

Growing up, I felt I had a very comfortable childhood. There wasn't any immense struggle that my family and I had to go through, like divorces or family members passing away unexpectedly. There wasn't ever much change in lifestyle. Looking back, it was as if I had grown up in this small town that never changed. It didn't have to, because it was always full of things to do to make me happy. I could go to the park, drive to the beach, bike ride to the market, or just visit friends and neighbors. There was always something to keep my interests, as a child. There was never any reason to be displeased or demand for a change of setting.

Another reason why I had such a comfortable life was because I was very close with my family. I wasn't smothered or spoiled by them; I found it fun just to be all together. My parents were always there to care for me, and would generously, and happily spend their extra time being a whole family. If a free weekend was coming up, or I was stuck at home with nothing to do, we would take a family outing, at home or out on the town. My family was always there to keep me happy and comfortable.

The trips I took, and still do, with my family continued to direct me to take pleasure in peaceful and simple situations. We would travel to cool, little public places in whatever area we were in, to have fun, as oppose to going to theme parks or trips abroad. If we stopped into a town to spend the night, or as a pit stop to another town, we'd end up visiting, say, a botanical garden or the historic downtown district there. For example, when we visited Orlando, only a mere three hours from my home, instead of going to Disney World, we decided to ride down to visit the local shops in nearby Winter Park. The town was peaceful and bright, with stores of every sort cradled into the 18<sup>th</sup> century Spanish buildings, all around a small street more suitable for walking than driving, all under the Spanish moss. There was even a small park down the road, filled with dogs and their owners, while people picnicked in the park benches. This simple place, where everything appeared to be healthy and natural, along with the inhabitants who lived with it, was a beautiful sight to my eyes. There was no worry about how much one was spending or if there was time to see everything. It was nice to just walk around, look into the shops, and explore. I didn't even have to sacrifice anything to have fun, for the park and the tall trees of moss were as appealing as anything. We always went to the simplest places, and had the greatest fun. There were never any troubles.

More recently, I found that the times when I was happiest, most at peace with the world around me, was when I was just relaxing, in a calm atmosphere with no voices to disrupt it. Say, when I was up in my room, making a painting in my sketchbook, with the windows open and a record spinning on the turntable. I was so incredibly happy at times like these. I really enjoyed the simple moments then. I believe the fondness for peace carried out in everything I do, as I became more independent.

So, the calm, comfortable, humble values of life were ingrained within me from childhood to present day. It's what I love the most, and what makes me the happiest. They are the moments where everything disappears around me, and I'm left with my warmth and myself. The world becomes perfect in my eyes, and the feeling stays to carry my happiness through the day.

I treasure these moments the most because they give me happiness. If I become uncomfortable, irritated, or displeased, I think back to those moments. I believe that happiness is the ultimate goal in life that everyone strives for. Perhaps, even just for a taste of it. But I believe what makes it the ultimate goal, is that it trumps all the others. Being happy is the only thing that matters to humans, or to life, for that matter. It's what we aim towards; to be pleased with one's self and the environment around us. Once one holds this feeling, this great feeling, then there is nothing else to worry about. There's nothing else to suffer over. Nothing matters, as long as one is happy. That is all that matters.

How does one become happy though? How is it achieved, and kept? As I see it, there are two ways of obtaining happiness. When a person comes in contact with an obstacle, they may either ignore and move on from this potentially uncomfortable situation that could take away their happiness. Or they could take it head on, power through it, and earn a higher level of understanding and experience from it, thus regaining their happiness. However, one way is neither worth more or more important than the other. All that matters is that one accomplishes happiness in their choice. I wish to outline these two achievements of happiness, and how one is not better than the other, as long as one is happy.

Personally, I have enjoyed the quiet, peaceful, simple moments the most, where I zone out the obstacle. These moments gave me the most happiness, just lying down in the silence, admiring my surroundings. There, I would block all my troubles out, all my duties I had to do but didn't want to, everything that stressed me out, wiped out of my head. I just had to ignore those annoyances to be at peace. It truly resembled a Heaven on Earth, just lying there. There was never any struggle to achieve this happiness; I just relaxed. After, when I fell back out of these tranquil states, I'd look around at everyone else, all my friends and acquaintances, and find that they were experiencing many troubles, worry, and problems in their lives. There was so much drama between people; it was hard to imagine how they would fit anything else but problem into their day. I thought to myself, why must they go through these struggles when they could be happy, without worry! After this, I strived to be happy, whenever I could.

It struck me though; what if I took the struggle out all together? What if I was permanently happy? What if I walked aside from every challenge, every hardship that presented itself to me, and held on to my happiness? For example, I would never lose my joy to the process of going through the uncomfortable experience of trying something new.

