

ARTICLE

Towards happiness: Ancient Greek values in the age of computational intelligence supporting happiness—selected issues

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Abstract

This article offers a selective, concise comparison of the ancient Greeks' ideas about happiness with contemporary metrics and AI-mediated wellbeing apps. It argues that these schools' views of happiness provide criteria for assessing the trajectory of today's approaches of development to the subject of happiness. Using a critical-analytical approach, it presents and compares those schools with major happiness metrics (e.g., World Happiness Report, Better Life Index, Happy Planet Index, Gallup Global Emotions) and popular wellbeing applications (Headspace, Calm, Insight Timer, Happify). The findings clarify where ancient insights align or clash with current practices and offer implications for wellbeing technologies. The paper also evaluates whether AI can support eudaimonia without eroding autonomy or commodifying the inner life. The article raises awareness that we are entering a new phase of understanding happiness, in which technology influences our choices and becomes not only a tool, but also a co-creator of our everyday experiences.

Keywords: happiness, eudaimonia, hedonism, happiness metrics, wellbeing apps

Introduction

The search for happiness is one of the key themes of philosophical reflection, an enduring concern of everyday life. Although the philosophers of ancient Greece proposed elaborate and diverse visions of happiness, contemporary society aided by technology and artificial intelligence algorithms, is attempting to reinterpret for a new generation what happiness is and under what conditions it can be experienced.

In order to achieve these research objectives, several main areas have been identified. In the first part of the article, the researcher attempts to present the main schools of ancient philosophical thought on happiness. The author refers to representatives of hedonism, Aristotle's eudaimonia, and the Stoics, and analyzes their possible references in contemporary, popular applications and programs devoted to the subject of happiness. In the second part, an attempt is made to answer the following questions: Do contemporary reports and applications

devoted to happiness, made possible by artificial intelligence, combine the legacy of the ancient Greeks with data optimization? What does the currently proposed path to happiness look like, and what does the practice of caring for well-being and personal development look like according to popular tools of the digital age? The third section discusses selected reports and applications and evaluates their potential impact on human life.

This article is a contribution to further research; it does not claim to provide definitive conclusions but rather examines the transformation of the understanding of happiness in the context of artificial intelligence. Ancient models of happiness, which were embedded in a social structure that took into account some presumed objective good and assumed some natural ends of human life, have been transformed by the applied concept of happiness as well-being. Happiness is achieved by the optimization of highly individualized class of goods.

The legacy of antiquity also includes specific positions on the character of thought, such as wisdom, value, happiness, virtue, pleasure, and human nature. Each of these systems proposes a slightly different way of life, answering the question of the meaning and manner of living a good life (Haybron 2007; Swoboda 1997).

Four models of achieving happiness in ancient Greece will be demonstrated by presenting the search for answers to the question of what a good life is, as well as selected applications that have the broadest impact, offering support in achieving happiness and appearing as a proposal in response to a request for support in the search for happiness.

It is worth noting that the very concept of happiness has varied greatly over the centuries – the concept often covered radically different paths to a good life, combining both the desire for fulfillment and a sense of harmony with oneself. Happiness is also referred to as success, intense joy, the greatest amount of goods, and satisfaction with life (Tatarkiewicz 2005) but certain ambiguity almost always accompanies any attempt to describe term “happiness” (Mordarski 2023; White 2008; Karaś 2019; Krasucka 2014). The article concludes with a brief synthesis of findings.

The hedonism of Aristippus and Epicurus, eudaimonia, and stoicism

Ancient philosophy, from Aristippus of Cyrene, Aristotle, and Epicurus to the Stoics, developed various schools of thought on happiness. Among them, three currents of understanding happiness gained particular significance: hedonism shaped by Aristippus and Epicurus, eudaimonia, and stoicism, which was continued by Roman thinkers. The proposed assumptions remain an indispensable point of reference in analyzing the experience of happiness to this day.

