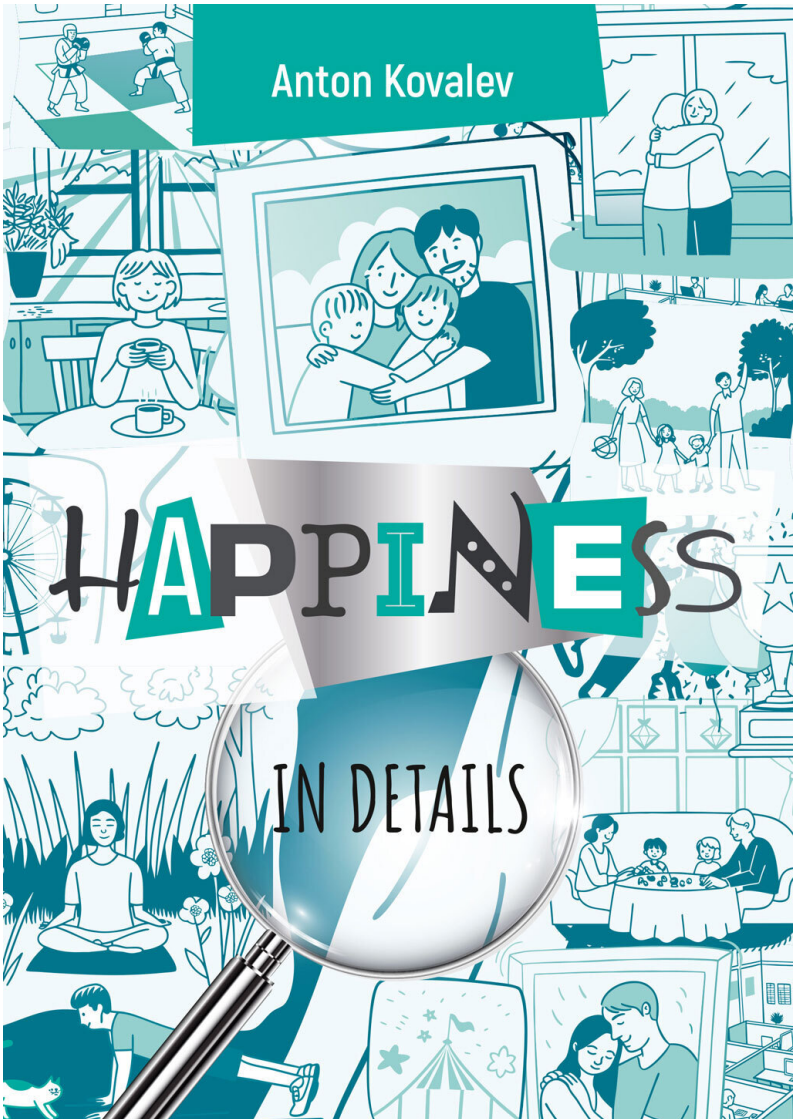
Anton Kovalev



HAPPINESS

IN DETAILS

Anton Sergeevich Kovalev
Happiness in Details

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Аннотация

The question “What is happiness?” accompanies us throughout our entire conscious life. No matter how many answers humanity has received over centuries and millennia, this question arises each time with renewed intensity. Happiness is a collective concept formed through the experience of many people. Its spectrum of shades is as diverse as life itself. In the book “Happiness in Details”, the author considers happiness not as an abstraction, but as very concrete things, actions, and deeds. Happiness can be managed – consciously, creatively, physiologically, and with God’s help. Happiness is not always an easy path, but it is a path rather than waiting. This book is the author’s attempt to share his own experience of achieving happiness, which may help the reader build their own happiness.

Anton Kovalev is a business trainer and mentor who has progressed from a bank manager to the Director General of a major Russian group of companies. He commissioned a number of entertainment industry facilities in Belgorod. He holds a PhD in Economics and is the developer of own training programmes in the fields of effective management and lean manufacturing. He is the author of the books

“From a Dream to a Happy Customer” and “The Power of System. How to Build a Lean Business.”

