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Happiness: The Science behind Your Smile

By Daniel Nettle



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Happiness: The Science behind Your Smile By Daniel Nettle

Bringing together the latest insights from psychiatry, psychology, and philosophy, Daniel Nettle sheds light on happiness, the most basic of human desires. Nettle examines whether people are basically happy or unhappy, whether success can make us happy, what sort of remedies to unhappiness work, why some people are happier than others, and much more.

The book is packed with fascinating observations. We discover the evolutionary reason why negative thoughts are more powerful than positive ones. We read that happiness varies from country to country, for example, the Swiss are much more happy than Bulgarians. And we learn that, in a poll among people aged 42 years old--peak mid-life crisis time--more than half rated their happiness an 8, 9, or 10 out of 10, and 90% rated it above 5. Nettle, a psychologist, is particularly insightful in discussing the brain systems underlying emotions and moods, ranging from serotonin, to mood enhancing drugs such as D-fenfluramine, which reduces negative thinking in less than an hour; to the part of the brain that, when electrically stimulated, provides feelings of benevolent calm and even euphoria. In the end, Nettle suggests that we would all probably be happier by trading income or material goods for time with people or hobbies, though most people do not do so.

Happiness offers a remarkable portrait of the feeling that poets, politicians, and philosophers all agree truly makes the world go round.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

What is happiness—is it an unpredictable emotion like joy? A rational construct like personal fulfillment? Or is it some subtle, elusive combination of both? In this enjoyable, thought-provoking book, Nettle digs into the subject with great insight and just a bit of cheeky irreverence. In clear, succinct prose, he argues "that what we are programmed for by evolution is not happiness itself, but a set of beliefs about the kinds of things that will bring happiness, and a disposition to pursue them." He cites survey after survey that report that people's sense of their own happiness outstrips their actual material well-being. Nettle, a biological psychologist at Britain's Open University, describes the pursuit of happiness in stark binary terms—fear and attraction, fight and flight, need and desire. Hard-wired to survive in a world of immediate physical danger, human beings are left to muddle through in today's world of relative safety. Nettle traces the modern epidemic of anxiety and depression to these vestigial aspects of our brain and hormonal structure. Ending on an optimistic note, the author sees a population buoyed by advances in both psychotherapy and medication. With absolute clarity and admirable brevity, Nettle explores the pursuit of happiness and, happily, makes good sense of it all. 15 b&w illus. (*July*)

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From Scientific American

The right to "the pursuit of happiness" is enshrined in the Declaration of Independence, and Americans are obviously hot on the trail: they pop pills, go to therapy, and spend millions of dollars on self-help tapes. Daniel Nettle, a British psychologist, tries to explain what happiness is and critiques the methods people are using to achieve it. And although Happiness is far from a how-to book, Nettle does conclude with a bit of advice on finding it. Nettle begins by defining the kind of happiness that interests him. Joy, the simple pleasure from finding lost money, is too trivial, and the "good life" is too much of a moralization. Instead his work focuses on "subjective wellbeing" or life satisfaction—which he says is what most people are seeking. Paradoxically, although many of the great European ponderers of the human condition—he quotes Freud, Sartre, Schopenhauer and others—agree with Western religions that life is a somewhat grim journey toward death, opinion surveys consistently show that people everywhere consider themselves fairly happy. They plan to be happier in the future, too. In light of this penchant, Nettle believes evolution has endowed us with a "happiness system" that allows us to feel satisfied with life yet remain convinced that if only we had another child, made more money or lost 10 pounds we would be truly happy. Not all our pursuits are equally effective, he says. Americans today have far more money than their grandparents did; still, there is no sign they are happier. Having more social connections and good marriages, on the other hand, does promote satisfaction, and Nettle essentially equates happiness with satisfaction. He enlivens this discussion with some odd facts: people believe they can overcome almost any adversity, but living in constantly noisy places reduces happiness. And although most things money can buy quickly fade in value, breast implants seem to create a lasting high. The book includes one chapter on the interactions of Prozac, opiates, ecstasy, and the serotonin and dopamine systems and how these compounds work in our brains to fight depression or induce feelings of pleasure. Yet Nettle does not consider biochemistry a source of happiness, and he moves on. He concludes this pleasant, jargon-free book with some advice: total happiness is not attainable, but you can manipulate your mind and life to reduce the impact of negative emotion, increase positive emotion and—most important—stop consciously seeking happiness at all. He quotes an old joke about the Dalai Lama, who is visited by a rich acolyte bearing a huge, gift-wrapped box. The Dalai Lama opens the box to find it empty and exclaims, "Exactly what I've always wanted!"

Jonathan Beard

From [Booklist](#)

The Declaration of Independence guarantees the right to pursue it. The government of the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan recently vowed to increase it for its constituents. From ancient times, philosophers have pronounced it the ultimate purpose of life. So why, then, Nettle asks, does happiness remain so elusive? Basically, the answer boils down to an inbred confusion between happiness and achievement. As competitive beings, humans are hardwired to mistakenly believe that, say, money, a nicer house, or more authority at work will make them happy. The sad truth, Nettle says, is that more of anything satisfies only as long as it exceeds what others around us have gained of the same things. If one owns less than one's neighbors, satisfaction will be elusive. And forget about happiness. Money can't buy it. Like anything else worthwhile, we must work to achieve it, but such work must make us happy more than it makes us wealthy. The reader may wonder whether researching this little book that reflects no small effort to demystify happiness made Nettle happy. *Donna Chavez*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Michael Floyd:

Do you have something that you prefer such as book? The e-book lovers usually prefer to opt for book like comic, brief story and the biggest the first is novel. Now, why not trying Happiness: The Science behind Your Smile that give your fun preference will be satisfied simply by reading this book. Reading addiction all over the world can be said as the opportunity for people to know world better then how they react towards the world. It can't be claimed constantly that reading habit only for the geeky person but for all of you who wants to become success person. So , for all of you who want to start examining as your good habit, you may pick Happiness: The Science behind Your Smile become your own starter.

Dana Hanley:

Are you kind of hectic person, only have 10 or perhaps 15 minute in your day to upgrading your mind ability or thinking skill also analytical thinking? Then you are receiving problem with the book than can satisfy your short period of time to read it because this time you only find guide that need more time to be learn. Happiness: The Science behind Your Smile can be your answer given it can be read by you actually who have those short extra time problems.

Jennifer Jones:

In this era globalization it is important to someone to acquire information. The information will make professionals understand the condition of the world. The condition of the world makes the information easier to share. You can find a lot of recommendations to get information example: internet, classifieds, book, and soon. You will see that now, a lot of publisher which print many kinds of book. The particular book that recommended to your account is Happiness: The Science behind Your Smile this guide consist a lot of the information on the condition of this world now. This kind of book was represented how can the world has grown up. The terminology styles that writer use for explain it is easy to understand. The actual writer made some analysis when he makes this book. That is why this book acceptable all of you.

David Fern:

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