



PART 2

Read the text below and answer questions 14–26.

THE SCIENCE OF HAPPINESS: BEYOND HEDONISM

Modern discussions of happiness often begin with a consumer assumption: happiness is primarily a matter of feeling good. In this hedonic frame, the “good life” is measured by comfort, pleasure, and the avoidance of discomfort, and the implied solution is to optimise experiences—better products, better entertainment, better lifestyles. Scholars argue that this view is appealing because it is simple and marketable, but it can also be misleading. Psychological research repeatedly suggests that pleasure is only one component of wellbeing, and that pursuing pleasant feelings too directly may even produce the opposite result, particularly when expectations rise faster than everyday life can satisfy.

A central theoretical distinction therefore separates hedonic wellbeing from eudaimonic wellbeing. Hedonic wellbeing refers to positive emotion and life satisfaction, whereas eudaimonic wellbeing refers to meaning, purpose, and personal growth. This paradox suggests why “empty pleasure” can occur: a person may experience comfort and frequent enjoyable moments while still feeling that their life lacks direction or significance. Conversely, “stressful purpose” is also possible: people can experience pressure, fatigue, and even periods of sadness while still reporting deep fulfilment because their activities align with values, relationships, or long-term goals. The distinction does not imply that pleasure is unimportant; rather, it frames pleasure as an ingredient that does not automatically translate into a sense of living well.

Because happiness is often treated as private and subjective, measurement has been crucial for turning it into a scientific topic. Researchers use global life-satisfaction surveys, daily reports of emotion, and experience-sampling techniques that prompt individuals to record feelings in real time. These approaches reveal that wellbeing fluctuates with context and is influenced by relationships, health, and expectations. They also highlight a phenomenon known as adaptation: after many positive or negative events, people often move partly back toward a typical baseline, which helps explain why large increases in income or dramatic lifestyle changes can produce less long-term improvement than people anticipate. At the same time, adaptation is not a complete return to “normal” in every case; severe illness or prolonged insecurity can shift wellbeing more persistently. Nevertheless, the baseline tendency complicates simple promises that the next purchase or promotion will permanently transform how life feels.

If measurement shows that happiness is shaped by circumstances, one domain repeatedly emerges as foundational: relationships. Studies across cultures often find that



social connection is among the strongest predictors of wellbeing. Emotional support, practical help, and the sense of belonging that comes from trusted bonds can buffer stress and increase resilience. Conversely, loneliness is associated not only with poorer mental wellbeing but also with worse physical outcomes, partly because chronic isolation can increase stress and reduce everyday support. Importantly, the evidence does not suggest that more contact automatically produces greater wellbeing. Quality matters more than quantity: frequent interaction that feels superficial can fail to protect wellbeing, whereas a smaller number of high-quality relationships can provide substantial stability and meaning.

Work and daily activity also influence happiness, but not only through income. Analytical accounts emphasise that wellbeing is shaped by how daily life is structured: whether people experience autonomy, competence, and a sense of progress. A job that offers control over methods and time can feel psychologically sustainable even when it is demanding. Conversely, chronic time pressure, lack of control, and work that feels meaningless can erode wellbeing, even when pay is relatively high. This helps explain why two people with similar salaries may report very different levels of happiness depending on workplace culture, job security, and whether their work aligns with personal values. Consequently, the science of wellbeing often treats daily activity as a central mechanism through which social and economic systems enter private experience.

The pursuit of happiness itself can become paradoxical. When happiness is treated as a performance target, individuals may monitor their feelings too closely, interpret ordinary sadness as failure, and become anxious when pleasure does not appear on schedule. This pattern can reduce enjoyment in the moment, because attention is directed toward evaluating experience rather than living it. Some experiments and surveys suggest that valuing happiness too strongly is linked to disappointment: people's expectations rise, and the gap between "how I should feel" and "how I actually feel" becomes a source of frustration. In this sense, the effort to force happiness can crowd out the quieter processes—connection, absorption, meaning—that often generate wellbeing indirectly.