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Happiness in Details

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ANTON KOVALEV

HAPPINESS IN DETAILS

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At the presentation of my first book, "From a Dream to a Happy Customer", the principal of the lyceum where I once studied gave me a brochure with a dedicatory inscription. At the time, I did not attach much importance to those words. When I was already submitting the book "Happiness in Details" for printing, I came across this brochure again and realised the full symbolism of the moment. It read: "Happiness comes to those who work hard!" At that moment, I had no thoughts about the theme of my next book. And now it is ready, and once again I am convinced that nothing is accidental, and everything I write about is true. I dedicate this book to my teachers.



AUTHOR'S NOTE

The question "What is happiness?" concerns everyone throughout their conscious life. No matter how many answers humanity has received over centuries and millennia, its meaning arises each time with renewed intensity. Each new generation discovers happiness anew and, having gained experience and compared it with previous generations, comes to understand that happiness is something concrete and definite. To see this and truly comprehend it, some people need an entire lifetime, while those whom circumstances lead to this question at a young age come to understanding sooner and define for themselves the categories of happiness, which allows them to live their lives more harmoniously and to fill them with meaningful purpose, vivid events, and deep sensations.

I did not choose the title "Happiness in Details" by accident. I understand that happiness is not an abstraction, but rather entirely concrete things, actions, and deeds that together create the very feeling of euphoria (whether quiet or unrestrained) that we call happiness.

This understanding came with experience, and reflecting on my childhood, I realized that the seeds of happiness were sown in me by my parents, grandparents, caregivers, teachers and coaches, friends and colleagues, and, of course, by myself.

In the book, I devote separate attention to each component of

happiness. These are my personal building blocks of this state, but I am confident that they can help each reader construct their own happiness. To look around, recognize the sources of your joy, and assemble a whole life from them, the one that flows with vibrant streams of activity or the one that passes steadily from day to day. Each of us has our own pace and rhythm. Step by step, we create and refine ourselves, according to our temperament or psychological type. The most important element in this process is activity, activity for the benefit of society, the country, people, family, and oneself.

Happiness is perceived differently by each of us. It can seem both near and far. When people wish us happiness, we often think of it as something currently unattainable, something to be pursued along a long, anxiety-filled, and error-prone path. And sometimes that is true. It depends on the scale of the dream we have defined for ourselves. It depends on the goals we set to be happy. The long journey should not frighten us, as it is full of sudden insights, discoveries, and small milestones of happiness, from which we derive pleasure and which move us toward the ultimate goal. The journey itself is happiness, as Confucius said. Mistakes should not scare us either. They are given to us for experience and understanding of life, for exploring our essence, for developing our strength, realizing how we can overcome difficulties, solve problems, and grow beyond ourselves.

Immediate happiness is very close; it is within us, with us, in everyday details, brief encounters, contemplation, activities,

and hobbies. Happiness does not always arise from pleasure; sometimes it is just a fleeting feeling. Usually, we do not even recognize such moments as happiness as they are ordinary. But what is wrong with ordinary? If it is meaningful – if we understand what we are doing and for whom – then it is not routine, habitual, boring, or unnoticed, as we are accustomed to perceiving the ordinary. It especially ceases to be ordinary when it is taken away from us. Only then does it become evident happiness.

