

Stumbling on Happiness PDF

Daniel Todd Gilbert

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Stumbling on **HAPPINESS**

"If you have even the slightest curiosity about the human condition, you ought to read it. Trust me."

—MALCOLM GLADWELL, AUTHOR OF *BLINK*



DANIEL GILBERT



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Stumbling on Happiness

Unraveling the Mysteries of Our Misguided
Happiness Predictions

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About the book

In "Stumbling on Happiness," renowned Harvard psychologist Daniel Gilbert explores the quirky intricacies of human psychology and our often misguided perceptions of happiness. Through a series of thought-provoking questions—such as why lovers forgive infidelity more readily than a partner's messiness, or why people value sight differently—Gilbert delves into the flawed mechanisms of imagination and the illusions that distort our ability to forecast our future satisfaction. Drawing on cutting-edge research from psychology, neuroscience, philosophy, and behavioral economics, he uncovers the peculiarities of our anticipations and desires. With engaging narrative style and profound insights, Gilbert masterfully reveals why our understanding of our future selves often falls short, leaving us stumbling in our pursuit of happiness.

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About the author

Daniel Todd Gilbert is a distinguished Harvard College Professor of Psychology at Harvard University, renowned for his research on "affective forecasting," which explores how effectively individuals predict the emotional consequences of future events. His notable achievements include receiving prestigious awards such as the Guggenheim Fellowship and the American Psychological Association's Distinguished Scientific Award for Early Career Contributions. Despite his accolades, Gilbert humorously claims his most significant achievement is ranking just behind Dizzie Gillespie among the Most Famous High School Dropouts. His work has garnered attention from major publications, including The New York Times Magazine, Forbes, and Oprah Magazine. He resides in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with his wife, though they share their home with no pets.

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Chapter 1 Summary : Journey to Elsewhen



Section	Summary
Introduction to Thinking About the Future	Gilbert humorously highlights the unique human ability to think about the future, contrasting it with animals' basic future behaviors, like squirrels burying nuts.
The Joy of the Future	The human brain's capacity for conscious experience and imagination is celebrated, with a distinction made between basic predictions and the complex foresight unique to humans.
The Ape That Looked Forward	Humans possess cognitive skills to conceive "later" due to the evolved frontal lobe, which is essential for planning and future-oriented thinking.
The Importance of the Frontal Lobe	Gilbert discusses the frontal lobe's evolution, sharing stories and studies that illustrate how damage to this area impairs future planning abilities.
Twisting Fate	Humans often seek present happiness but are distracted by future concerns, exploring the balance between anticipating joys and fearing negative outcomes.
Prospection and Emotion	Imagining the future can lead to pleasure but also unrealistic expectations; however, this optimism serves a motivational purpose.
Prospection and Control	Humans have a fundamental need for control, which significantly affects happiness, as feeling influential contributes to mental health and well-being.
Conclusion: The Illusion of Control	Gilbert suggests that our predictions about what yields happiness may be flawed, hinting at challenges in understanding the future and happiness.

Chapter 1: Journey to Elsewhen

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Introduction to Thinking About the Future

Daniel Todd Gilbert humorously introduces the psychologist's "vow" to utilize the phrase, "The human being is the only animal that..." in their work. He asserts that the unique capacity of humans is to think about the future, distinguishing this ability from similar behaviors seen in animals, such as squirrels burying nuts. Despite these animals showing behaviors that suggest future planning, Gilbert argues that true contemplation of the future is a defining aspect of human nature.

The Joy of the Future

Gilbert reflects on the achievements of the human brain, emphasizing that conscious experience and imagination of future possibilities are our greatest accomplishments. He discusses two types of "making future": immediate predictions made by various brains and the deeper, imaginative foresight that sets humans apart. While simpler brains can make basic predictions, humans have the ability to envision complex future scenarios.



The Ape That Looked Forward

Adult humans possess the cognitive development necessary to grasp the concept of "later," allowing them to think about future ambitions and transitions. Gilbert notes the evolutionary growth of the frontal lobe, which plays a significant role in this advanced cognitive ability, facilitating planning and future-oriented thinking.

The Importance of the Frontal Lobe

The evolution of the frontal lobe has been significant in developing human foresight. Gilbert shares anecdotes and research indicating that damage to the frontal lobe hampers the ability to plan and think about the future. He recounts the case of a man with frontal lobe damage who cannot conceive of future events, highlighting the contrasting experiences of typical individuals who navigate time and expectations.

Twisting Fate

Gilbert discusses how many people seek happiness by focusing on the present while paradoxically being drawn into



thoughts about the future. He questions why humans struggle to be in the moment, citing studies that show both the joy of anticipating future events and the burden of worrying about potential negative outcomes.

Prospection and Emotion

The chapter outlines how envisioning the future can be pleasurable, leading to a preference for fantasy over the actual experiences. Gilbert states that this tendency for optimism regarding the future can lead to unrealistic expectations and responses to risks, but also serves a motivational purpose.

Prospection and Control

Humans have an innate need for control, a quality central to mental health and well-being. Gilbert presents evidence from studies showing that perceived control has significant effects on happiness and life outcomes. The desire to manage the future stems from the inherent satisfaction found in feeling effective and influential over one's environment.

Conclusion: The Illusion of Control

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Despite the instincts driving humans to navigate their futures, Gilbert suggests that many of our predictions about what will lead to happiness may be misguided. He sets the stage for subsequent discussions on the nature of happiness and understanding our illusions about foresight, arguing that the journey to envision the future is fraught with challenges that distort our perceptions of what truly matters.