The hedonistic school associated with Aristippus of Cyrene (c. 435–356 BC) understands happiness as the maximization of mainly physical pleasures and the avoidance of pain; unlike Epicureanism, the mere absence of pain is not considered a good in itself. The word “*hēdonē*” itself, Latin “*voluptas*”, means “delight”. The hedonistic approach has a tendency towards reductionism, perceiving man as part of the material world and not overly emphasizing the spiritual dimension that reaches beyond the perceptible, earthly horizon. Matter and temporality begin to determine the dimensions of happiness, and the senses are the path to its attainment. Pain and pleasure, effort and comfort stand in opposition and reveal the tension that accompanies humans in their pursuit of fulfillment. This necessary distinction refers to the contrast between good, understood as pleasure, and evil, understood as pain and

discomfort. Happiness as freedom from unpleasant experiences becomes the goal of existence. In the face of the transience and fleetingness of life, hedonists directed their attention towards the present – they found the most important meaning in the “here and now” as the only certain circumstance and available source of happiness.

According to the Cyrenaics, because life is full of unknowns and uncertainties, happiness should not be tied to the good of others or to the success of social causes (Tatarkiewicz 2005). On the other hand, cultivating virtues is justified insofar and only insofar as they can help in achieving pleasure. Nevertheless, it would also be wrong to accuse the Cyrenaics of completely losing themselves in pleasure. Based on preserved accounts, it can be assumed that they preached the maxim of Epictetus: “It is the nature of the wise to resist pleasures, but the foolish to be a slave to them”.

Hedonism is a type of philosophical position that gained many adherents.¹ Among them was Epicurus (341–270 BC), who proposed a new, more moderate version of this idea. Like his predecessors, he referred to the concept of happiness as the absence of suffering, but his vision was far removed from sensual ecstasy and was not extreme in nature. In his account of happiness, he emphasized *aponia* and *ataraxia*, appreciating the profound value of interpersonal relationships, reflection, and peace. He can be credited with refining or even “civilizing” hedonism, elevating it from the level of sensual gratification and transforming it into a reflective system. It was no longer just the immediate pleasure associated with the present that gained significance, but also its mental or “spiritual” dimension. On this view it is possible to both refer to the past and look to the future. The means leading to a happy life rely not only on virtue, but also on the way we practice virtues in the polis, building a community.

A prudent approach to sensuality directs a person towards inner riches: “If you live according to your nature, you will never be poor; if you live according to human opinions, you will never be rich” (Seneca 1917).² In summary, Epicurus’ proposal is freedom from the world’s preoccupations, peace achieved through a moderate life in which happiness is manifested as freedom from suffering.

This type of reflection has found some place in psychology, and it can be said that, as it clearly favors pleasant mental states, it has shaped contemporary thinking about human well-being. Pleasant sensations and positive emotions have been recognized as conducive to mental health (Fredrickson 2002).

Another important philosophical concept concerning happiness is *eudaimonia*. According to Aristotle (384–322 BC), every action aims at some good; the highest human good is *eudaimonia*, often described as self-sufficient (*autarkeia*) (Arystoteles 1996). The relationship between the questions ‘What is *eudaimonia*?’ and ‘What is the good for human beings?’ frames more detailed inquiry.³

1. The legacy of hedonism found its place in Jeremy Bentham’s work on utilitarianism as teaching the greatest pleasure for the greatest number of people and was also included in the philosophy of John Stuart Mill, who distinguished between higher and lower values – he classified intellectual and spiritual values as higher, and sensual values as lower.

2. Seneca clearly states that this is “a saying of Epicurus.”

3. When referring to Aristotle’s views, it should be remembered that *eudaimonia* is based on a modified version of Plato’s ideas, with which it is in some dialogue (it also serves as a counterpoint to many later observations and concepts of happiness). Plato’s thought forms the axiological foundation through its understanding of good as an

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle presents human action as a sequence of aspirations, each aiming at a particular end: “All actions and choices seem to be directed toward some good—and that is why it is rightly called good, that toward which everything is directed” (Arystoteles 1996, EN I.1, 1094a1–3).