I read the novel Brave New World by Aldous Huxley, a book that takes place in a futuristic utopian society where everyone lives in a perfect world where everyone is happy with the role in society they are placed for at birth, but only because of the genetic manipulation and extensive conditioning they go through during their younger years to like it. In the novel, the Director, the person who is in charge of overseeing this human manipulation, says, "This is the secret of happiness and virtue-liking, what you've got to do. All conditioning aims at that: making people like their inescapable social destiny." He means that people are literally made for the job they are assigned in this utopia, and have no free will to move among society. They are stuck in the place they were raised for, yet they all are so happy to be. No one wants to rebel or fight for another, more powerful place in society, because they are happy where they are, no matter how low it may be.

This is because no person has to struggle or push their way into what it is they believe they are meant to do in life. The whole process of going to schools and getting a good education, then deciding what one wants to do for the rest of their life, then going through multiple shitty jobs. This is all avoided in this utopian society, and happiness takes its place instead! Everyone lives with this uninterrupted happiness their whole lives, the kind one gets when everything always works out for them. This is the kind where the person never has to grow, never has to change, but can remain blissfully happy, absent of any trouble.

However, wouldn't this be a very bland, linear happiness? If I lived in that world, I wouldn't really ever have to experience a challenge. I would never be able to place myself into the unknown, to eventually overcome it and arise with a broader range of experience and realization. All my other emotions, such as sadness, nostalgia, and surprise, would fade away, replaced by pleasure and happiness. They would not be needed if I chose to disregard the obstacles that would yield them, and instead I would continue on a path where only happiness is sealed. I believe Heaven is a great metaphor for this life of perfect, absolute happiness, rid of struggle and challenge, because it is the land of eternal peace. The late 70's/ early 80's band Talking Heads illustrate Heaven as a bleak wonderland in their song "*Heaven*," as "A place where nothing; Nothing ever happens," as the song goes. What the lead singer and songwriter David Byrne means when he says "nothing ever happens" is that heaven is void of anything unpredictable. Heaven is known to promise eternal happiness, which means the absence of anything unpleasant. The only time someone experiences any unpleasant feeling is when he or she doesn't expect it. No one would purposefully throw himself or herself into a ruining situation for the pure discomfort. No one wants to go through a struggle for the struggle of it. They go through it for what they learn at the end of it all, the true gain of experience they can use to better themselves. However, pure, simple happiness restricts this. The challenge is ignored and the highs and lows, and the gains, are lost with it, to keep a sustained happiness.

Even excitement is a threat to the constant, predictable enjoyment that the Talking Heads sing about in "*Heaven*". In *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, he describes the people living in the presented perfect utopian world, a place where everyone is blissfully happy, as having "no trace of agitation or excitement-for to be excited is still to be unsatisfied." What Huxley means by this quote is that when I become excited, it means that I have not yet succeeded in actually obtaining what it is I'm excited about. If I am excited about something, I'm looking forward to experiencing it. In a way, I go through a struggle for excitement. I fall into the process of waiting for and wondering about whatever it is I'm excited for, leaving me unsatisfied until I actually have it. I would be constantly searching and looking out for it until I find it. While doing this, I then simply wait through all the experiences around me, unsatisfied by them because I would be anxious for only one thing. And once I receive the experience I was excited about, I would consume the satisfaction of finally having it, right then and there. In turn, I would only be satisfied for a few fleeting moments. Then, I would become excited about something else, and I would search for something else that may temporarily satisfy, and the cycle would repeat. I would never be fulfilled with a simple, constant happiness this way. If I became excited, it could ruin that feeling, much like a struggle would. So, the

bland solution would be no adventures, no experiences, nothing that might crack the fragile state of this delicate joy.

Now, what if I kept the struggle within my life? What if I chose to combat a multitude of obstacles? This, I believe, is another way to happiness, but requires the overcoming of these very uncertain obstacles. The goal of going through a struggle is to learn from it and apply its experience to one's self, in order to better them, and achieve happiness. To do this though, one must go through the dangers of the struggle. The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche communicates this need for danger when he says, "The greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment of existence is to live dangerously!" With this quote, Nietzsche is essentially supporting the claim to live with risk, to live with danger, and to go into the uncontrollable and unknown to gain the highest values of life! One may even know the dangers of an obstacle, but then would choose to face them because they know what they might gain when it is all over and conquered. One may even go through the struggle for the variety of human emotions that it could yield, and take pleasure through that process. The "greatest fruitfulness and... enjoyment" that Nietzsche speaks of, the highest value of life, as I see it, are the ones where a person takes happiness and joy from witnessing how they have grown and changed for the better from dealing with the struggle. If they do not like the change, that just becomes another stage, and the desired happiness will be reached once it is again conquered. Once a difficulty is defeated, that person bears the fruit of a bettering change, an advancement, and is rewarded with the "greatest enjoyment" of truly realizing who they themselves are, how they have grown, what they enjoy, how they can become better, and what makes them feel all the broad range of emotions of the human being.