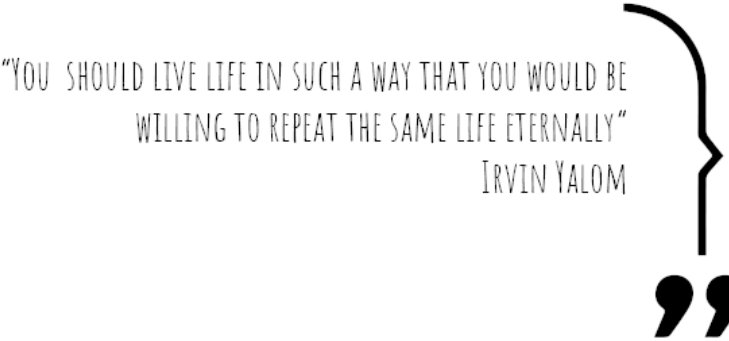
"I have heard it said, 'Happiness is the absence of unhappiness'." That is indeed a strong and reassuring criterion. Yet why wait for harsh lessons – the ones we truly have the power to avoid? It is better to recognize everything from the start, embrace your everyday happiness, the possibility of change, and live a happy life. One that, yes, does not exclude difficulties and challenges. Great happiness comes as a result of victory, solving a complex problem, or being freed from a burdensome obligation.

Happiness can be managed – consciously, creatively, physiologically, and with God's help. This book is my attempt to share my techniques for achieving happiness. It is like a recipe for a dish, which you can interpret according to your own taste, thus bringing a measure of creativity to the preparation and creating your own version of the dish. The same applies to happiness. There is a foundation, which is largely unchanging, and there are details – substitutable, which do not affect the core. My recipes may inspire some readers to embark on their own paths

to happiness. I am confident you will succeed.

A few words on how to use this book. It is divided into four thematic parts, each ending with a selection of quotes on the topic and a space for notes to record your own thoughts. Be sure to make use of this. Each part also contains thematic sections that are interconnected yet can be read independently of the main text if a particular topic interests you more or is especially relevant at the moment. Each section concludes with a summary of the topic, which can serve as a guide through the book or as a prompt for your own reflections. Enjoy your reading!

IN GENERAL ABOUT HAPPINESS



WHAT PHILOSOPHERS SAY

There are several things that give us grounds to say that we are happy. This happens when what we consider most important for ourselves takes place in our lives. The desires of many people on this matter largely coincide, differing only in some nuances. Thus, each of us develops our own set of significant values that we are not ready to give up under any circumstances. Among them, one can highlight the following priorities: to love and be loved, to have a family and children, to have interesting work, to possess a certain degree of freedom, to continue developing, to have the opportunity to devote time to favorite activities, to have

good friends, to adhere to order and discipline, to treat elders with respect, and the like. If these things are present in our lives, the joy of being almost never leaves us.

It turns out that the feeling of happiness does not depend at all on such attributes of modern life as status, financial opportunities, social environment, and so on. We are often surprised that people with a high level of material well-being, a large number of friends and connections, and what appears from the outside to be a strong family, feel completely unhappy. If you look more closely, the people around them are not friends at all, but merely an entourage, and within the family everyone is a stranger to one another, there is no mutual understanding or support, and relationships are built on commercial principles. And conversely, people who are not very wealthy, who experience great difficulties in life, are truly happy, and this is very noticeable about them. It is as if some special, kind warmth emanates from them. Where does this warmth come from, and what constitutes their true happiness?!

Almost every day we are faced with solving major and minor problems or tasks that life and we ourselves set before us. But that is precisely the point: our attitude toward happiness depends on how we perceive these daily challenges, how we resolve them, what they give us, and what kind of aftertaste we feel from them. What is happiness really like, what does it consist of, and what does it depend on?

It happens that a person experiences happiness when they

go through some kind of trial. Everything is over, everything is resolved, everything is behind, and one can finally breathe freely – this very moment is taken for happiness. It is not without reason that they say: happiness is when there is no misfortune. Indeed, when everyone is alive and healthy, when all necessities are available: food, clothing, friends and relatives, work – what more is needed? This is happiness. However, human nature is such that we are never fully satisfied with what we have. And so we invent plans, tasks, worries, personal growth, a change of activities, and the like. From this, we derive both happiness and unhappiness. It depends on how we perceive it and on the depth of the problems we encounter along our path. Yet some people perceive problems stoically, without asking the question, "Why is all this happening to me?" but rather asking, "What is all this for?"

When philosophizing about happiness, I most often recall childhood – a picture from that time that invariably brings a smile to my face.