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Chapter 2 Summary : The View from in Here



Section	Summary
Conjoined Twins and Happiness	Lori and Reba Schappell, conjoined twins, find joy in their unique circumstances, challenging societal views on happiness and quality of life.
Understanding Happiness	Happiness is complex and subjective, including emotional happiness (basic feeling), moral happiness (virtue-related), and judgmental happiness (life satisfaction assessments).
The Complexity of Emotional Happiness	Emotional happiness involves positive experiences shared by everyone, but confusing happiness with activities leading to it can cause misinterpretation.
Philosophical Perspectives	Philosophers like Freud, Plato, and Aristotle link happiness and virtue, raising skepticism about the pursuit of pure emotional happiness.
The Language Around Happiness	Language surrounding happiness can mislead, conflating emotional experiences with life judgments, complicating the understanding of happiness.
Experiential Backgrounds and Meaning	Unique experiences influence happiness perceptions; concepts like "language-squishing" and "experience-stretching" reflect how backgrounds shape emotional vocabulary and fulfillment.
The Challenges of Recognizing Change	People struggle to recognize changes in happiness due to faulty memories, complicating self-assessment across varied life circumstances.
Concluding Thoughts	The subjective nature of happiness is linked to personal histories, inviting a reconsideration of how it's perceived, with the implication that happiness differs widely among individuals.

Chapter 2: The View from in Here

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Conjoined Twins and Happiness

Lori and Reba Schappell are conjoined twins who live a life filled with joy despite their unique circumstances. While conventional wisdom suggests that separation would offer a chance for greater happiness, the twins express happiness in their current state, challenging societal perceptions of happiness and life quality. This contradiction raises questions about the true nature of happiness and how it is defined.

Understanding Happiness

Defining happiness is complex due to its subjective nature. It encompasses emotional happiness (a basic feeling), moral happiness (associated with virtuous living), and judgmental happiness (based on assessments of life satisfaction).

Emotional happiness, the most fundamental, resists precise definitions as it relates to feelings rather than tangible metrics.

The Complexity of Emotional Happiness

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The exploration of emotional happiness reveals that people universally strive for positive experiences, regardless of individual circumstances. Philosophical perspectives have long linked happiness with virtue; however, equating actions that lead to happiness with happiness itself can lead to misinterpretations. A distinction must be made between the feelings of happiness and the activities that might produce it.

Philosophical Perspectives

Historical figures like Freud, Plato, and Aristotle have emphasized the pursuit of happiness as a fundamental human motivation, with many arguing that moral virtue is essential for true happiness. This has led to societal skepticism about simple emotions being worthy of pursuit, as articulated by philosophers like Mill and Nozick, who questioned the value of happiness derived from superficial sources.

The Language Around Happiness

The language we use to describe happiness can be misleading. People sometimes conflate emotional happiness with judgmental assessments of life situations. When expressing happiness about events or conditions, it may not



accurately reflect one's emotional state. This semantic confusion complicates the understanding of happiness as both a subjective experience and a social construct.

Experiential Backgrounds and Meaning

Experiential backgrounds significantly influence perceptions of happiness. The twins may interpret happiness differently from others due to their unique circumstances, leading to the idea of "language-squishing," where limited experiences shape their emotional vocabulary. Conversely, "experience-stretching" suggests that their unique experiences might allow them to find fulfillment in ways others cannot comprehend.

The Challenges of Recognizing Change

Research indicates that people struggle to recognize changes in their experiences, often relying on faulty memories. This raises doubts about the reliability of self-reported happiness over time. Individual experiences inevitably shape perceptions, complicating any assessment of happiness across differing life circumstances.



Concluding Thoughts

In the quest to define happiness, it becomes clear that subjective experiences are inherently tied to personal histories and contexts. The twins' claims challenge conventional wisdom, inviting readers to reconsider how happiness is perceived and understood. True understanding of happiness remains elusive due to its deeply personal and contextual nature, suggesting that one person's happiness may differ vastly from another's, influenced by life experiences.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: Subjectivity of Happiness

Critical Interpretation: The chapter illustrates that happiness is deeply subjective, as seen through the lives of conjoined twins Lori and Reba Schappell who find joy in circumstance where others might not. While conventional wisdom might imply that separation could enhance happiness, their contentment challenges the often rigid perceptions of what constitutes a fulfilling life. This instance warrants critical interpretation because it acknowledges that societal norms can obscure individual truths about happiness. The implications of this subjective nature suggest that happiness cannot be universally defined; rather, it is intricately tied to personal experience and context. Readers should remain open to the idea that the author's views, while thought-provoking, may not fully encapsulate the diverse experiences of happiness among individuals. This notion of happiness as a subjective construct has been supported by various psychological and philosophical studies, including those expounded in works like "The Happiness Hypothesis" by Jonathan Haidt and "Authentic Happiness" by Martin Seligman,



which argue for multiple interpretations of what makes life joyful.

Chapter 3 Summary : Outside Looking In

CHAPTER 3: Outside Looking In

Introduction to Self-Recognition in Emotions

- The chapter begins by highlighting the struggle people have in accurately recognizing their own emotions compared to understanding others'. A joke about psychology professors emphasizes the peculiar nature of self-awareness and emotional recognition.

Mistaking Feelings

- People can be wrong about their emotional states; a concept illustrated using examples of conjoined twins and the tendency to misinterpret feelings. The author presents a challenge to examine our own self-awareness, setting the stage for exploring how emotions are processed.



The Complexity of Perception

- The author delves into how the brain processes visual information, emphasizing that it identifies objects in a split second before fully understanding them. This leads to the idea that we can feel emotions (like fear) before we can identify them, complicating our self-awareness.

Experiments on Misinterpretation of Emotions

- An experiment illustrates how physiological arousal, such as fear experienced on a shaky bridge, can be mistakenly labeled as sexual attraction when encountering an attractive person. This reveals how our contexts shape emotional interpretations.

