

Four Views of Happiness

Which view seems most reasonable to you? Which view in fact most structures your life?

<p>Tragic View: What we most deeply want cannot be had (love is fundamentally broken or impossible), but that can't stop us from wanting it; the gods are either dead (= false myths) or unintelligible, like the universe as a whole. *Optimistic (like Nietzsche – humanity is free to define its own values, though they can never be more than temporary and will not fit with the universe), or *Pessimistic (we are 'free' because all important connections have been destroyed; without God, everything is permitted)</p>	<p>Aristotelian View: Just by being human, we all desire to be happy, but many people (those who were raised under the right circumstances, especially those who dedicate themselves to a life of appreciating beauty) can have – for a while, in this life – what we most desire, so long as nothing horrible happens to them. *Complete happiness is being fully human, which means partaking in godlike activities (thinking, contemplating) as much as possible for a human being and doing so well. *There is a secondary version of happiness that requires less moral luck: we might live according to many of the virtues in suboptimal situations.</p>
<p>Christian View: We deeply want more than can really be had in this life – in fact, we need to learn to desire <i>more</i> than we already do – and there is good reason to think we will get what we want by being given a different kind of life. *Complete happiness is available to everyone, just not in this life. It requires divine help, and it is available only through dying (which includes refusing to settle for lesser but probably more immediately inviting pleasures, yielding control). Mourning the evils of this life makes sense because there will be something better, but rejoicing in the joys of this life also makes sense, since they are previews of that better thing. *Both Augustine and Thomas think it is possible to have a secondary kind of happiness this side of death, if we live according to the virtues and from the perspective of hope.</p>	<p>Stoic View: Either we don't want much to begin with (in which case we are aligned with nature), or we do want a lot, but that is foolish idealism/wishful thinking, so we should go ahead and adjust our desires to current reality. When we desire <i>only</i> the way things are, this will be happiness. (This may include Buddhist cessation of all desire.) In the extreme case, this view approves of suicide (in the sense of the 'death with dignity' label): if it turns out that I can't learn to see all things as necessary and find happiness in that, then removing excessive desire means removing myself, literally. I should go out on my own terms, because virtue is entirely in my control.</p>