I feel happy when there is order and cleanliness around me. I paid attention to such things even in childhood. In the courtyard of the block of flats where we lived at the time, it was always very clean. Not a single speck, blade of grass, or pebble: if they did not belong, they simply were not there. This was the norm. I was about seven years old then, and I wondered who created this order of things, who maintained it? I began asking the older people. It was the janitor, who else could it be! In appearance,

and later in conversation as well, he turned out to be the kindest of people; his eyes shone. Every word he spoke was filled with meaning, and most importantly, he took pleasure in what he was doing. At the time, I simply accepted this as a given and stored it away subconsciously, as all children do. But later I recalled it often. To this day, his smile still stands before my eyes, even though more than thirty years have passed. He was undoubtedly a happy person. Such people possess a special energy, you can see it, it is impossible not to notice. Once, my friends and I stopped by his place for a few minutes to return some videotapes. I was shocked, he lived very modestly, on the ground floor, and the entire area of the room was about twelve square meters; everything was there: the bed, the kitchen, and the toilet with a shower. Even then, I began to understand that happiness is a special spiritual–physical state that does not depend on the quantity of things or possessions.

Since the theoretical foundations of our existence are defined by philosophers, let us turn to their interpretations of happiness in different eras.

The ancient Greeks viewed happiness through the prism of virtue and satisfaction with life. Socrates, for example, believed that a person is happy if he knows his own nature well. He did not, in principle, condemn pleasure; he saw in it neither good nor evil and believed that reason and a person's capacity for rational thinking stand at the forefront. He said: virtue is knowledge. And knowledge is undoubtedly capable of bringing pleasure, and

therefore, in such a case, pleasure is a good. Aristotle advocated the development and realization of the best human qualities, also through virtue and moderation. For Plato, true happiness lay in the knowledge of the absolute idea of the good. The Stoics believed that one should accept as a given what is beyond our control and proposed focusing on one's inner world. True freedom, and therefore happiness, arise from a person's ability to control their thoughts and emotions.

Epicurus was known for his philosophy of hedonism. Let us dwell on this in more detail. According to his theory, the goal of life is the maximum pursuit of pleasures and the avoidance of suffering. The suffering and fears of the people around him led the philosopher to focus on the question: what makes people happy? He reasoned as follows: the human mind is capable of comprehending reality – there is room for happiness in reality – happiness consists in the absence of suffering and anxiety, including fear of the inevitable, and in order to achieve happiness and peace, a person needs nothing except themselves. If a person is self-sufficient, then he does not need states, institutions, fame, wealth, or Gods. This sounds quite modern.



What is interesting is that Epicurus divided pleasures into several categories. Natural and necessary pleasures – those that relieve suffering and satisfy a person's natural needs: food, water, sleep, clothing. Natural but not necessary pleasures – the same needs, but with certain excesses: for example, quenching thirst not with water but with wine; satisfying hunger not with simple food but with delicacies; covering one's nakedness not with ordinary clothing but with garments made of delicate, specially dyed fabric – in our time, fashionable, branded clothing. By the way, according to his theory, love can also be classified as a pleasure with excesses – after all, one can live without love. However, it is worth remembering that such pleasures often lead to certain vices – greed, envy, jealousy, vanity. And consequently, they also lead to suffering. There are also unnatural and unnecessary pleasures, without which a person can live and, according to Epicurus, live better than with them. These include satisfying one's ego through vanity – wealth, fame, reverence. This brings to mind an association with Maslow's hierarchy of needs: the needs at the base are necessary for survival, while

those above are what people strive for and achieve, and in the process and/or as a final result experience happiness. But this is not guaranteed. Everything depends on our goal, ethical principles, faith in a dream, aspiration, and the efforts we apply.

