The Four Levels of Happiness

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The Greek Philosopher Aristotle observed that all human beings wish to be happy and search for happiness. Why? Aristotle? The Greek Philosopher Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) observed that all persons devoted to the contemplation of the Godhead, if this is the case, then human beings wish to be happy and search for happiness. Let us look at what kinds of happiness there might be and whether these types might be logically ranked.

From reviewing Greek and later Christian writings it may be observed that happiness has four levels. These may be described as follows (in ascending order):

1. Joyful: Happiness in a thing. Thus, “I see the Inquisition, I eat the linguini, it makes me feel good, I am happy.” This kind of happiness is based on something external to the self, is short-lived, and, on reflection, we do not consider that it is in any way true happiness.

2. Quality: The happiness of comparative advantage. "I have more of this than X." I am better at this than X." This kind of happiness results from competition with another. The self is seen in terms of how it measures up to others. It has been called "the competition game." Such happiness is rather unstable and, if one fails, can lead to unhappiness and sense of worthlessness. Exclusive pursuit tends to oppress others. Most people would not imagine a world as satisfactory if it was composed of only happiness #2 type people.

3. Beatitudinal: (Beatitudinal = happiness or blessedness). The happiness that comes from seeing the good in others and doing the good for others. It is, in essence, other-regarding action. Happiness #3 is, in some sense, at war with happiness #2. One cannot be at the same time in competition with someone else and doing the good for and seeing the good in them. Most people would prefer a world (community, families, relationships) structured around the pursuit of happiness #3 than entirely based on happiness #2. Happiness #3 is higher than happiness #2 because the other #3 is not necessarily limited. We cannot be someone else's everything. For example, we or they, will die and if our happiness is contingent upon them, it dies with them. "There must be more than this."

4. Sublime Beatitudinal: (sublime = "to lift up or elevate"). This category, the most difficult to describe, encompasses the search for the fullest and perfection of happiness. The fulfillment, therefore, of goodness, beauty, truth and love. So we recognize in this category, these things that are, in some sense, beyond what we are capable of achieving on our own.

This pursuit is pursued through the other happinesses but with a clear understanding that in the battle between happiness #3 and #2, happiness #3 must win out if we are to approach the transcendentals of this category:

(transcendental: from the latin words trc: to reach or ascend and -tend: to climb over or surpass). The transcendentals have traditionally included; truth, beauty and goodness. Note that all religions have some concept that they place in a position over things that are, in a sense, beyond what we are capable of achieving on our own. The pursuit of happiness #3 results in a search for happiness in God. "We seek Him, we find Him, at last, we see His face in beauty." What is our search for happiness? It is the search for happiness in God or God's face. We do not see God directly, but we experience what we seek in other things which they reveal. From reviewing Greek and later Christian writers it may be observed that happiness has four levels. These may be described as follows (in ascending order):

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