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RECENSION OF THE TERM 'AUTHENTIC HAPPINESS'

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Abstract: 'Happiness' could be the most attractive term or virtue found in all religions and subsequently the philosophies thereof. Ultimately all living beings have various ideas about it and therefore different paths are adopted or tried to achieve it. There is always an attempt by the scholars, motivational speakers, and discourses to announce a 'one liner' as the only possible source of happiness and show how easy or simple it is. It is sad that not all shades of the term are covered nor the factions of the society. On the other hand, once a philosophical outlook is accepted it becomes easy to analyze any concept covering all its genuine aspects. A realistic picture when drawn promotes a clear understanding of the factual truth. It is however an unfortunate reality that most of the theories are over ambitious and stacked with wishful or idealistic thinking. This kind of effort to impose one's own ideas with impressive jargons or phrases is nothing else than merely misleading with lofty theoretical ideas. Authentic happiness may be the result of the demands of one's own sentimental ideas but they cannot be universalized. There are indeed many avenues worth suggesting yet none can assure uniform results. One of the glaring drawbacks had been placing excessive trust in the results without subjecting them to the test of validity in actual practice. That is why there is ever, to the best of the capacity, a psychological soothing effect by acquiring knowledge but not wisdom. Utility based assumptions even if theoretical, will serve the purpose to a very large extent than merely hypnotizing through an impressive verbose language stuffed with technical terminologies. It should be a prime duty of every thinker to place the existing reality with limitations of any proposed idea than to drag the same to illogical conclusions. This paper attempts to surface the reality particularly about the much publicized word 'Authentic' so that nothing is missed.

Keywords: Authenticity, Happiness, Knowledge, Wisdom.

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INTRODUCTION

Most of the virtuous human qualities are idealized disproportionately. Anything outstretched beyond its elastic limitation has to lose its geometrical design and metaphysically spoken, its intrinsic quality. It is our faulty judgment about the 'virtues' which disappoints us. There is always an innate tendency in us to universalize the importance under enthusiasm. This is why the relevant atheistic objections have remained unanswered by the followers of their choice religion, who maintained untiringly their fervent spirit. It is always wise to hold on to the scientific temperament as far as possible. In case certain phenomenon turns out to be beyond the human comprehension, then there is nothing wrong in bracketing it into the arena of mysticism. It is sad to see that despite the enormous scientific development in the interest of humanity the warring spirit between science and wild religious sentiments built up more through ritualism has not been tamed down. There is definitely a huge storage of knowledge indicating periodical enrichment but 'wisdom' as such seems to be getting gathered at snail's pace. For a rational way of living, one does need ethics and morals as handy tools. They are the genuine guides on all counts. Theoretically at least, none would oppose

their utility under trying times and no religion could ever object to the principles derived from them.

Human nature cannot be easily defined but may be described succinctly from various points of view. Since the variation is so much dispersed from person to person it would be sane to do the proper analysis taking on individual cases. It is an open fact that many times there are hardly any shades of difference between almost the close by words like pleasure, joy, happiness, euphoria, thrill, contentment etc. Commonly one may think they are all ultimately leading to same. Such a viewpoint is not totally wrong because the results always speak and when we get comforted we do acknowledge the source as the triggering point. Age wise our thinking process or method changes and we do take into consideration many personal and social factors influencing in making our personality. In fact it all begins with the meaning or purpose of life. When such a question repeatedly appears at the advance stage of life, we do realize that a 'belief system' is a must, whether accredited in the society by all or not. Even unconventional viewpoints would serve the purpose. Man being a social animal needs psychologically a support which can always provide the sense of

belonging. It is in this context that religions, social theories & norms, philosophies, political ideologies etc. have gained tremendous importance in the society. Although throughout history this question of happiness had been repeatedly surfacing, there is not a neatly drawn plan or scheme which could assure happiness as such. The various schools of philosophy have very enthusiastically come up with a wide variety of solutions but it seems nothing is truly workable or thoroughly convincing in totality. The fact is that no doubt there are various causes but one of the major ones could be the diversity of human thought. At the same time lack of scientific temperament also causes impenetrable layers of ignorance owing to which there seems to be no easy respite.

Happiness itself is an exclusive and different concept depending much on the individual level of comprehension and surroundings. Hunting out for a universal theory leading to Authentic Happiness would mean only an intellectual exercise leading to no man's land. The very first objection could be to the word Authentic. Nothing can be claimed so. At its best one may think of the terms like suitable, agreeable, possible and idealized. At any rate there cannot be an authoritative or universally qualified or appreciable or acknowledged solution which can deliver the desirable goods. Secondly, absence of unhappiness cannot be equated to happiness. There are rather many times occasions wherein we are neither in the zone of happiness nor unhappiness. Boredom for instance does not necessarily mean unhappiness. Ennui is another term which we commonly use that arises out of listlessness and dissatisfaction. Therefore, most of the times our preconceived notions begin dreaming of the resulting future situation and the failure causes unhappiness. Many times this is also expressed as disappointment. Another important point to be noted here is that it all depends on one's own bearing or sustaining capacity. Intensity of unhappiness can never be uniform for all. Leo Tolstoy in *Anna Karenina* wrote, "All happy families are alike but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." There is an innate defense mechanism at the mental level owned by all in all age groups. Finally it is our personal culture which prepares us for any untoward incidence or builds the sustaining capacity. Usually particularly from the Eastern Religious points of view happiness derived from the external sources is looked upon as of an inferior quality and much impetus is paid to the one surfacing from the spiritual outlook. In fact happiness which is morally based has no such division and there is no specific intelligible happiness as Authentic. Many times,

it is one's own conjectures which articulate happiness but there cannot be a single standard path to achieve. This is the main reason as to why so many theories have emerged earning recognition.