The intermediate good that has already been achieved leads to the next good, and at the end of this chain of goals and goods is the highest good. The actions taken and the path traveled therefore have their ultimate goal, which is happiness: “Happiness turns out to be something perfect and self-sufficient, being the goal towards which everything else tends” (Arystoteles 1996, EN I.7, 1097b20–22). In this way, Aristotle rejects the idea of endless pursuit; human life has an internal direction, and happiness can be achieved through the perfection of virtues and rational action.

The Stagirite does not ground his guidelines for achieving happiness on actions based on pleasure and sensual enjoyment, because these actions could be attributed to animals, and humans, as rational beings, are obliged to use this unique characteristic. The acquisition of wealth cannot be considered as the goal of human activity either, since it serves only as a means and therefore has no ultimate value. The pursuit of honors is merely a confirmation by others of what one has already recognized as an achievement and is also rejected by Aristotle. What, then, is worth striving for? Aristotle identifies an activity distinctive of human beings – namely, rational activity in accordance with virtue.

According to the philosopher, a person who lives happily strives to develop and use his or her mental and moral potential for these are spiritual goods, the most highly valued ones. The development of a stable disposition to act in accordance with reason is a virtue and is understood as a kind of good. People are not born with these virtues; they become virtuous because they work on their inner resources and must constantly be vigilant so that some of them are not lost. According to Aristotle, virtues can be divided into two kinds: intellectual and ethical. The former, once acquired, remain with a person permanently, while the latter—e.g., justice, courage, generosity—require not only work to develop them, but also effort and care to maintain them in a permanent state. To summarize Aristotle’s path to happiness, it is self-knowledge and self-improvement, coming to terms with one’s weaknesses, recognizing and developing one’s strengths, and following the path of the “golden mean”, which functions as a measure for ethical virtues and a guide to their development.

The importance of *eudaimonia* has remained significant for subsequent generations, because it concerns not only the fleeting aspects of happiness but also the long-term cultivation of character and the discovery of one’s potential. The Stoics offered a different way of thinking about happiness. The philosophical movement initiated by Zeno of Citium (c. 335–263 BC) was derived from many earlier schools. It drew on the materialistic understanding of reality (materialistic monism) and critically interacted with rival views. The Stoics considered rational beings to be the most perfect of all possible beings – and uniquely capable of moral development. This perfection is most fully expressed in the ability to distinguish between what is instinctive and animalistic and what is unique to man. Happiness, therefore, is not something that an animal can achieve, but something specifically human.

Although many actions are morally neutral (*adiaphora*), the path to happiness leads through the rational cultivation of virtue. Particularly valued were practical wisdom, moderation,

objective value, the positing of reason as the central authority in the structure of the soul, and the purposefulness of existence.

justice, and courage – which also play an important place in Plato’s work. They proposed understanding nature as a rational ordered cosmos (*logos*).

Emotions were also considered natural, but capable of disrupting rational behavior and resulting in dependence on external circumstances. In response to this risk, the Stoics proposed concept of *apatheia* – independence from destructive passions. Everything that is not related to the pursuit of virtue, which is an end in itself and whose practice leads to the attainment of good and happiness, should be indifferent.

To summarize this part of the study, the views can be presented in a synthetic formula.

Table 1. Values leading to happiness according to selected ancient philosophers

Philosopher	Definition of happiness	Core values	Purpose of life
Aristippus	Pleasure as the highest good; sensual experience in the present moment	Intensity of experience, freedom, control over pleasures	Maximizing pleasure and avoiding pain
Aristotle	Fulfillment through moral and intellectual virtues	Reasonableness, moderation, justice, friendship	Full development of human potential
Epicurus	Pleasure understood as the absence of suffering (<i>ataraxia</i>) and peace of mind	Moderation, friendship, simplicity of life	Lasting peace and freedom from suffering
Zeno of Citium	Living in harmony with nature and reason; acceptance of fate	Virtue, discipline, resistance to emotions, acceptance of fate	Peace of mind and inner freedom

1. Happiness as a measurable phenomenon in the private and social spheres

Ideas from classical philosophy were partly taken up by psychology with the rise of the humanistic movement in the twentieth century. Psychology, which has developed as an empirical science and addressed topics such as cognitive processes, emotions, and sources of motivation. There was also an interest in happiness understood as an element of full human development.