The Duality of Experience and Awareness

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Chapter 4 Summary : In the Blind Spot of the Mind's Eye

Chapter 4: In the Blind Spot of the Mind's Eye

Introduction

In this chapter, we explore the complex relationship between imagination and reality, particularly focusing on how our brains fill in gaps in memory and perception, leading to flawed predictions about our future happiness.

Real-Life Contrasts

Adolph Fischer and George Eastman exemplify contrasting perceptions of happiness. Fischer, wrongfully executed, claimed it was the happiest moment of his life, while successful Eastman ended his life despite his achievements. This raises the question of why individuals can feel opposite emotions in seemingly similar situations.

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The Mistake in Imagination

The author suggests that our failures to accurately predict feelings about future events stem from the errors in our imaginations. Our decisions are often based on forecasts of our happiness but can be misguided due to the shortcomings in how we envision these scenarios.

Filling-in Memory and Perception

Our brains do not store experiences faithfully; instead, they compress and reconstruct memories using key details and summaries. This creative reweaving results in a sense of familiarity but may lead us to confidently misremember events. For example, a study showed how external cues influenced volunteers' memories of a viewing experience, illustrating how susceptible our memories are to alteration.

The Illusion of Reality

The brain also fills in perceptual gaps, functioning similarly to how a magician tricks an audience. This filling-in trick can influence our real-time perceptions. An example of this is the visual blind spot, where our brains use surrounding



information to create a complete picture, thereby obscuring the gaps in our perception.

The Construction of Perception

Philosopher Immanuel Kant proposed that perceptions involve a blend of sensory input and pre-existing knowledge. Our brain's interpretations of what we see are influenced by what we think and believe, rendering our perceptions as potentially inaccurate representations of reality.

Realism vs. Idealism

While children initially perceive the world as it is, they gradually learn that perceptions are subjective. Adults also experience moments of realism, where they initially interpret situations from their perspectives before considering alternative viewpoints.

Imagination's Ease and Errors

Imagination allows for effortless conjuring of scenarios, but the details formed can unwittingly influence our expectations about future experiences. Incorrect assumptions about future



happiness based on imagined scenarios can lead to significant misjudgments.

Conclusion

Our tendency to accept imagined details as truthful representations can lead to misguided beliefs about what will make us happy. Recognizing the potential inaccuracies in our imaginative processes is crucial for making informed choices about our futures. Ultimately, while our brains' filling-in tricks enable a rich experience of life, they also require us to be conscious of the limitations and biases inherent in our perceptions and predictions.

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Critical Thinking

Key Point: The Flaws in Predicting Future Happiness

Critical Interpretation: One key point from this chapter revolves around the inherent flaws in our imagination when predicting future happiness. Gilbert argues that our brains often misrepresent potential experiences, leading us to make misguided assumptions about what will truly bring us joy. This could pose a significant risk for individual decision-making, especially as it suggests that our expectations are often synthetically constructed rather than grounded in reality. However, it's important to consider that Gilbert's assertion may not hold universally; the subjective nature of happiness is complex and context-dependent. For instance, research from psychologists such as Dan Ariely in "Predictably Irrational" and positive psychology experts like Martin Seligman offers alternative perspectives, arguing that while our predictions may be flawed, they are not entirely disconnected from lived experiences. They stress the role personal values and agency play in shaping our future happiness, suggesting that Gilbert's conclusions may overlook how active engagement in life choices can enhance, rather than simplify, our



emotional foresight.

Chapter 5 Summary : The Hound of Silence

Chapter 5: The Hound of Silence

In this chapter, Daniel Todd Gilbert explores the concept of absence and our tendency to overlook it in both our perceptions of the past and in how we imagine the future. This tendency, likened to a dog that fails to bark during a theft, illustrates how crucial missing information can be when making judgments.

The Curious Incident of the Dog

Gilbert references Sherlock Holmes' deduction about a theft, emphasizing the importance of what didn't happen—the silence of the dog—highlighting our frequent neglect of absences in decision-making.

Pigeons and Human Learning

Research comparing pigeons to humans reveals that both can



recognize the presence of certain features (like a light) but struggle with the significance of their absence (an unlit lever). This tendency extends to how people assess their experiences and the world around them.

Absence in the Present

Gilbert argues that our focus on present experiences often leads to distorted perceptions. For instance, when assessing urban pigeons' accuracy in defecating on people, we fail to account for the numerous instances of "misses." He discusses how scientists calculate relationships based on both occurrences and non-occurrences, a practice ordinary people often overlook.

Philosophical Reflections on Absence

The chapter includes reflections from Sir Francis Bacon about the human mind's tendency to prioritize visible phenomena over invisible ones. Bacon uses the example of a visitor in a temple questioning why pictures of perished sailors weren't displayed, illustrating our common oversight of absence.



Absence in Personal Judgment

Gilbert provides examples of how the neglect of absence affects personal decisions, such as choosing between vacation destinations. People tend to focus on the positive aspects of options when selecting and the negative when rejecting, leading to contradictory choices.

Absence in Future Predictions

The chapter discusses how our inability to predict the future accurately is also tied to our neglect of absent details. For example, people's bleak predictions after traumatic events often exclude the daily activities and moments of joy that still occur in the aftermath.

The Impact of Detail on Happiness Predictions

A study involving college students predicting their emotions after a football game reveals that those who consider more details tend to have a more accurate understanding of their future happiness.

Temporal Horizons and Detail Perception

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Gilbert compares the clarity of near events to the vagueness of distant ones, explaining that when we envision the future, we often overlook many details that will shape our experiences and emotions.

The Role of Imagination in Decision-making

He suggests that while imagination allows us to fill in gaps, it also leads us to miss out on critical pieces of information, resulting in a miscalculation of future experiences.

