Human Flourishing

Today happiness appears to be a general and concrete feeling but in this day and age, it seems so elusive, abstract and for some it is hard to find. In the past three decades the United States has seen a three hundred percent increase in adolescent suicide and a thousand percent increase in adolescent depression (NOT CITED). One can always envision themselves being in a state of happiness. However, when considered it is a very dynamic concept, one that has had philosophers talking for centuries. The Ancient Greeks called it Eudaimonia meaning “happiness”, or “human flourishing”. The Anglicized version of the word is spelled Eudemonia. Etymology considered the word broken down is *eu* meaning “good” and *daimon* meaning “of a supernatural being”. Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.) was one of the greatest philosophers of all time, namely only Plato is his peer. The moral theory of Aristotle, like that of Plato, focuses on virtue, recommending the virtuous way of life by its relation to happiness. Eudaimonia is a central concept in Aristotelian ethics and political philosophy, along with the terms "aretē", most commonly translated as "virtue" or "excellence", and "phronesis", often translated as "practical or moral wisdom".  So Aristotle is saying that practicing a virtuous life correlates with happiness. He may have been one of the first, along with Plato, but Aristotle must have been on to something that we as Americans have lost sight of.   
 Jim Fay and Dawn Billings are the two pioneers of a technique of raising children called “Love and Logic”. In their book, *From Innocence to Entitlement* they blame the loss of happiness on an entitled attitude. They believe that children who are raised with a sense of entitlement, lack the full joy of life. Through gratitude children learn to appreciate and be happy for the abundance around them, rather than feel they lack wealth that they are entitled to have. Dawn Billings also goes on to say that having a respect for one’s self and others generates an appreciation for those around you. This makes light of Aristotle’s theory of virtue being connected to happiness. And as we live in a “feel good” society, with all the instant gratification, entertainment, recreational drugs, psychotherapy, sexual gratification and grade inflation, it becomes harder and harder to find the meaning in life, or even deal with it. Most times when something is so far gone, it requires not just a few changes but a complete and radical change. I believe that if Americans desire to be the top dogs, the role model that the world looks up to, and be a truly civilized society, there needs to be a radical change in the way we run things in our country and in our lives. For example, instead of spending trillions on a military budget of world conquest proportions, we become a humanitarian world power. Changes will always start within and as Marcel Proust said “The real voyage of discovery consists not in making new landscapes but in having new eyes”. First people must change the way they see things and in the process perhaps they will find something new truly worth living for. Finding happiness is unique to the individual.

Happiness means many different things to the average person. Some may think of happiness as money, some as a fulfilling career, some as having no responsibilities and relaxing on a beach. Maybe some are closer to the core, when they get their happiness from sharing, and giving a part of themselves, like those with a rare blood type that donate monthly. To me, I find peace and content, and even a swelling happiness from within when I go into the mountains, or raft down some white water. I love nature in its simplest form. I love seeing my family back in my hometown during holidays and going to races with my teammates, all of these things give me enjoyment. However, I will say you are wrong if you tell me that happiness comes primarily from human relationships. “What we experience is not external reality but our internal reaction to it”. Neils Bohrs, a Nobel Prize winning physicist said that. That means that we make our own happiness, both by what we enjoy and how we react to what is around us. And in living a good and virtuous life as Aristotle explained, we can learn to react positively to our surroundings. I believe that when someone can find a sense of right, or virtue, in what they do every day, in how they live and can find gratitude for that life, they will find true happiness. And in the entire world’s great experience, happiness is always better when shared with others.   
  
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