SELECT PHILOSOPHIES ON HAPPINESS

Every living being is in the quest of happiness. There can be naturally various sources but the base is surely and authentically built out of morality. In this context no philosophy ever underrated the importance of ethical and moral values in life.

EPICURUS: He is considered to be a sincere explorer of the realm of happiness and that too with a scientific temperament combined with a keen metaphysical inquiry. Mostly his philosophical genre seems to be associated with hedonism. There is nothing new in the scheme of life granted by Nature or some potentially strong agency to which we generally refer to as the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God. The major problem rather going on from centuries is that it is neither well defined nor can be described without correlating it to the mythological interpretations. The different shades of the passing phases of life have not drastically changed. That is why what is granted to human life is freedom which may be utilized depending on one's own outlook of life by experience or borrowed philosophies. It is sad that the majority is engrossed more in building conjectures which are erected more out of wishful thinking. As a result, most of the people have been drifted away from the path of happiness. Some of the ascetic practices that are recommended through religious writings have even disdained the life of pleasure, comfort, and enjoyment while to some extent even happiness too. Epicurus bridges up the gap between the metaphysical concepts of pleasure and happiness. He does not want to call the latter as a by-product. On the contrary he considers and suggests these two terms to be treated as same or at least equivalents. Happiness according to him is always associated with pleasure. That is why he thinks even our being social and analytical will lead to happiness. The genuine freedom automatically comes when one adopts social life as an important ingredient of happiness. Bertrand Russell writes, "Epicurus disagrees with some of the hedonist predecessors in distinguishing between active and passive pleasures or dynamic and static pleasures. Dynamic pleasures consist in attainment of a desired end, the previous desire have been accompanied by pain. Static pleasures consist in a state of equilibrium, which results from the existence of the kind of state affairs that would be desired if it were absent."¹

PLATO: Irrespective of the approach most of the ancient philosophers never stirred even a few spaces to deviate from the rigid moralistic stand taken to gain happiness. In fact, for them happiness could be an automatically manufactured species, when a righteous path is chosen. That is why the terms like 'virtue' and 'knowledge' were given utmost importance with the strong belief that with a typical satisfaction, happiness naturally makes a way into life. This strong belief that with a moral base happiness would naturally flow continued unabated. Since life has various activities involved, sorting out those exclusively based on virtuous acts is a must. In this context, the discrimination between animal passion and human emotion is necessary although both are directed towards happiness or pleasure only. Human beings are gifted with the faculty of thinking, contemplating and analytical mind. Therefore, pruning everything beforehand to gain maximum benefit and subsequently gain happiness would be a sensible move. Getting back to his mentor Socrates we find a clear influence over Plato's thinking. Socrates speaks about diverting our attention from the body and concentrating over the soul as priority. There is indeed a clear indication in Socrates' sermons that dislodging borrowed unhappiness is the key to gaining happiness. Mostly we are engaged with the demands of the body owing to which the soul's minimum requirements are neglected. This in turn creates a free channel for unhappiness. Tranquility descends only when the sources of unhappiness are thwarted which is our prime duty. Therefore, Plato lays a lot of emphasis on moral values which are sure to produce happiness in a guaranteed way than the opposite which might bring in pleasure on a temporary basis. The material world has definitely its own importance but then that cannot assure lasting happiness in its true sense. Ultimately it leads to self-fulfillment.

ARISTOTLE: An encyclopedic philosopher of giant status with an enviable scholarship embraced truth from every nook and corner he felt worth exploring. A true scholar would never stand still because he knows no subject is under anyone's custody. Every subject progresses or progressively reveals knowledge but in installments only and Aristotle was never complacent with the treasure he had. It was the inquisitive mind which found solace when knowledge was steadily getting enriched. Usually Aristotle's philosophy of happiness rests on the four popular pillars viz. Laetus, Felix, Beatitudo and sublime Beatitudo. These Latin terms are quite popular and they indicate stages or levels of

