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“Accept the fact that the achievement of your happiness is the only moral purpose of your life, and that happiness—not pain or mindless self-indulgence—is the proof of your moral integrity, since it is the proof and the result of your loyalty to the achievement of your values.”

Ayn Rand (1905–1982), Atlas Shrugged (1957), Random House, p. 1059.

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2. In the contemporary world humans tend to think but also act individually and while most of us aspire to be happier, there is no specific way to do so as people perceive happiness very differently. According to Ayn Rand to attain happiness is our main goal in life. She states that happiness is not about sacrifice or selfishness but to achieve it you have to adhere to one’s moral principles and have integrity. However, one can wonder: is happiness and devotion to moral values a personal matter or does society play an important part in achieving the ultimate goal in life?

Rand’s claim implies an individualistic attitude towards the meaning of life. It originates from her statement that she perceives wellness as self-realization. She firmly believes happiness means neither sacrifice nor self-indulgence, these being provided as the two verges. However, one may come across many different definitions of happiness. I believe most of them are acceptable as well as valuable, as it is only natural for humans to have different perspectives of something so subjective. One such perspective can be that happiness is a state of elation which can hit you during the most unexpected situations, such as achieving a goal or communicating with your favorite people. Or simply, to quote a famous author from my country, Nikos Kazantzakis, happiness is a flower you wear on your ear. His statement implies that happiness does not only originate from the important things we experience, like winning an award or having public recognition, but it mostly is the outcome of the small things we do in our everyday life, for instance, interacting with people, enjoying nature, or reading an interesting book. He believes these simple experiences are what matters the most because they compose the biggest part of our lives. Moreover, the feeling of being happy can spring from self-realization, self-knowledge and knowing your worth. These last concepts constitute our well-being which is unique and tops a person’s development, as pointed out by Abraham Maslow in his famous hierarchy of needs. That said, I consider happiness as consciousness, having self-esteem and knowing why and how you have become yourself.

Having considered Rand’s conditions for happiness, I realized there might be some points she did not take into account. One of them might be the fact that a happy society is

something bigger than the total of its happy members. Acting entirely on an individual basis might not be as effective as Rand puts it. It takes more than a thousand of happy humans to make a happy society; the process is not one of automation. Our social interactions actually contribute to a much broader definition of happiness. Society functions correctly when there is empathy. We have to think unselfishly, because after all, we all need each other. Communication does not just improve the quality of our life; it is actually a human need, and if it gets neglected our mental health can be seriously impacted. Therefore, I believe communication is an inseparable part of our lives and that both our personal and social life can benefit from it.

Another point of view of happiness, which nearly agrees with Rand's but also takes into account the degree of our values is Aristotle's statement that a precondition of happiness (eudemonia) is virtue, as an intermediate state between hyperbole and ellipsis, between too much and too little. Therefore, happiness can be achieved with moderation too, meaning we always have to do just as much as needed to be happy, nothing more or less. If we correlate Aristotle's claim with Rand's, integrity certainly needs moderation. We should be integral, but not excessively, because then we might end up being inflexible, individualistic or over-critical towards other people's flaws. On the other hand, not having enough integrity might make us too flexible and probably prone to corruption. Both of these situations can be avoided if we find the balance between the two, which may vary for each and everyone of us. Back to Rand, I think what she expresses in her claim is the balance between being too individualistic and not individualistic enough.

We might be able to find this balance by building strong and useful habits, experiencing new things, learning more about ourselves and therefore understand what makes us truly happy, but most importantly, by accepting the difficulties we are faced with. Most people seek the "easy way out". The learning process being marginalized and the climate rate mounting dangerously are some examples of selfish aspiration to success that went terribly wrong. But, have we ever thought of a life with no difficulties? A life in which we put no effort, yet have the best outcome? Despite sounding unreal, I believe it would lack fulfillment and joy. It is worth mentioning that inconveniences and how we contribute to the formation of our personality, morals and traits. That said, life cannot and should not only be about our personal satisfaction. We will only be able to appreciate our life in general when we get out of our comfort zone and face our struggles.

On a final note, I found Rand's claim lacking in the social parameter, despite my first thought of its being true. It is impossible for humans to achieve happiness separated from society. We should take into consideration that moderation is a prerequisite for integrity. Lastly, life is worth living when you fight for a worthy cause. During this fight you do not act as a superhero, but as a part of humankind. Only after you have overcome your personal battles will you be able to assess if you have had a happy life.

