

Faith & Reason Group Discussion Questions – September 20, 2024

WHY AREN'T WE HAPPIER?

The Science of Enjoyment, Satisfaction, and Meaning

Discussion prompt #1 (link from **12:14** through **37:57**, 2 minutes per person)

select themes

- Inevitability (and essentiality) of negative emotions ... “happier-ness” as the goal
- Happiness = **enjoyment** + **satisfaction** + **meaning** (i.e., “macronutrients”)
- Enjoyment not just pleasure (limbic) ... it adds **people** + **memory** (executive)
- Satisfaction = **earned success** + **service to other people**
- Meaning = **coherence** (“Why do things happen the way they do?”) + **purpose** (“What am I on earth to do?”) + **significance** (“Why does it matter that I am alive?”)
 - Test: Why am I alive? What would I die for? (any answers = pass)
 - “Institutions of meaning”: faith (or transcendence), family, friendship, work

Let’s all grant Brooks’ framework and review the bolded words above; which feels like your happiness well, and which feels like a happiness desert at present?

Discussion prompt #2 (link from **37:57** through **1:11:11**, 2 minutes per person)

select themes

- Happiness in decline: “climate” vs. “weather” (e.g., social media, COVID, politics)
- Causes: denigration of faith, family, friendship ... political, technological substitutes
- Defining and measuring happiness: biases, stigmas, cultural factors
- Intelligence makes you happier until it gets in the way (solution: happiness diet)
- Policies curbing unhappiness, eliminating barriers to happiness yet not fostering it

Brooks covers a lot of ground ... what landed poignantly for you and why ... OR, what fell flat (or worse) for you and why?

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~ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS~

1. The American Obsession with Happiness

- Key Points: Brooks highlights how American culture is focused on the pursuit of happiness, contrasting it with older values centered on service to others.
- Question: Do you think society's focus on personal happiness has affected how people prioritize their lives? How has this influenced your own priorities over time?

2. The Neuroscience of Emotion and Happiness

- Key Points: Brooks explains that happiness can't be a constant state because the brain's natural emotional processes include negative emotions.
- Question: How do you personally manage feelings of negativity or stress in your life? What practices have helped you find balance, whether through faith or other methods?

3. Happiness as Enjoyment, Satisfaction, and Meaning

- Key Points: Happiness is described as a mix of enjoyment, satisfaction, and meaning. Brooks stresses that it's not about fleeting pleasure but deeper, long-lasting fulfillment.
- Question: Which element—enjoyment, satisfaction, or meaning—feels most important to you in your pursuit of happiness? How do you prioritize these in your daily life?

4. Pleasure vs. Enjoyment

- Key Points: Brooks draws a distinction between short-term pleasure and deeper enjoyment, which often involves meaningful connection and shared experiences.
- Question: Have you had an experience where long-term enjoyment, rather than short-term pleasure, brought you more fulfillment? Can you describe that moment?

5. The Decline of Faith, Family, Friends, and Work

- Key Points: Brooks argues that societal shifts have reduced the emphasis on faith, family, friendships, and meaningful work, affecting people's overall happiness.
- Question: Do you agree that family, friendships, and meaningful work are on the decline today? How have these aspects played a role in your own happiness or fulfillment?

6. Loneliness and the Solution of Service

- Key Points: Service to others is framed as a remedy for loneliness and path to fulfillment.
- Question: Have you ever found that volunteering or serving others has helped you feel more connected or fulfilled? How did that experience impact your sense of well-being?

7. Generosity and Happiness

- Key Points: Studies show that acts of generosity can boost happiness, especially when those acts are shared with or witnessed by others.
- Question: How do you think generosity influences happiness? Do you feel that being generous has impacted your own sense of fulfillment?