain happiness it would be because I wouldn't have *time* to be happy. I would be too busy working to be happy. I was convinced that happiness and work were two mutually exclusive concepts. I had developed this conviction after discovering that all those rows of corn that I had hoed as a boy would always and forever be exactly alike; that the coal mine where I worked would grind me up during my life and spit me out dead at the end; that the foundry where I worked would cast a pall over my life just as assuredly as its smoke cast a pall over the city. I believed that somehow I had to beat the working world if I was ever to attain happiness. I'm sure that other people share this sentiment, because many of the young people I have worked with have told me that they'll beat it by working very very hard at something very very lucrative and buy their way out before they're forty. They're wrong.

Let me share these wise words with you. They were written by E. F. Schumacher, an English economist, author of *Small is Beautiful*, and they changed my life. I paraphrase.

What is good work? One can determine what good work is by applying three criteria.

1) Good work provides one with the means to bring forth the goods and services necessary for a becoming existence. I like that word "becoming." It implies that one should earn enough money to live well. It implies good taste. It suggests not only that there is such a thing as too little income, but that there is also such a thing as too much: one's material existence should be lived within the limits of good moral and aesthetic judgment.

2) Good work is done in cooperation with other people. When I work, I need to bend myself to the needs of other people. I need to serve them. (Remember my earlier comments on love?) This is not only important to the people I serve, but it is also in my true self-interest to do so, because it forces me to fight my own egotism. It forces me not to be selfish. It reminds me of my true and modest place within the scheme of things. If I am required to resist the demands of my own selfish ego, I in fact am the beneficiary.

3) Good work allows me to develop as a human being. Whatever aptitudes I have, good work will allow those aptitudes to be expressed and to be developed. A corollary to this statement is that if an employer creates a situation where this is allowed to happen, then both parties benefit.

For decades I have examined these statements from as many angles as I could imagine, and I cannot find fault with them. It seems clear to me that if all three elements are present in a job, one will be happy. It seems equally clear to me that if one element is missing, then one's happiness is diminished; and if only one is present, then one's life will be utterly impoverished. I used that word "impoverished" for a specific reason, because it often happens that the single reason for working is to make money, and it is one of life's strangest ironies that pursuing this single goal leads to one's impoverishment.

I would like to supplement this definition of good work with one from the writer Stanley Crawford, who got it from the Amish. Stanley Crawford (*A Garlic Testament*) is a writer and garlic farmer in New Mexico, performing each activity in its proper season. Now, imagine how most people view work: labor is an investment. Work is a short-term loss, an expense. To get a paycheck, we need to invest (or "lose," or relinquish) our labor. I imagine that most people see their work, and their preparation for work, as an investment that will produce a payoff later, not today. This means that the benefits of work are necessarily deferred; it also means that work is a zero-sum game. One gives up quite a bit—one's time, which is one's life—to get that money. But what happens if we turn the idea around by 180 degrees? Then we would say that work is something we *produce*. It is valuable in and of itself; it is "a product, not an expense" (page

166). If we accept that view, life changes.

For many people, since work is merely an investment rather than an outcome, if it doesn't produce a payoff it shouldn't be done. For example, an athlete supposedly works hard to achieve a goal. A successful cross-country skier, for example, trains hard and deserves to win. But what about the skier who is satisfied to be mediocre? If that skier is able to get out of work, he or she thinks that is good, because they think that the work isn't valuable in itself and mediocre results are inevitable anyway. But what if the skier becomes aware that *the work itself* is good regardless of the outcome of the race? Suddenly life has changed. Life is more interesting. Each moment of activity becomes valuable. Success in competition becomes merely the logical outcome of each day's activity instead of being the sole justification for training. Now training has meaning. Work has become the end and not the means and one's life is vastly more satisfying.

(I observed the above situations as a ski coach, and as I have aged I can apply the conclusions to myself; for I will never be a fast skier, but I always find satisfaction in the work anyway.)

You can transfer this example quite easily to the academic world and the world of employment. For many people, if you are able to avoid training or homework or labor, you have "won." But according to Crawford's paradigm, avoidance is a loss and engagement is a gain: probably with a paycheck, but certainly with happiness. Of course, it is difficult to see all work as an end. One has to pick one's work with care. Nevertheless, the key point is that happiness is an activity (reading, training, stacking garlic bulbs) and not a condition (admiring your medals, examining your bank statements), and it is available to us right now.

