

Happiness

Anthony Daniels on three studies of being happy

Happiness: Lessons from a New Science

by Richard Layard

Making Happy People: The Nature of Happiness and Its Origins in Childhood

by Paul Martin

Going Sane

by Adam Phillips

1 MY HEART sinks whenever a patient says to me that his ambition in life is to be happy: for he is sure to have not the faintest idea of the preconditions of happiness. He thinks either that it can be aimed at like a bullseye on a dartboard, or that instant relief from financial constraint or anxiety, for example by winning the Lottery, is all that is required.

2 These three books, the first by an economist, the second by a behavioural scientist and the third by a psychoanalyst, attempt to tell us about these preconditions – about how we should live in order to be happy – in large part by telling us how we should not live.

3 Richard Layard is an economist who appears to have fallen out of love with his subject, or at least to have developed deep doubts about the guidance it can offer to humanity without advice from disciplines such as sociology and psychology. He starts out from a banal but none the less vitally important observation: that increased levels of production and consumption of material goods do not increase

human satisfaction, at least once a certain level has been reached. He therefore cannot subscribe to the view that a major aim of government ought to be the maximisation of wealth and personal income. 29, he develops an argument for high taxation that I had never heard before, namely that it will discourage people from wasting their lives in pursuit of what they mistakenly believe will bring them happiness.

4 Layard is an old-fashioned utilitarian whose philosophical hero is Jeremy Bentham. He believes that happiness is a unidimensional neuropsychological state that is easily measurable; and that every human action ought to be directed at producing the greatest happiness for the greatest number. No one's happiness is to count for more than anyone else's. The Benthamite philosophy of happiness would not allow the claims of affection.

5 This is a very thin philosophy, and if ever it were consistently practised (which thankfully is impossible), the world would be a very cold and comfortless place. It does not explain why, or to what extent, I obviously prefer the interests of my own children, my friends or my fellow countrymen to those of people living on the far side of the globe who are no more than abstractions to me.

6 Nevertheless, there is much in this book, especially in its analysis of what makes us unhappy, with which one can agree. Man has an innate tendency to envy, and much of his dissatisfaction

arises from awareness that others are better off than he, which he considers an injustice. Layard quotes evidence that most people, at any rate those above the bread line, are more interested in their relative than in their absolute wealth. Anything that increases people's ability to compare themselves with others, therefore, will increase their dissatisfaction; and television, says Layard, is precisely such an instrument. The omnipresence of the little screen, with its diet of glamorous and exciting lives, means that many people now compare themselves not with their neighbours, to whom they are similar, but with the inhabitants of a fairy-tale world in which dull routine and financial limitations are unknown. The comparison causes bitterness and resentment.

7 Not only that, but television discourages the very kind of social interaction which is one of the greatest sources of human happiness. There is a correlation between the amount of television watched in childhood and unhappiness later in life; and while a statistical correlation is not in itself proof of causation, there are plausible explanations as to why passive entertainment should be destructive of human happiness.

8 Layard is very clear also about the kind of 33 that is conducive to happiness. He will have no truck with the idea that the breakdown of the traditional family represents a beneficent extension of individual choice: for it has had a disastrous effect upon children and society as a whole.

9 Dr Paul Martin, a behavioural scientist, approaching happiness from a slightly different angle, comes to many of the same conclusions as Richard Layard, and indeed quotes much of the

same evidence. For example, both assert, using the same experimental research, that people are not always motivated by financial incentives, and that in some cases financial incentives actually reduce motivation rather than increase it. This is because financial incentives can reduce the feeling that a task is intrinsically interesting or worthwhile, which is an important ingredient of a happy life. Performance-related pay in the public service therefore destroys contentment and performance alike. Since most people want at least some autonomy at work, managerialism is yet another source of unhappiness.

10 The two authors' prescription for happiness is commonsensical: don't be envious or materialistic, cultivate friendships, and lose yourself in tasks that have intrinsic value. They both write clearly, but this cannot be said of Adam Phillips, whose book is a meditation on the meaning and importance of sanity. However, he never defines the term intelligibly. Phillips has a reputation both as a philosopher and as a prose stylist. This is mysterious to me. His prose is opaque, pretentious and of startling inelegance.

11 Nor is there any compensation in the quality of the thought. In fact, Mr Phillips displays no consecutive thought at all, and rarely mentions anything as vulgar as a fact. To read him is like being apostrophised by an un-self-critical pub bore who thinks he has something important to say but hasn't. I have rarely read so many pages with so little profit.

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Tekst 7 Happiness

- 1p **27** Which of the following can be concluded from paragraph 1?
- A Happiness results from an individual's conscious choice to pursue it.
 - B In their search for happiness people may start from a mistaken notion of it.
 - C Unhappy people may experience their unhappiness as a medical condition.
 - D Wealthy people are likely to believe that they have achieved happiness.
- 1p **28** In paragraph 3, how does the second sentence relate to the first?
- A It anticipates any criticism of the point made in the first sentence.
 - B It elaborates on the point made in the first sentence.
 - C It sheds a different light on the point made in the first sentence.
- 1p **29** Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 3?
- A Admittedly
 - B Even so
 - C Paradoxically
 - D What's more
- 1p **30** Which of the following are in accordance with Richard Layard's view of happiness (paragraph 4)?
- 1 Each individual has a duty to take other people's happiness into account.
 - 2 Happiness is a momentary state which can easily be destroyed.
 - 3 One's own happiness is the direct result of making other people happy.
 - 4 There is nothing mysterious about happiness.
- A Only 1 and 2.
 - B Only 1 and 4.
 - C Only 2 and 3.
 - D Only 3 and 4.
 - E Only 2, 3 and 4.
 - F All four.
- 1p **31** Which of the following could replace "Nevertheless" at the beginning of paragraph 6?
- A In spite of Layard's failure to recognise the merits of altruistic behaviour,
 - B In spite of the fact that Layard adopts an unacceptable stance,
 - C In spite of the fact that Layard considers happiness a purely abstract phenomenon,

In de alinea's 6 en 7 worden twee oorzaken genoemd waardoor televisie geluk in de weg staat.

2p **32** Welke twee oorzaken zijn dat?

1p **33** Which of the following fits the gap in paragraph 8?

- A** family life
- B** financial input
- C** personality development

Education ministers have been spelling out to England's schools how their most effective teachers will be able to earn more than £35,000 a year. The new scheme, based on an appraisal system linked to pupils' results, has been strongly opposed by teachers' unions. (bbc.co.uk/news)

Als Paul Martin en Richard Layard om advies werd gevraagd over dit plan van de regering, zouden zij negatief reageren.

2p **34** Welke twee redenen zouden zij daarvoor geven, te oordelen naar alinea 9?

Bronvermelding

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