Presentism: The Influence of Current Experience

Lastly, the chapter introduces the term "presentism," referring to how present experiences shape our understanding of the past and future. Gilbert concludes by reaffirming the importance of recognizing both presence and absence in our judgments to gain a clearer understanding of our experiences and decisions.



Chapter 6 Summary : The Future Is Now

Chapter 6: The Future Is Now

Futuristic Predictions in History

In libraries, many futurist books from the 1950s—like **Into the Atomic Age**—illustrate a vision of the future that reflects the author's time rather than actual predictions. They showcase an idealized image of domestic life and technology that fails to account for social diversity and advancements that emerged later.

The Tradition of Underestimating the Future

Historically, many scientists and inventors have inaccurately predicted the future, often believing advancements like airplanes or television were impossible. Predictions frequently err by assuming the future will closely resemble the present.

Presentism in Memory

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People often remember their past opinions and emotions in light of their current feelings, leading to distorted recollections. This tendency is evident in various instances—such as students recalling past worries or spouses reflecting on grief—by projecting current feelings onto past experiences.

Presentism in Forecasting the Future

When imagining the future, people struggle to envision it differing significantly from their present circumstances. These difficulties manifest in various behaviors, such as teenagers making impulsive choices, mothers underestimating their future career desires, and smokers believing they can easily quit immediately after smoking.

Imagining and Pre-feeling Events

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Rahul Malviya

Beautiful App



This app is a lifesaver for book lovers with busy schedules. The summaries are spot on, and the mind maps help reinforce wh I've learned. Highly recommend!

Alex Walk

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Chapter 7 Summary : Time Bombs

Chapter 7: Time Bombs

Understanding Time Perception

Daniel Todd Gilbert discusses how people perceive time as an abstract concept, which is visually difficult to imagine compared to concrete objects. Most individuals visualize time through spatial metaphors, thinking of the past as behind them and the future ahead, which influences how they reason about past and future events.

The Impact of Repetition on Happiness

Despite the common belief that variety leads to greater happiness, research shows that experiencing the same enjoyable event repeatedly can decrease satisfaction. This is due to a phenomenon called habituation, where the delight in an experience diminishes over time. To combat this, people can introduce variety or increase the time intervals between similar experiences.

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The Role of Time and Variety

Gilbert argues that time and variety are tools to mitigate habituation's effects on enjoyment. When experiences are spaced out adequately, variety becomes unnecessary, and repetitive experiences can still provide joy. Misjudgments occur when individuals do not account for the time between experiences, leading them to incorrectly seek variety in situations where it is not beneficial.

Imagining Future Experiences

Our imaginations often overlook the temporal aspect when considering future events. Instead, people frequently project their current emotions onto future scenarios, leading to flawed predictions about how they will feel later. This tendency is shown through various studies, demonstrating that present feelings heavily influence future expectations.

Comparative Misjudgments

Human decision-making is swayed by comparisons between current and past experiences rather than potential future

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alternatives. This can result in individuals underestimating or overestimating their satisfaction regarding choices, particularly when they fail to realize that their values may change over time.

Presentism and Future Predictions

Presentism—judging past events or figures by today’s standards—also influences future predictions. As future-focused beings, people often apply their current emotions and thoughts to predict how they will feel about future situations, which can skew their expectations. Acknowledging that their future selves will perceive the world differently can aid in making more accurate predictions about future happiness.

Conclusion

Gilbert highlights that understanding the nuances of time perception, enjoyment, and presentism can enhance our ability to predict future happiness. By considering how our perceptions influence our decisions and feelings, we can navigate our choices more wisely and recognize that both time and comparison play critical roles in shaping our happiness.



Chapter 8 Summary : Paradise Glossed

Chapter 8: Paradise Glossed

Introduction

- Shakespeare's notion that perspective shapes our feelings is presented humorously. Emphasizes unconventional methods for improving happiness, suggesting negative experiences may paradoxically lead to personal growth.

The Misconception of Trauma

- Traditionally, psychologists believed traumatic events have severe, lasting adverse effects. Recent research shows most people are resilient and don't suffer chronic distress from trauma; they often emerge with enhanced perceptions of life.

Contradictory Claims of Happiness

- Testimonials from individuals who suffered significant losses (jobs, freedom, mobility) suggest positive



transformations stemming from trauma, challenging the belief that trauma inherently leads to unhappiness.

Human Resilience

- Studies reveal that many people fare well after experiencing trauma. The predictability of suffering is often overestimated; individuals facing different crises may not react as negatively as expected.

Perception Influences

- Our interpretation of events is shaped by context, frequency, and recency. Personal preferences and meanings associated with experiences lead us to evaluate situations more positively once they become personal.

The Role of Meaning

- Meanings assign importance and satisfaction to experiences; the interpretation of complex events is subjective and often favorable. The brain tends to focus on interpretations that promote well-being.



Self-Deception and Positive Bias

- We have a tendency to seek evidence that confirms our beliefs and perceptions. Our evaluations of ourselves are often colored by the information we choose to accept, creating a skewed self-image.

Cognitive Bias in Seeking Facts

- People tend to collect and analyze information that supports their views while dismissing contradictory evidence, leading to a distorted reality. This influences self-perception positively, allowing individuals to maintain favorable views of their abilities and experiences.

Conclusion

- Our psychological makeup helps maintain a balance between reality and illusion, enabling us to cope with life while fostering positivity. Awareness of these biases is crucial for better emotional forecasting and understanding our future happiness.



Chapter 9 Summary : Immune to Reality

Chapter 9: Immune to Reality

Introduction

This chapter explores the concept of the psychological immune system and how it shapes our perceptions and emotional responses to experiences. Using the story of Clever Hans, a horse that seemingly answered questions through body language cues from its owner, the author illustrates how we often deceive ourselves unconsciously regarding our interpretations of events.