One of the first concepts in this area was proposed by Abraham Maslow (1954), who formulated the hierarchy of needs and emphasized the importance of self-actualization. Work on measuring happiness continued throughout the twentieth century (Angner 2011), gathering momentum in the 1970s and accelerating further in the 1980s. During that period, the possibility and need to measure happiness arose, leading to classify individuals, groups, and ultimately societies as more or less happy. As a result, the already extensive research areas of this concept gained new content and dependencies between new topics appeared (Mitchell et al. 2013).

Initially, measurements were based mainly on questionnaires and interviews, but over time, neurobiological methods were also used to study happiness at the level of neuroactivity (Richter et al. 2024). The inclusion of computational methods made it possible to create statistical models and map relationships, extracting patterns of satisfaction from the private sphere, which soon became a helpful market tool. These approaches were quickly taken up across commercial domains, especially marketing and management.

In this way, happiness—more clearly than in past eras—ceased to be solely a matter of individual choice and became a domain subject to strong social influence. It became a subject

of media discourse and a component of market strategy or even manipulation. Researchers often use the term “subjective well-being”. The term “well-being” appeared in the definition of health proposed by the WHO in 1948 as “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (*Constitution of the World Health Organization* 2025).

As early as 1890, William James, in his classic work *The Principles of Psychology* (James 1890), wrote about the “stream of consciousness” and the spiritual sources of well-being – these are some of the first psychological approaches to the subject of happiness. However, in the 1990s, Martin Seligman (2011) proposed a new direction of research focused on mental well-being, which is considered to be the true beginning of positive psychology. The first theoretical models describing the structure of happiness were developed at that time. The first of these is the PERMA model (Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment), which identifies five key pillars of well-being. Another theory is Mihály Csíkszentmihályi’s flow theory (Csíkszentmihályi 1990), which characterizes happiness as a state of complete engagement and absorption in a given activity. It also gained popularity in the 1990s but had been developed since the 1970s.

Along with the development of positive psychology, empirical research on happiness, life satisfaction, and well-being has also progressed (Czapiński 1994). More and more factors that influence well-being, both individual and social, have begun to be taken into account. This issue has increasingly attracted interdisciplinary attention and “become a significant topic for empirical studies” (Hallberg and Kullenberg 2019, p.42) situating questions of personal destiny and worldview within a global framework.

Since 2012, the annual World Happiness Report (World Happiness Report, n.d.), Gallup (2024), the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, and an independent editorial team have been involved in the creation of the reports.

The second most important report is the Better Life Index, developed by the OECD in 2011 (*OECD Better Life Index*, n.d.). It focuses on four key areas: environmental sustainability, improving well-being, reducing inequality, and system resilience. The OECD initiative takes the form of an interactive portal where users can assign weights to individual categories themselves to see which country best meets their expectations. What can we learn from the report? First of all, that the study covers areas of socio-economic progress (follow in OECD): “1. Housing: housing conditions and costs (e.g. real estate pricing). 2. Income: household income (after taxes and transfers) and net financial wealth. 3. Jobs: earnings, job security and unemployment. 4. Community: quality of social support network. 5. Education: education and what one gets out of it. 6. Environment: quality of environment (e.g. environmental health). 7. Governance: involvement in democracy. 8. Health. 9. Life Satisfaction: level of happiness. 10. Safety: murder and assault rates. 11. Work–life balance” (*OECD Better Life Index*, n.d.).