Stanley Crawford looks forward to the time that he stacks harvested garlic bulbs for drying, calling it "meditative labor...[It] is when I inhabit my body again, fill it out, study its sensations...This is wealth that has not yet been driven through the filters of abstraction and stripped of its sensual and material qualities" (pages 169-170). His labor is a valuable product. Perhaps this is what Buddhists call "mindfulness," what Gandhi might value in good work.

Let us reach back through time and recall what play really is. Let us remember being immersed in the intense play of childhood. Remember how involved you were. Your play was your entire world. It was the most serious *business* imaginable. Or observe a child at play. They *are* what they are doing. There is no separation between their egos and their activity. They *are* their activity: their function *is them*. I suggest that the highest level of play is indistinguishable from the highest level of work. The athlete or the chess master who functions at the highest level of his game must work very hard; the worker who is functioning at good work in the most intense possible way is at play in the most profound sense. This is the unity in life that we must strive for. We must strive for lives that are not fragmented. We must strive to be whole in every sense. Our physical lives, our thinking, our love, our work, must all mesh, and we will be unhappy to the extent that they don't.

I know of people who are glad to commute long distances because they are delighted to put as much distance between themselves and their jobs as possible.

Unfortunately, our society hasn't reached the point where it has much interest in creating truly happy workers, or, for that matter, truly happy people, according to Aristotle's or Schumacher's or Stanley Crawford's definitions. (Indeed, Schumacher insists that our economy has narrowed so much that monetary profit is now its sole concern; we are regressing rather than advancing.) And so you and I have to find cracks and niches in society where we will be allowed to be happy. (You may object that our society and our economic system have no obligation to define and provide for good work; that, indeed, it is the sole responsibility of the individual to do so.

But we are all fragments of that larger society; we function together as ethical creatures; and I reject the inhuman idea that we should merely be subject to market forces. Schumacher has much to say on this most important subject.)

But good work can be found even in our ruthless economy. For example, if you had asked me, when I was a public school teacher, if my job met Schumacher's three criteria, I would have said yes. But before I retired I agreed to participate in a new program, based on the Socratic Method and the Great Books idea, and this program allowed me to grow in ways I could never have foreseen. My new opportunity to grow meant that my students had a greater opportunity to grow which meant that my employer came closer to accomplishing its mission. This forms a pleasing and productive unity. To use conventional ethical language, my true self-interests merged with the true self interests of both my students and my employer (and the larger public).

If my students can be happy, I can be happy.

There are ways to make institutional changes which have large and unforeseen and salutary consequences, and those institutional changes have important effects on real people in the real world who want to be happy. But we need to be able and willing to visualize and implement those changes.

Physical activity, thinking, loving, working: here lies happiness, as far as I can reason.

The daily question of establishing happiness is directly connected to another very important question: How can I live an authentic existence? Of all questions, this must be among the most important.

I can remember when I was a youth. One of the most important problems in my life was that I wanted to live a life that reflected or expressed the real me, whatever that was. I didn't want to live a pretend life; I didn't want to live a life that was less than genuine; as Holden Caulfield would say, I didn't want to be a phony. Huckleberry Finn, who perhaps was Holden's direct literary ancestor, continually faced the problem of how to separate the true from the false when dealing with his fellow man. He was rarely able to identify the genuine article. Few of his fellow Americans led authentically good lives, though plenty were genuinely bad.

The importance of this problem has stayed with me throughout my life, and in spite of seven decades of various experience remains with me to the present day. I must believe that others are bothered by the same challenge. Thoreau said when he went to Walden Pond that he "did not wish to live what was not life." As with so many of our best thinkers, his life was a quest for authenticity. I continue to be troubled by the same problem. How do I live an authentic existence?

If it is important to live an authentic existence, then one must answer the more fundamental question, who or what is the real me? How do I know who I am? How do I define myself? I can't live an authentic life until I know what is the authentic me.