Clever Hans and Psychological Immune System

- Clever Hans was thought to be capable of answering mathematics and current events by tapping his hoof; however, it was revealed that he responded to nonverbal cues from his owner, Wilhelm von Osten.
- Just like Clever Hans, people often unconsciously favor facts that support positive views of their experiences, leading



to self-deception.

Unconscious Processes of Self-Deception

- People are generally unaware of their motivations and often provide plausible justifications for their feelings and actions when prompted.
- Research demonstrates that when exposed to subtle stimuli, individuals alter their judgments and behavior without conscious awareness, leading them to misattribute their feelings to erroneous reasons.

The Impacts of Attempted Positivity

- Attempts to force positive feelings can backfire. Studies indicate that individuals who consciously try to induce happiness often end up feeling worse than those who simply engage with experiences naturally.

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Chapter 10 Summary : Once Bitten

Chapter 10: Once Bitten

The Role of Experience in Learning

The chapter opens with a playful examination of children's literature about potty training, highlighting the importance of learning through firsthand and secondhand experiences. Just as children learn the right way to approach their bodily functions, adults should ideally learn from their experiences and the guidance of others.

Challenges in Learning from Happiness

Despite having opportunities to learn what makes us happy through direct experiences and shared advice, adults often continue to make the same mistakes. Expectations linked to material possessions or social achievements frequently lead to disappointment, akin to children not yet mastering how to use the toilet correctly. This raises the question of why emotional forecasting doesn't improve with experience.



The Illusion of Memory

Memory plays a pivotal role in how we assess our past experiences. It is not a reliable record but a reconstructive process that often distorts our recollections, emphasizing vivid and unusual instances while downplaying the ordinary. This can result in incorrect estimates of the frequency of certain experiences, as illustrated by examples like being stuck in slow grocery lines or missing trains, reinforcing a flawed understanding of what will make us happy in the future.

Final Impressions Matter

The chapter discusses the significant influence of how experiences end on our memories and evaluations. A painful experience that ends favorably may be recalled more positively than a less intense one that concludes badly, leading to curious choices in future situations. This phenomenon is evident in studies about people's recollections of painful situations like childbirth or enduring cold water trials.



Misremembering Emotions

The author explores how gender theories can bias memory, leading to flawed recollections of emotional intensity. For example, men might remember their emotions as less intense than they actually were due to societal beliefs about masculinity, while women may remember theirs as more intense. This misrepresentation affects how we process our experiences and impact future decisions.

Emotional Predictions and Retrospection

Using the 2000 U.S. presidential election as a case study, the chapter illustrates how voters' predictions of their emotional responses to outcomes often do not match the reality, leading to continued errors in forecasting emotional reactions to significant events. This mismatch highlights the substantial influence of expectations on memory.

Conclusion: Learning Through Coaching

Ultimately, the chapter suggests that while practice does not necessarily lead to learning from experience, coaching—especially in addressing emotional

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outcomes—remains crucial for better understanding and improving our responses to life’s challenges.

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Chapter 11 Summary : Reporting Live from Tomorrow

Chapter 11: Reporting Live from Tomorrow

Key Themes and Concepts

This chapter explores the complexity of predicting our future happiness and the shortcomings of relying solely on our imagination to do so. The central thesis is that sharing experiences and knowledge among individuals can provide better insights into future emotional outcomes.

The Flaw in Imagination

- Imagination often leads to inaccuracies when we try to forecast our future happiness. We tend to overlook important factors and project our current feelings onto future situations.
- The wisdom of seeking information from others who have experienced similar situations is emphasized as a more



reliable method for predicting emotional futures.

Vicarious Learning

- Humans have the unique ability to learn from others through communication, allowing us to bypass the necessity of direct experience.
- The interconnectedness of society enables an accumulation of wisdom on what to expect from life's experiences.

The Ecology of Advice

- The abundance of sources for advice—including friends, family, and professionals—does not always lead to better decision-making. Evidence suggests that most people still make poor choices in significant life areas.

Belief as a Social Phenomenon

- The chapter discusses how beliefs, much like genes, can be transmitted through social networks. Certain beliefs persist because they benefit the community, even if they are inaccurate or misleading.
- For example, the belief that money equates to happiness is

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examined in the context of economic behaviors. Research indicates that after a certain point, increased wealth does not significantly enhance happiness.

The Illusion of Unique Experience

- There is a tendency in individuals to view their experiences as unique compared to others, which leads to an underestimation of the similarities in emotional responses among people.
- This perception can hinder our ability to learn from the emotional experiences of others, causing us to distrust their insights when they could be beneficial.

Rethinking Happiness Predictions

- The author proposes that instead of relying on self-generated projections, individuals should seek out the experiences of others (“surrogates”) to predict future emotions more accurately.
- Research shows that people who use the experiences of others to inform their predictions tend to have more accurate forecasts of future feelings.



Conclusion

The chapter illustrates the importance of social learning and how society's collective wisdom can help individuals navigate their paths toward greater happiness. By recognizing the reliability of others' experiences and understanding the flawed nature of our own imagination, we can better prepare for our emotional futures.