Take the idea of love, for example. This beautiful, wonderful, happy, excited feeling, an emotion I believe all humans search for in themselves, cannot be achieved without the struggle of compromise and understanding. Being in love seems to mean that one must go through the hardships of a relationship to also have the immense happiness it will provide when two people, or things, stick together. Eventually, a person will see himself or herself grow and change for the other, and witness how they grow and compromise from experience of being with the other. They will rise to new heights of understanding and emotion, all in hopes of eating from the fruit known as love. A relationship then becomes the part that is "dangerous," for a person risks their unconditional attachment being soiled by their counterpart, and a depression after knowing that it may not be shared. However, once this fear, this risk, this danger, is pressed aside, and love is achieved, it will be held so tightly and proudly, for the true "fruitfulness and greatness" is won.

However, is this achieved happiness really worth the intense struggle? Is giving up my happiness temporarily for suffering, stress, or pain a good exchange? Now, with each new struggle, comes new lows. Every obstacle yields greater levels of hardship and difficulty, and they can steal someone's happiness for an unpredictable amount of time. Gaining happiness by this way means that a person will have to deal with the miserable struggle.

In another chapter of Brave New World, the main character Lenina, is a girl raised in the perfectly happy, conditioned world of the utopian society, where struggle doesn't exist for her and everyone is perfectly happy doing what they are manipulated and raised to do in the social body. However, she is brought out of her comfort zone. This happens

to her when the other main character, Bernard, a boy who expresses an odd amount of individuality and inner-turmoil within the utopian society, brings her up in a helicopter over the roaring ocean during a storm. This scene scars Lenina, and she is forced to watch it as Bernard tells her of how he wants to know “what would it be like if I(he) could, if I(he) were free-not enslaved by my(his) conditioning.” She knows of the struggle this kind of idea could bring for a person, and what unhappiness they would experience when they drive away from their conditioning, the very thing that makes her and everyone else in that world happy. Stunned, she shies away from what he is saying, and questions why he doesn’t forget “these dreadful ideas of yours (his). You’d (He’d) forget all about them. And instead of feeling miserable, you’d (he’d) be jolly. So jolly.” Basically, Lenina doesn’t understand Bernard’s radical ideas, and sees them as irrational because they bring unhappiness. She doesn’t see the sense in him being miserable all the time, when he could just be positively and simply happy. The process of running through a struggle of pain and hardship doesn’t seem worth it. Throwing away an individual’s call to being happy to go through countless stages of the unknown and turmoil is what a person would have to do eventually, at an unpredictable point, find it again, among the rubble of the struggle. For example, to Bernard, discovering who he is as an individual and breaking the restraints of his “conditioning” may be worth it. However, he must still deal with suffering if he wants to achieve happiness that way.

So the question rises: Is one form of happiness more valuable than the other? Is it worth more to sustain my happiness by avoiding a struggle, or to take the struggle head on and gain happiness from how the experience positively affects me? I believe neither is worth more than the other, as long I am happy in the end. It only matters if I’m happy! So however I may obtain happiness doesn’t really matter. It’s not the process that is important, but rather, the achievement. Or, happiness can be achieved through the process of finding it. A person can receive more joy by striving for a goal than actually finishing it. However, happiness is still won. Anyway it’s put, happiness is the ultimate goal! In Brave New World, when Bernard continues to talk to Lenina about “if I (he) were free-not enslaved by my(his) conditioning” he asks if she agrees with him about the idea of having free will, untainted by the manipulation at birth known as conditioning. He asks her, “Don’t you wish to be free Lenina?” She responds, “I don’t know what you mean. I am free. Free to have the most wonderful time.” In the context of the book, she obviously isn’t free, because she has been programmed from birth, as I have said, to enjoy the work she was designed for, as for everyone else in the utopian society( all except for Bernard, mysteriously.) I believe she disregards the fact that she doesn’t hold free will, because she is just as happy without it. If she is having “the most wonderful time” then what need is there to be concerned about anything else? In her world, she has everything she needs! Finding freedom from conditioning, that struggle that Bernard goes through to find his happiness, is good for him, because it makes him happy! And Lenina’s way of sticking to what she knows, which is her conditioning, is her happiness! Neither way of pursuing happiness is better or worth more than the other, since they both have the same output, which is being happy.

There are two sides in achieving happiness when I may come in contact with an obstacle, a potential struggle. I may choose not to risk my precious, simple, peaceful happiness that I hold, and decide to avoid a challenge, is to stay in my linear, unshaken peace. However, I may also choose to accept the struggle, and experience all of its

unpredictable trials in order to gain a broad understanding of the previously unfamiliar difficulty, as to better myself from what I learned from the challenge, to become happy. What I'm communicating by outlining and identifying these two processes and is that none is better than the other if I am happy in the end. How I became happy isn't a concern, if I have it in the end. Happiness is the ultimate goal. It is the driving force of every human, and every living thing. To succeed at being happy, is to succeed at life.