I suppose there are two great traditions in religion and philosophy that help one to answer this question. One tradition, which we associate with Eastern religions, generally teaches that we define ourselves in terms of our proper place in the cosmos; if we can properly place ourselves in a right relationship with everything else in existence, we can be at rest; the more closely I can identify with the rest of the cosmos, the more authentic my existence is; the real me is inseparable from everything else. Happiness, if there is such a thing, would then be a condition, a state of being; it might be a condition close to total oblivion; it might really be an illusion. But in any case, the preferred state would be a state of rest. Many readers of this essay would call

this the undivided self.

Broadly speaking, the other major tradition, the Western tradition, takes a more activist view of the self. This view claims that the self is subject to analysis, and can therefore be viewed as a distinct entity separate from the rest of the cosmos. We can view ourselves as fragments or parts of the rest of the universe, somehow distinct from the rest. This emphasis on analysis is usually attributed to Aristotle. Perhaps Western, and specifically American, individualism is rooted in this belief. In this view, the individual self may have a very uneasy relationship with the rest of the human community and with what I have been calling the cosmos; we sometimes see ourselves as solitary, isolated, and perhaps abandoned creatures in a hostile universe. Some of us have come to call this condition the divided self. I think that this condition explains why, in the Jewish, Moslem, and Christian traditions, salvation is held out as the only satisfactory answer to our predicament. In this view, without salvation, we are creatures lost in a chaotic world. The Eastern viewpoint has no need to offer salvation for the individual from the cosmos, since one is already an integral part of the cosmos.

In this Western view, the individual is never really at rest; instead, life is a continual process of change and strife, until, perhaps, salvation is achieved. Those of us who are unsaved are left with an unfinished and unfinishable quest. The Eastern thinker might say, I am what I am; the Western thinker might say, I am what I do. The journey always beckons.

I have been educated in the Western tradition and I am temperamentally attuned to its attitudes. Although I can approach Eastern thought on an intellectual level, I have no real affinity for it. I have been raised and taught to do rather than to be. Whenever I have put myself to the test, I have always come to the conclusion, based on my experience, that, as Aristotle would say, happiness is an activity. I am what I do. I know of no other way of truly understanding myself. The level of happiness that I attain is directly related to the actions in which I engage. If I am unhappy, it is not because I am bad, but because I am doing bad things, or failing to do much of anything at all. When I am unhappy, it is almost always because I have chosen to engage in some activity that makes me unhappy, or because I have failed to engage in an activity which promotes my happiness. Sins of commission or omission. When I am happy, it is not because I am good, but because I have engaged in an activity that is true to what is best in me.

This is where the question of one's authenticity enters the picture.

If I am right, and if I define the self—what I really am—as what I do, then I have a simple formula for defining me. If I ever have difficulty understanding who or what I am, I can quickly take stock by asking myself, What am I doing? I don't need to plumb the depths of my unconscious to locate my self, though that too may reveal some truth about me; I don't need to examine all the great philosophies and religions of the world, though that too would certainly be edifying; I don't need to scratch my head and mutter over and over, "Who am I?" and "What is the meaning of life anyway?"

However, I do need to examine the content of the definition that I just offered. Again: the activity that will make me happy is that which is true to what is best in me. If I can keep this standard in view, I can lead an authentic existence. Now, how do I know what is best in me? A clear-headed self-examination should help me clarify this point.

This question can only be answered by the individual, and so I will ask it of myself. For you, the answers will be your own.

What is best in me?

My capacity for love.

My ability to think.

My ability to converse intelligently and productively with other people.

My ability to read for engagement rather than for escape.

My ability to observe what happens in the world around me.

My ability to write.

My ability to find joy in the use of my body, including the use of my senses.

My ability to find joy in doing difficult things.

If these qualities are among the best that I possess, then what should I do to guarantee that I am living an authentic existence? What actions are true to what is best in me?

Expressing love to my family and friends.

Ensuring that I always engage my mind.

Engaging in worthwhile conversation.

Reading widely and deeply.

Attending closely to the world around me.

Working to develop myself as a writer.

Engaging in regular physical activity which satisfies my senses, especially my senses of sight, hearing, and smell.

Challenging myself; fighting complacency; exploring new places and experiences.