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Example

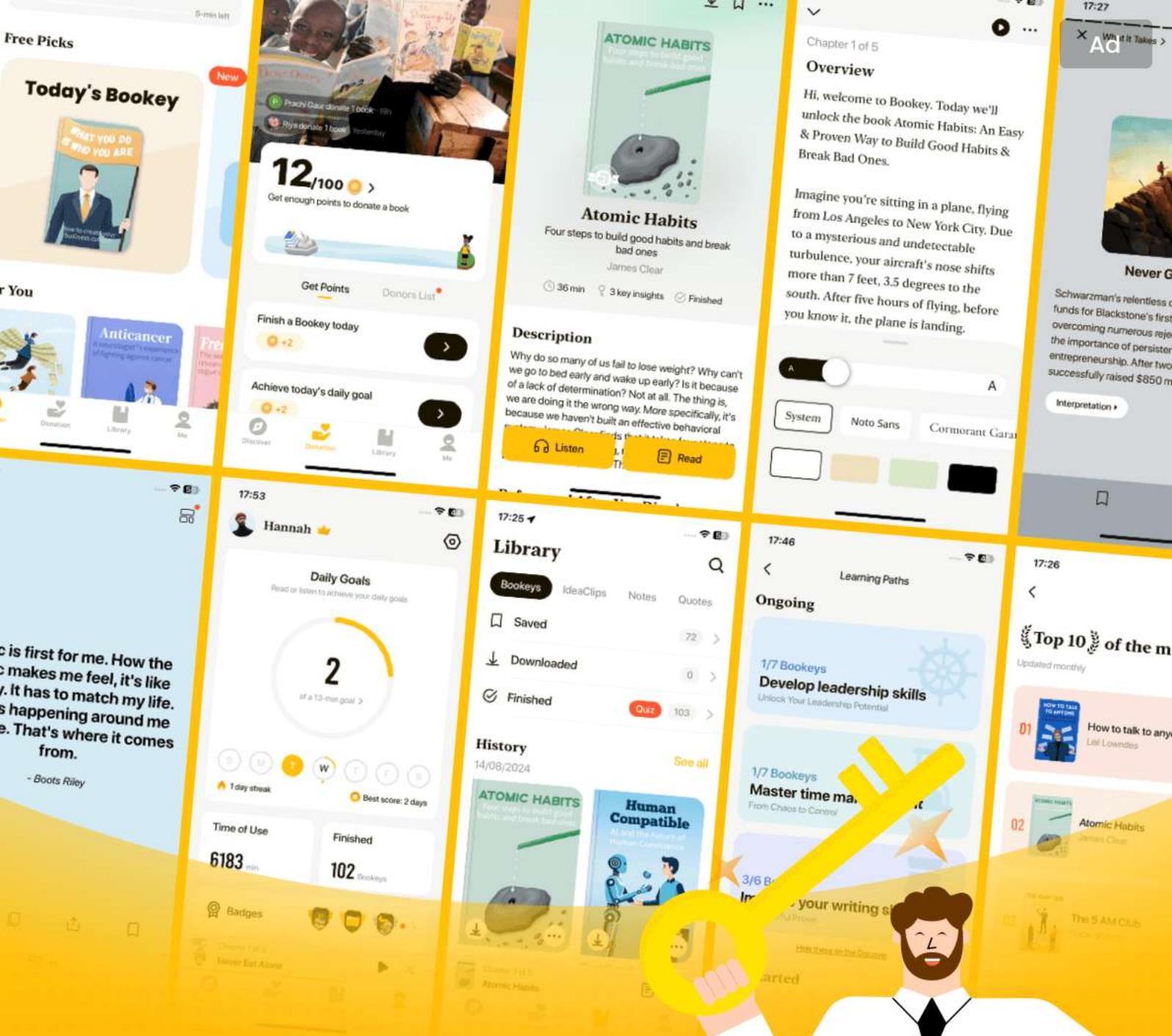
Key Point: The Limitations of Imagination in Predicting Happiness

Example: When considering a future job, instead of imagining only your own feelings, ask colleagues about their experiences to gauge potential happiness more accurately.

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Best Quotes from Stumbling on Happiness by Daniel Todd Gilbert with Page Numbers

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Chapter 1 | Quotes From Pages 26-53

1. The human being is the only animal that thinks about the future.
2. The greatest achievement of the human brain is its ability to imagine objects and episodes that do not exist in the realm of the real.
3. We think about the future in a way that no other animal can, does, or ever has, and this simple, ubiquitous, ordinary act is a defining feature of our humanity.
4. We insist on steering our boats because we think we have a pretty good idea of where we should go, but the truth is that much of our steering is in vain...because the future is fundamentally different than it appears through the prospectiscope.
5. What do you want to be when you grow up?

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6.A permanent present-what a haunting phrase.

Chapter 2 | Quotes From Pages 54-82

1. Our point of view is no, straight out no. Why would you want to do that? For all the money in China, why? You'd be ruining two lives in the process.
- 2.If you said, 'Joyful, playful, and optimistic,' then you are not playing the game and I am going to give you another chance. Try to be honest instead of correct.
- 3.Happiness is a you-know-what-I-mean feeling.
- 4.We hope there never was such a person, but if he says he is happy and he looks happy, is there a principled reason to doubt him?
- 5.If impoverished experiential backgrounds squish our language rather than stretch our experience, then children who say they are delighted by peanut butter and jelly are just plain wrong...
- 6....there are experiences far better than those we have had so far... and that no one knows what happiness really is.



7.The experience-stretching hypothesis suggests that when given a birthday cake, Lori and Reba talk about their feelings the same way you do but feel something different.

Chapter 3 | Quotes From Pages 83-105

- 1.How are you ? " is overly familiar for the same reason that "How am I ? " is overly strange.
- 2.Yes, and you'll find one in the mirror.
- 3.But how can that be ? How can we know something is scary if we don't know what it is ?
- 4.It is possible to mistake fear for lust, apprehension for guilt, shame for anxiety.
- 5.Those subatomic particles that like to be everywhere at once seem to cancel out one another's behavior so that the large conglomeration of particles that we call cows, cars, and French Canadians stay exactly where we put them.
- 6.If war didn't cause pain and anguish, if peace didn't provide for delights both transcendental and carnal, would either of them matter to us at all ?