The input data are translated into approximately 80 indicators of high socio-economic utility, useful in management as well as in the creation and modeling of political activities. After reviewing the above thematic areas, it can be concluded that happiness only concerns the ninth item. What constitutes the overall picture of the study is better described as satisfaction. It is difficult to find direct references to ancient concepts of happiness in the proposed areas. The hedonistic perspective seems to be the closest, while the Aristotelian concept of eudaimonia seems to be the most distant. The indicators focus on quick responses,

measurable states, and satisfaction, which makes it difficult to appreciate long-term character formation, where progress can be difficult to describe.

The third example is the Happy Planet Index (*Happy Planet Index*, n.d.), an indicator developed by the British think tank New Economics Foundation, which has been measuring well-being in individual countries since 2006, paying particular attention to environmental protection and the fact that the goal of economic development should be to ensure people's health and happiness. The HPI calculations focus on factors such as ecological footprint and sustainable development. The index is one of the most compelling calculations supporting the foundation's goals, which can be summarized as follows: "1. A Fast and Fair Transition. Build a fast and fair transition to a green economy through a deep and equitable transformation to address the climate crisis. 2. Guarantee Economic Security for all. Guarantee economic security for all by rebuilding effective and sustainable public services to give everyone access to life's essentials. 3. Shift Power to People and Communities. Shift power to people and communities through democratic ownership of the economy and devolving political power" (*Happy Planet Index*, n.d.).

The last of the selected examples is Gallup Global Emotions – an annual report prepared by an American international analytical and consulting company (*Gallup Global Emotions Report* 2024). It serves as a measure of emotions, providing information on the state of happiness understood as the sum of positive emotions minus the sum of negative emotions, examining them through surveys conducted worldwide in 100 countries.

Below is a table listing the most popular reports on the subject of happiness.

Table 2. Selected happiness and well-being indices

Name	Organization	Description
World Happiness Report	UN	The most important ranking based on subjective well-being
Better Life Index	OECD	Interactive, multiple dimensions of quality of life
Happy Planet Index	NEF (UK)	A combination of happiness and ecology
Gallup Global Emotions	Gallup, Inc.	Everyday emotions — happiness “here and now”

In this way, we are embarking on a new path to happiness on a global scale. To summarize the types of indicators, they can be compared with the ideas of ancient concepts of happiness.

The WHR and Better Life Index present happiness as living in decent conditions, freedom from fear, and a sense of security, attempting to describe a number of external components of happiness in line with the visions of Aristotle and Epicurus. The HPI, which values harmony, especially living in harmony with the environment, refers to the philosophies of the Stoics and Epicureans. GGE, on the other hand, corresponds most closely to the philosophy of the Cyrenaics, leaning towards the emotional “here and now”.

It is also worth mentioning how apps dedicated to happiness or well-being work.

One of the most popular apps related to happiness and well-being is Headspace⁴, which has over 70 million downloads and reaches over 100 million users worldwide. One of its founders is a former Buddhist monk who wanted to popularize the practice of meditation. The company is currently valued at approximately \$3 billion, with revenues of \$348.4 million in 2024 (Latka 2024). The app supports meditation and mindfulness practices rooted in

4. [headspace.com](https://www.headspace.com)

Eastern philosophies, but it also contains elements close to Stoicism – especially distancing oneself from emotions, accepting fate and things over which we have no control. There are no direct references to ancient philosophy in it. It is focused on personalization and analysis of individual predispositions (frequency of use, specific time, matching breathing exercises to biometric results).

Another app is Calm⁵, which had approximately 4.5 million paying subscribers in 2023 and an estimated 180 million downloads (Curry 2025). It is one of the longest-running apps in the category and offers meditation practices as well as tools for relaxation, visualization, creativity, and concentration. The app can be personalized to user preferences, adapts content to a user's current emotional state, and can even flag a potential risk of depression.