I should add to this incomplete list the general idea of my employment. What occupation fits my aptitudes the best? What job allows me to live the most authentic life; that is, a job that allows me to be true to what is best in me? In my case, teaching allowed me to be true to myself, and wilderness guiding gave me that opportunity; and perhaps I will write something worthwhile someday which will be an expression of what I am at my best. For every individual, the answer to this question is an important key to living an authentic life, and hence a key to happiness; and certainly good work should not be defined solely in terms of income. It should be defined in terms of how it allows one to live an authentic existence, and Schumacher's short list above indeed leads one towards an authentic life.

I think that one of the great tragedies of modern American life is that too many of us cannot find authenticity in our work. I can imagine a farmer, to pick one occupation of many, saying, "Yes, I am a farmer. That is the real me. I am a farmer from sole to crown and inside and out. I may be a husband, father, poet, baseball fan, but really I am a farmer and nothing but a farmer. Grab my arm and you have grabbed the arm of a farmer." But how many people can say that? How many people instead are convinced that, though they are working at such-and-such a job, the real person is something else; they go through the day wearing the mask and costume of widget maker, but inside, they are convinced, they are something better. But according to my assertion—that you are what you do—the widget maker is lying. Grab the arm of a widget maker, and a widget maker is what you have your hand on, regardless of his protests to the contrary. His challenge is to bring his conception of himself in line with the reality of what he does; or else change what he does. We can't have it both ways.

Can I identify what is best in me?

Can I identify which activities are consistent with my best qualities?

Can I so organize my life that I am able to engage in the activities that are truest to what is best in me?

And now for the hard one. Can I avoid those activities that violate what is best in me?

The great thinkers and doers of history have, to adopt Thoreau's language, lived the lives which they have imagined for themselves. Show me a great individual, and I will show you someone whose thoughts and actions were in constant accord with each other; someone whose intentions and actions were identical; someone whose life was all of a piece; someone whose professed beliefs were in exact accord with his activities. The direction and accomplishments of their lives did not occur by accident. Their lives were directed consciously by themselves according to the principles to which they adhered. They had a plan, not necessarily detailed, but enough to give firm direction to their movement through life. Life was not just something that happened to them. And they worked very very hard, usually unto death. Emerson and Thoreau both agree that no one was ever betrayed by his own genius. Now, I certainly do not aspire to greatness, but I am equally certain that the great ones serve as inspiring models.

Socrates may be the man most worthy of emulation. Socrates did not preach his philosophy, he did not teach his philosophy, he did not write books to spread his philosophy. Socrates *lived* his philosophy. The man's words were his words; the man's deeds were his deeds; there was nothing about Socrates that was not Socrates. He was whole, and therefore authentic. The man was embodied in his deeds. Unfortunately, there is, for many of us, a large distance indeed between the intention and the action, between the word and the deed. One of the courageous actions one can perform is to close that gap and make the intention and the action more nearly identical; to not violate what is best in one's self.

The word that I use to describe this kind of wholesome behavior is integrity. A well-conducted life, like a well-designed building, will not collapse. It will endure because it has structural integrity. All the parts fit together properly; its proportions are pleasing; it forms a harmonious whole. It is all of a piece. It performs the function for which it was designed. It does what it is; it is what it does. Few things are more beautiful than a life of integrity. This way lies authenticity, and happiness. But, as with Plato's democratic man, there are few sadder spectacles than a life which lacks integrity; a life ungoverned by guiding principles, a life which lacks proportion, a life where the trivial dominates and what is important is treated incidentally.

The writer Jean Craighead George once wrote that the old Inuit valued above all the human qualities of intelligence, courage, and love. This is a powerful triumvirate. We quickly see that these three qualities must operate together. Intelligence by itself is sterile. Love, as they say, may be blind, and courage may be foolhardy. But when intelligence is directed by love, and when love has the courage to reach out beyond one's ego, then we are in the presence of powerful forces.

In this triumvirate, the quality of courage is perhaps the hardest to define. Courage to do what? And why?

Montaigne wrote, "[Socrates is] courageous in death not because his soul is immortal but because he is mortal."

Fate has a way of catching us all from behind when we're not looking. It trips us up at exactly the wrong time, and we wonder, Why me? Why now?