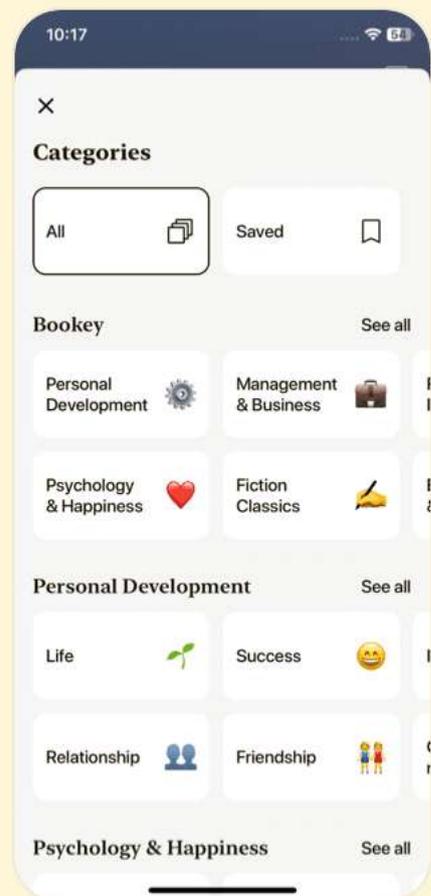
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Chapter 4 | Quotes From Pages 106-128

1. This is the happiest moment of my life.
2. So why did a poor man who had accomplished so little stand happily at the threshold of his own lynching while a rich man who had accomplished so much felt driven to take his own life?
3. We make decisions about whom to marry, where to work, when to reproduce, where to retire, and we base these decisions in large measure on our beliefs about how it would feel if this event happened but that one didn't.
4. Perhaps it is true that we can't always get what we want, but at least we feel sure that we know what to want in the first place.
5. Imagination is a powerful tool that allows us to conjure images from 'airy nothing.'
6. The filling-in trick is not limited to the visual world.
7. The world as we know it is a construction, a finished product, almost—one might say—a manufactured article, to which the mind contributes as much by its moulding



forms as the thing contributes by its stimuli.

8. We generalize our subjective sense of things with the objective properties of those things.

9. Our brains are talented forgers, weaving a tapestry of memory and perception whose detail is so compelling that its inauthenticity is rarely detected.

10. You are a very fine person, I'm sure. But you are a very bad wizard.

Chapter 5 | Quotes From Pages 129-145

1. By paying careful attention to the absence of an event, Sherlock Holmes further distinguished himself from the rest of humankind.

2. Absence in the Present

3. The failure to consider absences among the most serious: By far the greatest impediment and aberration of the human understanding arises from those things which strike the sense outweigh things which, although they may be more important, do not strike: it directly.

4. The misses are crucial to determining what kinds of



inferences we can legitimately draw from the hits.

5. Our inability to think about absences can lead us to make some fairly bizarre judgments.
6. When we think of events in the distant past or distant future we tend to think abstractly about why they happened or will happen, but when we think of events in the near past or near future we tend to think concretely about how they happened or will happen.

Chapter 6 | Quotes From Pages 146-162

1. When a distinguished but elderly scientist states that something is possible he is almost certainly right. When he states that something is impossible, he is very probably wrong.
2. The Future Is Now
3. When brains plug holes in their conceptualizations of yesterday and tomorrow, they tend to use a material called today.
4. When depressed people think about future events, they cannot imagine liking them very much.



5. Our attempts to use our minds to transcend those boundaries are, more often than not, ineffective.

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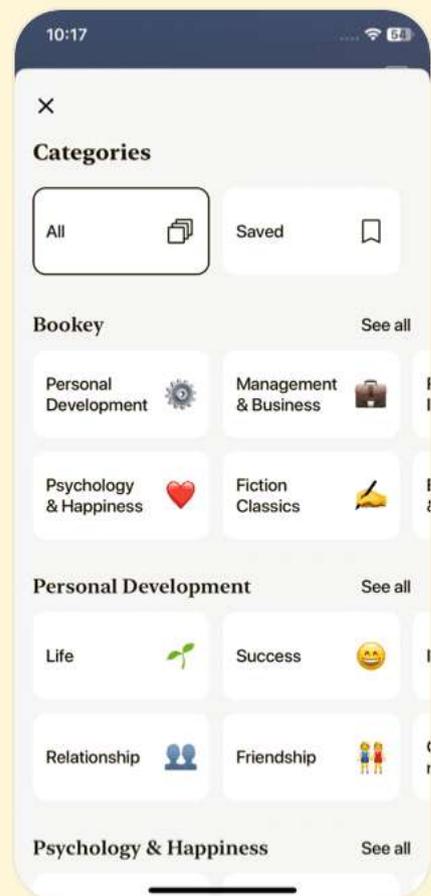
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Chapter 7 | Quotes From Pages 163-187

- 1.If we can't create a mental image of an abstract concept such as time, then how do we think and reason about it?
- 2.Reasoning by metaphor is an ingenious technique that allows us to remedy our weaknesses by capitalizing on our strengths-using things we can visualize to think, talk, and reason about things we can't.
- 3.Among life's cruelest truths is this one: Wonderful things are especially wonderful the first time they happen, but their wonderfulness wanes with repetition.
- 4.The point here is that time and variety are two ways to avoid habituation, and if you have one, then you don't need the other.
- 5.When we reason by metaphor and think of a dozen successive meals in a dozen successive months as though they were a dozen dishes arranged on a long table in front of us, we mistakenly treat sequential alternatives as though they were simultaneous alternatives.