happiness. However, in brief, Aristotle insists upon happiness as the main species, meaning and purpose of life. Furthermore it is everyone's prime duty to be happy. All our actions would gain meaning only when they lead to happiness. Therefore it necessarily depends on us only to be happy. "Aristotle is a merciless realist, who keenly and fundamentally experiences life with all its imperfections, with all its ugliness and even monstrosity. No question arises where nature and life are full of beauty: supreme reason with all its Ideas is simply embodied to its full extent in matter and there is no ground for any dualism here."² Our roots and chosen paths may be different but the aim remains same. The four terms used by Aristotle from Latin in general are connected to happiness and subsequently luck or fortune. When a total lifetime span is considered, Aristotle insists on the importance to be given to human relations through friendship, overall health, i.e. on all planes accumulation of knowledge and wealth. This shows unlike some philosophers who would stick on to only one aspect overlooking the other possibilities, Aristotle laid emphasis on all. However, his final word went always to 'virtue' for genuine happiness. Therefore, to him there are indeed various sources to draw happiness from. Happiness might come from material objects satisfying nurtured ego, philanthropic nature and purity or sublime beatific peace. That is why for Aristotle the ultimate purpose of human existence itself gets equated to happiness. In this regard the term 'Eudaimonia' is often used. This shows in brief we can conclude that happiness depends on self. "Hence arises Aristotle's surprising inclination on the one hand to preach practical activity and on the other to find the highest human happiness in concentrated withdrawal into oneself, in intellectual self-contemplation. It would seem that the two are incompatible. But Aristotle's entire Nicomachean Ethics is devoted to classifying virtues as "theoretical", i.e. purely contemplative, and "practical". And although the practical virtues procure inner satisfaction, pleasure and happiness, nevertheless true happiness is wisdom wrapped up in itself and withdrawn from all practical activity. This view is not very comprehensible to people today. But for Aristotle such a state is the absolute foundation for experiencing and loving life and for vital activity."³

STOICISM: 'Living in the present' can be taken as the sure gateway to happiness. It is a proven fact that nurturing of the memories sometimes may be joyful. However at times it may give away to despondency. Stretching wishful thinking for the desirable results from future becomes a habit. This may at times create

excitement but there could be a silver lining of anxiety too. These outlooks have nothing else to offer than surfacing nostalgic moments and unreasonable expectations from life. Therefore as Seneca reiterates the fact that we are habituated to place blames on some agency or the other for our shortcomings or failures. We habitually and sadly miss the line of rational thinking without proper periodic analysis. We get psychologically so much tuned to our aims that even embracing illusions becomes natural. Further we eagerly expect wanton results. Therefore Seneca said, "If you really want to escape the things that harass you, what you are need is not to be in a different place but to be a different person." We must be prepared to depart from the theoretical ideas which might sound impressive but somehow wither away in practice when meticulously applied. This is possible, according to Seneca only when we keep a strict vigilance on own activities and also our voluntary response to the situations on daily basis. Marcus Aurelius began with a systematic approach towards life de-cluttering it to have simplicity. "Therefore, with all confusions, common man out of frustration felt the solace from hedonistic approach for exploiting the available resources. On the other hand Aurelius thought there is more sense in facing the reality as it is than expecting miracles to get auto-generated. It was waste of efforts when directed towards the aims without knowing the facts. Hasty decisions would create always a chaos."⁴ High sounding principles too require simplicity in functioning when applied so that best results can be crystallized out. Irrespective of our status a simple life would be highly profitable. He never encouraged brooding over the past which is irreparable nor toying with ideas connected to the unseen future. By adopting a sort of tidiness it would mean perfect sorting and leading a life free from self-created controversies. As a piece of advice Epictetus says, "Self importance is not the way of the true philosopher. Nobody enjoys the company of a braggart. Don't oppress people with dramatic stories of your own exploits. Nobody cares that much about your war stories and dramatic adventures, though they might indulge you for a while to appear polite. To speak frequently and excessively of your own achievements is tiresome and pompous."⁵

CONCLUSION

"Happiness does not come automatically. It is that good fortune bestows upon us and a reversal of fortune takes back. It depends on us alone. One does not become happy overnight, but with patient labor, day after day. Happiness is constructed, and that requires effort

and time. In order to become happy, we have to learn how to change ourselves-Luca and Francesco Cavalli-Sforza"⁶

It is on records that every school of philosophy whether eastern or western has spoken about happiness. Some of the schools of thought have attested happiness to a particular chosen disposition. The problem however does not seem to have been convincingly solved. Unhappiness does continue in spite of materialistic advancement and studies made on human psychology. The basic mistake committed is by adopting a warring spirit to deal with unhappiness. Therefore any solution howsoever sounding perfect cannot work effectively. It is ultimately a matter of common sense in the modern age to accept both virtues and vices have their own status or existence. One may take a detour to avoid certain vices but claiming a thorough control over them on a permanent basis is a faulty judgment. There are transitory emotions with everyone. None can escape. The difference lies only in the art of handling the same. Certain problems of life will continue as ever with change in intensity because the challenges would not be new but can appear in varied forms. Instead of wrestling with the emotions it is wise to silence the same amicably. Just as understanding happiness is required similarly knowing fully what unhappiness really means is important. Dismal philosophies lead us nowhere. It is always wise to reshape our attitude and own the responsibility for whatever happens or happened in past. It is a battle which is to be fought lonely. At the most a secondary or tertiary support system may be erected through proper knowledge and social circles formed. There is a Tibetan saying that sums up everything in brief, "Seeking happiness outside ourselves is like waiting for sunshine in a cave facing north."

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