These two apps reportedly account for about 90% of the meditation-app market and are among the most popular results for apps associated with the keyword “happiness”. Due to the significant difference in popularity and reach of the apps, it can be assumed that the next ones will be sufficiently popular to be selected among those that occupy a smaller share of the app market.

The third app is Insight Timer⁶, also dedicated to free meditation. It gives you access to thousands of free guided meditations. It offers resources for stress reduction and develops mindfulness, support for sleep problems, and a wide selection of meditation music. The app encourages regular practice, allows us to participate in live classes, and emphasizes community building. It has an extensive content database, the selection of which is supported by algorithms. Work is also underway on solutions in which a “virtual mentor” guides users through the practice.

The fourth app discussed is Happify⁷. It offers a set of exercises and games aimed at strengthening mental health and improving well-being. It draws most heavily on the principles of positive psychology but also refers to behavioral research and mindfulness practices. This approach can be seen as an attempt to follow the philosophy of Aristippus of Cyrene, which emphasizes the role of pleasure and mood improvement as a path to a happy life. The app also uses artificial intelligence for clinical analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of the proposed therapeutic paths.

This concise overview of the analyzed applications shows that we are dealing with behaviors preferred by customers. The focus on quick results does not always encourage actions with delayed gratification, and happiness as the result of a long-term process is a less attractive proposition and a “commodity” that is more difficult to sell.

At different stages of life, people subordinate themselves to the pursuit of goals, believing that the achievement of them will give them a better state than the one they are currently in (Uribe et al. 2023). They do this because of their accepted vision of their lives. This does not always mean full compliance with the imagined vision of happiness but usually reflects a certain stage or state that provides the circumstances for achieving a state of greater happiness.

It can be noted that it is extremely difficult to define a set of actions that ensure happiness. There is confusion regarding minor intermediate goals and interpersonal obligations, an imbalance between the realization of one's own goals and the fulfillment of expectations

5. calm.com

6. insighttimer.com

7. happify.com

resulting from the socio-cultural model in which we function. Achieving happiness is therefore the result of many factors, and the search of individuals for a properly formulated concept of happiness is nothing more than their waiting for instructions and a kind of recipe. Technological progress brings opportunities and threats, including formulas for happiness that are directed at the individual client and, the adaptation of mental health support (Linardon et al. 2024; Uribe et al. 2023). With only a rare need to visit a specialist, the expansion of offers with new content, health monitoring, and the possibility of saving costs seems inviting.

Not only do we believe in new technological achievements, but we are beginning to perceive artificial intelligence as a kind of authority (Hauswald 2025), highly valuing the ability to describe reality mathematically, sometimes without reference to the depth of human experience and unique individuality.

Summary

The 21st century has seen an intensification of research into happiness, particularly its quantitative measurement. On the modern path to happiness, people may encounter linguistic transformations created by AI operating on a processed description of reality. Ancient concepts remain an inspiration, but under the influence of modern tools, they become simplified and optimized. In the proposed applications, we focus on avoiding undesirable experiences and maximizing short-term sensations – because they determine whether we will return to the application. Happiness is reduced to measurable, mathematical aspects of the phenomenon. The depth of human experience, the mystery of existence and individuality, which is impossible to present in applications, seems sometimes even more inaccessible. On the other hand, it should be noted that these applications enable a wide audience to work on them and perhaps contribute their development, for they are accessible to many people anywhere and anytime, sometimes enabling persons to take first step towards improving their well-being and supporting therapeutic activities.

The temporal dimension also remains an important theme – contemporary approaches balance between quick results and the long-term process of striving for happiness. It is to be hoped that the measurements will contribute to finding a balance between the hedonistic approach and eudaimonia (Schmitz, Burk, and Wiese 2025).

Questions arise about the role of technological advances and about the growing perception of AI as a primary source of knowledge, even including knowledge about one's own happiness – as well as about the risks of technological dependence and the problem of shared responsibility for actions taken under its influence.

The article raises many issues that require broader, more in-depth study, appropriate to the scope and importance of the content addressed.

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