The teachings of the hedonists largely resonate with the modern attitude toward life. Hedonism is characterized by the unconditional value of earthly life, the value of happiness as a variety of pleasures, maximum comfort, and the absence of difficulties. Moreover, the aspiration of Western society toward such happiness originates precisely in hedonism. Modern hedonism in mass consciousness is the pursuit of comfort and the acquisition of the very best, the highest quality, and the newest, believing that only this can provide a strong and pleasant sensation. Thus, consumption for the sake of pleasure lies at the foundation of this attitude. If one reflects on it, such an approach guarantees only momentary joy from possession. But disappointment follows quickly after joy, since the joy of owning a thing and the pleasure of novelty pass very quickly. The opportunity to demonstrate this possession can be called nothing other than primitive hedonism.

Interaction with sensual pleasures, as shown by research in neurophysiology and psychology, activates "pleasure receptors," stimulating the release of "happiness hormones." But the problem is that these joyful moments are also short-lived and are replaced by a feeling of emptiness. And yet a person seeks more stable and long-lasting sensations of happiness. Modern

psychology preaches the same idea.

A "proper lifestyle," which includes discipline, self-development and ethical principles, thereby creates a foundation for long-term inner well-being. Such an approach provides psychological resilience in the face of life's difficulties. We will discuss this in more detail in the following chapters.

In our time, philosophers continue to study concepts of happiness, paying special attention to such aspects as psychological well-being, social connections, and personal values. Modern perceptions of happiness, in addition to the influence of hedonism, are based on existential philosophical theory of the twentieth century, which asserts that happiness is a feeling of the meaningfulness of life and that everything depends entirely on ourselves. Representatives of this movement, such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, emphasized meaning and purpose of existence. This philosophy is perhaps close to the majority of modern people. However, ordinary people most often associate existentialism with feelings such as loneliness, melancholy, sadness, despair, and the meaninglessness of existence. Nevertheless, existentialism is, above all, a philosophy of freedom, which asserts that there is no predetermined fate; a person creates oneself, and full responsibility for one's existence lies with the individual. Everything that happens to us is a consequence of the choices we ourselves have made. Nothing predetermines us, nothing limits us, but no one solves our problems for us either. Realizing this fact, a person cannot shift

responsibility for oneself onto the surrounding world – friends, relatives, authorities, a "father-tsar," or even the Lord God. This teaching instills fear in some people, especially those who are accustomed to shifting responsibility for their own failure onto others; for them, there will always be someone/something to blame – circumstances, heredity, parents, or environment.

It turns out that we can, and in a good sense should, do only what we want and not do what we do not want. However, this does not mean at all that if I want to punch someone or throw trash on the sidewalk, I will do so. No, this already falls into the category of permissiveness, which is a product of a lack of proper upbringing, education, and spiritual development. There are certain rules of social life, moral and ethical constraints. Existential freedom is of a different order. It means that one can leave an unloved job and do what one wants; one can transfer from an institute that causes suffering to another, more interesting field of study; one can stop communicating with people who are unpleasant. Such freedom gives choice and places oneself first, so that in the end one may become happy.

Existentialism proposes that we build our lives ourselves. And it is precisely for this that God endowed human beings with the greatest freedom. We ourselves must fill the emptiness in our hearts; we must give life meaning by engaging in what we like. The philosophy of existentialism is the faith in the human being.

We said that together with boundless freedom, an equally boundless burden of responsibility falls upon a person, which

presupposes questions of duty and honor.

Our conversation about these components of happiness is still ahead.

Existentialism also leads a person to the idea that one will not become truly free until one becomes aware of the finiteness of one's life. Only by sensing the presence of death behind one's back does a person begin to change life priorities, value oneself more, and enjoy life. The constraints that suppress potential disappear, and a feeling of liberation appears. The American psychotherapist Irvin Yalom expressed this well: "Physical death destroys us, but the idea of death saves us." Only then does a person begin to live a real life and engage in what one truly wants, when one fully understands that one can die at absolutely any moment. Unfortunately, awareness of this often comes to us in mature age. Or terrifying circumstances of war force us to think about it. Life is too fleeting; therefore, spending it on an unloved job, toxic people, fashionable but uninteresting activities is not entirely logical.

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