Debate therefore turns to what interventions are realistic and fair. On an individual level, practices such as gratitude journaling, acts of kindness, mindfulness, and physical activity show modest average benefits, but not for everyone and not in every context. These activities may help some people notice support, shift attention, or build routine, yet they are not a universal solution. Conversely, critics argue that focusing too strongly on personal optimism can shift responsibility onto individuals facing structural disadvantage. Researchers increasingly emphasise that wellbeing is shaped by environments: discrimination, neighbourhood safety, access to healthcare, stable housing, and



educational opportunity can all influence chronic stress and life prospects. This broader view does not deny the value of personal habits; it argues that happiness is also a social outcome, affected by policies and institutions that shape daily insecurity. Overall, the evidence suggests a conclusion that is broader than pleasure: wellbeing is strengthened by meaning, relationships, autonomy, and supportive conditions, and the most reliable approach is often to build those foundations rather than chase happiness directly.

Questions 14–18

Select the correct answer.

14 What criticism does the opening paragraph make of the idea that happiness is mainly about feeling good?

- A** It assumes that happiness cannot be influenced by material circumstances.
- B** It overlooks the fact that pleasurable experiences are difficult to measure scientifically.
- C** It reduces wellbeing to pleasure even though research suggests that pleasure is only one part of it.
- D** It assumes that people generally prefer meaningful activities to comfortable ones.

15 What distinction does the passage make between hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing?

- A** Hedonic wellbeing concerns social connection, while eudaimonic wellbeing concerns physical health.
- B** Hedonic wellbeing concerns pleasure and life satisfaction, while eudaimonic wellbeing concerns meaning and personal growth.
- C** Hedonic wellbeing describes long-term fulfilment, while eudaimonic wellbeing describes short-term enjoyment.
- D** Hedonic wellbeing depends mainly on personality traits, while eudaimonic wellbeing depends mainly on public policy.

16 What does the passage suggest about adaptation?

- A** After major events, people often move partly back toward a typical baseline.
- B** Adaptation means that long-term wellbeing does not change in response to any life event.
- C** Adaptation occurs mainly in response to income changes, not to health or relationships.
- D** Adaptation shows that experience-sampling methods are less valid than life-satisfaction surveys.

17 What does the passage say about relationships?



- A** Frequent social contact improves wellbeing even when people do not feel close to others.
- B** The number of social connections matters more than their reliability or trust.
- C** Social relationships influence emotions but have little connection to physical health.
- D** A small number of high-quality relationships can provide substantial resilience.

18 What risk is mentioned about pursuing happiness directly?

- A** It encourages people to avoid long-term goals in favour of immediate pleasure.
- B** It makes people less aware of changes in their circumstances and values.
- C** It can increase anxiety and reduce enjoyment by turning happiness into a performance target.
- D** It reduces motivation because people stop monitoring their feelings altogether.

Questions 19–22

Complete the notes below. Choose **ONE WORD ONLY** from the text for each answer.

What research reveals about wellbeing

- Researchers have identified **19**: after many positive or negative events, people often move partly back towards a typical baseline.
- These measures show that happiness varies with context, relationships, **20**, and expectations.
- Studies also suggest that wellbeing at work can improve when people have autonomy and feel they are making **21**
- Individual practices such as gratitude journaling typically show **22** average benefits.

Questions 23–26

Choose **TRUE** if the statement agrees with the information given in the text, choose **FALSE** if the statement contradicts the information, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if there is no information on this.

23 The passage states that pleasure is the only component of a good life.

24 The passage suggests that relationship quality matters more than the number of relationships.

25 The passage claims that gratitude journaling improves wellbeing equally for everyone.



26 The passage provides exact statistical percentages showing how much inequality affects happiness.

Answer Key

14. C

15. B

16. A

17. D

18. C

19. adaptation

20. health

21. progress

22. modest

23. FALSE

24. TRUE

25. FALSE

26. NOT GIVEN