

Pursuit of happiness in "you learn by living"

[Experience](#), [Happiness](#)



The Pursuit of Happiness In the book, " You Learn by Living," Eleanor Roosevelt notes: " Happiness is not a goal; it is a by-product"(Roosevelt 95). When one's specific desire is fulfilled, feelings of happiness flourish. Therefore, happiness is the ultimate goal in life for many people in today's society because their life revolves around desire. That said, everyone's interpretation of happiness varies. Some may believe wealth and power will bring them happiness, while others might argue that beauty and popularity will keep them happy.

Whatever the recipe of happiness may be, the product is universal—they all generate feelings of pleasure and satisfaction. Temporary pleasure and satisfaction, that is. What if the word " eternal" was inserted into the definition of happiness to say that it was a state of eternal well-being and contentment? How would one sought to pursue this form of happiness? At the start of Book One of The Consolation of Philosophy, Anicius Boethius, a learned official of the Roman Empire who awaits execution for unjust accusations, desolately rests in his jail cell, writing poetry and contemplating on life with the Muses of Poetry.

He is soon interrupted by Philosophy, who appears to him in the form of a lovely woman that is " full of years, yet possesses a vivid color and undiminished vigor" (Boethius 2). As a physician treating a patient would, Lady Philosophy diagnoses Boethius with a serious illness, which she says she is here to cure, unlike the Muses she calls " hysterical sluts"(Boethius 2) who is only here to take Reason away from him. When asked to " discover

his wounds", Boethius begins to moan about the loss of good fortune: his wealth, his power, his friends, and even contact with his family.

He goes on to complain that he is suffering unjustly in a state of complete innocence, blaming Fortune for taking away these goods. As for Lady Philosophy, whether or not Boethius is a "victim of Fortune" (Boethius 4), as he calls himself, is simply not important. The fact that Boethius has fallen under Fortune's spell, and forgotten three important things: his true nature, the end and purpose of things, and the means by which the world is governed (Boethius, 10), seem to be the bigger issue since they are the main causes of his illness.

Throughout all five books of *The Consolations of Philosophy*, in her intent to cure Boethius' disease, Lady Philosophy corrects Boethius of the errors that caused his illness--the main error being his misconception of how happiness can be achieved. When told of Boethius' sudden reversal of fortune, rather than feeling pity and empathy, Lady Philosophy scolds Boethius for mourning over tangible and earthly things like fame, wealth, and power. These "goods", or rather "false goods" can deceive to bring happiness, but it fails to satisfy the true, eternal soul.

Wealth and power were merely gifts from Fortune that temporarily visited him by the wheel of Fortune. Moreover, Lady Philosophy is able to prove that they are in fact false goods because they were taken away from Boethius; they did not belong to Boethius. Lady Philosophy tells Boethius, "Be not overcome by your misfortunes, for the gifts of fortune are fleeting and happiness is not to be found in temporal goods"(Boethius 21). The things

that are thought to make us happy, wealth, honor, and power, have no actual value or power and therefore cannot truly make someone a happy person.

Lady Philosophy further explains how these false goods only evoke feelings of negativity. Wealth only leads oneself to greed and further protection of himself, honor creates jealousy, and power is meaningless because it does not last. Lady Philosophy explains: " Why, the prefecture, which was once a great power, is now but an empty name"(Boethius 23). These lesser goods, which hold less power than mankind, cannot drive one to live a happy life; only a greater good that is more powerful than man possesses that power. This leads to the next question: How is true happiness achieved?

In Book Two of The Consolation of Philosophy, Lady Philosophy thoroughly explains true happiness: " If I ask you whether there is anything more precious to you than your own self, you will say no. So if you are in possession of yourself you will possess something you would never wish to lose and something Fortune could never take away"(Boethius 23). She says that happiness can't consist in things governed by chance because true happiness cannot be taken away. She goes on to explain that nothing on earth can bring true happiness—not one that is eternal.

The common belief of all mankind agrees that God, the supreme of the Heavens and the Earth is the highest good. True happiness comes from the desire for the perfect itself and the perfect Good—God. Therefore, one can only attain true happiness through the pursuit of God through intellectual and spiritual means. On page 23 of Book Three, Lady Philosophy says: " Only

by being like God, who is the highest good, can lasting happiness come to man. " Everyone desires happiness, and happiness is identical with the good, therefore God and true happiness is of necessity. She also says that the good gain their reward automatically, since by being good, they attain the good, which is happiness. Furthermore, only our spirit and intellect can lead us to the true good—the true happiness of the soul, God. As a strong believer, and child of God, it is only sensible that I agree with Lady Philosophy on her reasoning that only one higher power offers true happiness. The all-powerful Creator of humankind motivates man to live a good, virtuous life under Him, which, according to Lady Philosophy defines true happiness.

Seeking God, in many ways, is parallel to seeking true happiness. The bible, which quotes the words of God, in many cases, teaches the man in God to strive for the higher goods that make up true happiness and, to keep away from what are the evils of false happiness in not only religious terms, but also philosophical terms. In Psalms 37: 4 of the New International Bible, it says " Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. " The desires that the bible verse refers to are not casual wants that nature longs for, but innermost desires that satisfy the inner soul—the true goods.

The bible disfavors certain desires, in which Lady Philosophy would consider " false goods" and the Bible refers to " lusts. " These desires are often described as cravings that long to satisfy physical appetite, like food, alcohol, sex, money, and pleasure. Once man rids himself of desire, he begins to be carefree, letting the mind be emotionally free, free of worry, confident, and

at inner peace, reaching a state of happiness under God. Lastly, God rules the universe for the highest good, so man works to move toward that good according to their own will to be obedient towards the highest good, God.

As I have begun to discuss above, I strongly believe that living a life for a higher power, rather than oneself, creates an optimistic state of mind, resulting in a more satisfied, happier person. Research shows that that religious people are happier and less stressed. Once one understands that the world is not governed by Fortune, but by a reasonable Creator, unhappiness becomes absent because he is agreeing to Divine Providence. Giving reason to everything that happens makes life less distressful.

Rather than staying in a state of despair, only a person in God understands that suffering leads to the sanity of reason and therefore, with suffering, happiness will be awarded at the end. It can also be said that the person in God is not only happy, but also virtuous because being "good" consists of being virtuous. In relation to what Lady Philosophy defines as false happiness in *The Consolation of Philosophy*, someone who seems to have everything that most people desire, often times, suffers from severe depression. Marilyn Monroe is a great example.

She had everything that many seem to think brings happiness—beauty, wealth, fame, sex appeal, and popularity—but she ended her life in suicide. It can be further argued that happiness consisting of anything other than the one God, cannot be everlasting. While these so-called "false goods" temporarily satisfy one's self, the one real true good, the Creator, provides consolation that is eternal. In comparison to lesser goods, faith is a

consistent element of happiness and good health. In explaining happiness to Boethius, Lady Philosophy says, " Why, then, O mortal men, do you seek that happiness outside, which lies within yourselves? True happiness cannot be found through the senses. Happiness comes from within one's soul. It is not external. It is a by-product of an inner condition. It is not simply a temporary indulgence of pleasure. If one lives only for personal happiness, he will probably never find it. As American social writer and philosopher, Eric Hoffer said, " The search for happiness is one of the chief sources of unhappiness. " Getting rid of the longing for false goods, or evil desires, is the first step of achieving true happiness—one that will last forever!