The great synthesizer Ernest Becker has written, "Hubris means forgetting where the real source of power lies and imagining that it is in oneself."

If that Power lies elsewhere than in one's self, then where does it lie? That is the great and profound mystery that we all stand before. For the Greeks, that mystery had a human face, for

the Jews that mystery was awful and impenetrable, for the Christians it is ultimately benign and understandable, and for the Buddhists, if I understand it properly, it is Good simply because it Is.

In any case, one aspect of courage is to be able to give one's self to this mystery—to life and the world—without reservation or fear. Our old friend Thoreau had much to say on this topic. He was convinced that we stand in the presence of this mystery every instant of our lives and must always respond to it alertly and immediately. He wrote, "Not until we are lost...do we begin to find ourselves, and realize where we are and the infinite extent of our relations." "In any weather, at any hour of the day or night, I have been anxious to improve the nick of time...; to stand at the meeting of two eternities, the past and future, which is precisely the present moment." And how does one respond to this profound situation that the alert person acknowledges? Through one's deeds. He wrote, "To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of arts."

It requires courage to attain this level of alertness and attention, but this alertness is necessary to the good life. As Annie Dillard wrote, "The way we spend our days...is the way we spend our lives," and the following more prosaic words are attributed to John Lennon, "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans."

Thoreau wrote, "No man ever followed his genius until it misled him." One's powers and abilities are integral to and inseparable from the forces that bind and direct the powers of creation and life. It is fair to say that the entire burden of his life and work is to trust the world and give yourself to it rather than try to protect yourself from it. This level of trust requires courage. Consider Odysseus, whose story is perhaps the greatest of all quests—and I do think that life is a quest. He was mightily intelligent and crafty, and as a man of action acted as if he were in charge of his life, yet he also gave himself fully to his fate, which was ultimately beyond his control. Such is courage: to trust the uncertain future, and to be an active participant in it as it unfolds. Thoreau again: "Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star."

Our subject is the attainment of happiness, and in that regard I assert that all good things on this earth stem from beauty and love. Each by itself is valuable; together they are the most valuable and durable of all forces.

Beauty has two sources, the first of which is the world itself, the result of all the creative forces of the past. The second source of beauty is human creation, and this has an ethical component, since our power to defile what is beautiful, or to create what is ugly, is akin to sin; and our ability to create what is beautiful is blessed. The link between love and beauty is clear, because our hearts go out to the beauty of the world, and the beauty of all creation, including our fellow creatures. Without this connection we are like the Ancient Mariner before he is redeemed, merely one of the un-dead. He is redeemed when he learns to bless all of creation, and thus he learns to live.

I have been torn between two views of happiness. Is happiness the result of the elimination of desire? The effacement of ego? Should I practice a form of discipline that requires that I subject my mind and body to a purging discipline? Should I be a Buddhist? Or should I continue to accept Aristotle's conclusion that happiness is an activity?

I am a hedonist and I live within my body. I value my senses and I love living within the sensual world. But I must pose the questions as real alternatives.

Westerners generally accept the latter view, which is not trivial. If happiness is an activity, I must therefore draw the conclusion that *I am what I do*. I am not an idea of myself; I am not a bundle of intentions; I am not an abstraction; my actions *are me*; nothing else is me. Which means that every action I take is extremely significant; indeed, of both immediate and ultimate significance. Or, as Thoreau wrote, “Our whole life is startlingly moral. There is never an instant’s truce between virtue and vice.”

Intelligence, courage, love. The exercise of intelligence is an activity: it makes one happy. The exercise of love is an activity. The exercise of courage allows one to greet life wholeheartedly and wholesomely. And beauty informs all of it, the quality, along with love, that directs intelligence and drives life, the quality that fills our senses and which makes life worth living.

An afterthought: One quality that I have not associated with happiness and authenticity, with beauty, courage, and love, is comfort. Indeed, not once did that occur to me. The larger question is that of the connection between pleasure and happiness. I think that one does not need to feel pleasure to be happy, but that pleasure may contribute to the sensation of happiness in certain circumstances, always transient. If I complete a difficult ski race, my happiness comes from the total experience (and it is the work that I produce that contributes to my happiness, not my results). The pleasure of beer and sauna afterwards is real, and welcome, and transitory.