6. We make mistakes when we compare with the past instead of the possible.

Chapter 8 | Quotes From Pages 188-211

1. For there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.
2. the absence of grief is quite normal, and that rather than being the fragile flowers that a century of psychologists have made us out to be, most people are surprisingly resilient in the face of trauma.
3. most folks do pretty darn good when things go pretty darn bad.
4. the human mind tends to exploit ambiguity
5. We cannot do without reality and we cannot do without illusion.
6. we may live at the fulcrum of stark reality and comforting illusion.

Chapter 9 | Quotes From Pages 212-237

1. Our psychological immune system... prefers to smooth over unpleasant experiences rather than



face them squarely.

2. When we contemplate being hung out to dry this way, we naturally generate the most dreadful possible view of the experience; but once we've actually been heartbroken and humiliated, our brains begin shopping for a less dreadful view.

3. Intense suffering triggers the very processes that eradicate it, while mild suffering does not.

4. Our relentless desire to explain everything that happens may well distinguish us from fruit flies, but it can also kill our buzz.

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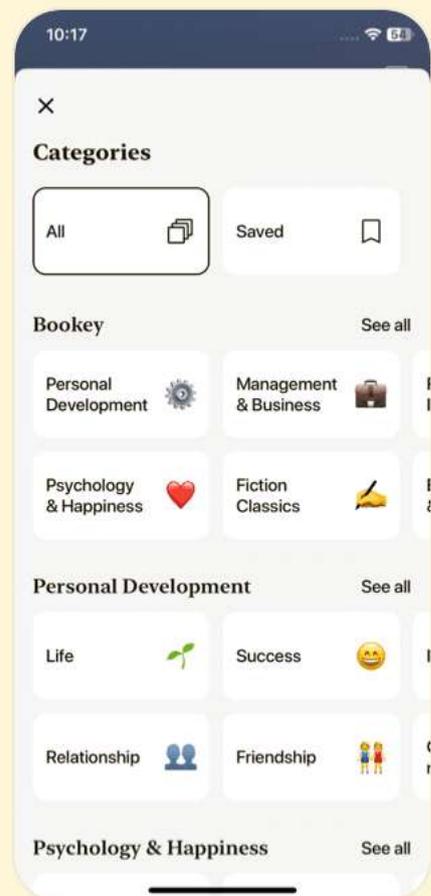
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Chapter 10 | Quotes From Pages 238-255

1. Firsthand knowledge and secondhand knowledge are the only two kinds of knowledge there are, and no matter what task we master—pooping, cooking, investing, bobsledding—that mastery is always a product of direct experience and/or of listening to those who have had direct experience.
2. All's Well I recently had an argument with my wife, who insisted that I like the movie *Schindler's List*. Now, let me be clear: She was not insisting that I would like the film or that I should like the film. She was insisting that I do like the film, which we saw together in 1993. This struck me as supremely unfair.
3. The fact that we often judge the pleasure of an experience by its ending can cause us to make some curious choices.
4. Our brains use facts and theories to make guesses about past events, and so too do they use facts and theories to make guesses about past feelings.
5. Our inability to recall how we really felt is one of the



reasons why our wealth of experience so often turns out to be a poverty of riches.

Chapter 11 | Quotes From Pages 256-281

1. The future's not ours to see. Que sera, sera.
2. We should ask the teacher.
3. We all make ample use of this resource.
4. Given the overabundance of consultants, role models, gurus, mentors, yentas, and nosy relatives...
5. Does a stitch in time save nine?
6. If we can not travel in the dimension of time, we can travel in the dimensions of space...
7. Every human culture tells its members that having children will make them happy.
8. The production of wealth does not necessarily make individuals happy, but it does serve the needs of an economy...
9. Our belief in the variability of others and in the uniqueness of the self is the main reason why we refuse to use others as surrogates.





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Chapter 1 | Journey to Elsewhen| Q&A

1.Question

What is the defining feature of humanity according to the author?

Answer: The human being is the only animal that thinks about the future. This unique capacity distinguishes us from other animals who, while they may act as though they are looking ahead, do not consciously contemplate potential future events.

2.Question

What is the most remarkable achievement of the human brain?

Answer: The greatest achievement of the human brain is its ability to imagine things that do not exist and to envision possibilities that have not yet occurred, allowing for the concept of 'making future.' This is what enables humans to think about alternatives and plan ahead.

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3.Question

How do animals like squirrels and sea slugs demonstrate a form of future thinking?

Answer:Squirrels bury nuts in anticipation of needing food later, and sea slugs can learn to predict events to avoid shocks. However, these actions are instinctual and do not imply a conscious thought process about the future, as they do not possess the ability to reflect on their actions or consider longer-term consequences.

4.Question

Why is childhood understanding of the future limited?

Answer:Children often struggle to provide accurate answers to questions like 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' because they do not fully grasp the concept of 'later' or 'the future' in the way adults do.

5.Question

What implications does frontal lobe development have on human behavior?

Answer:The frontal lobe, which has expanded significantly in humans compared to other species, is critical for planning



and thinking about the future. Damage to this area can impair a person's ability to foresee events, reflecting its role in our capacity to navigate future scenarios.

6.Question

How does thinking about the future affect human emotion?

Answer:Imagining future scenarios can evoke pleasure, as seen when people daydream about positive outcomes. On the flip side, it can also lead to anxiety as individuals anticipate potential negative events, highlighting the dual nature of our future-oriented thinking.

7.Question

What is the relationship between control and happiness according to the author?

Answer:Humans have a profound need for control, and feeling in control contributes significantly to one's happiness. This desire drives us to think about the future: we forecast potential outcomes to manage and steer our lives toward desired paths.



8.Question

Why do people often overestimate the likelihood of positive future events?

Answer:People's tendency to vividly imagine positive outcomes leads them to believe these favorable scenarios are more likely to occur, resulting in an optimistic outlook on their futures.

9.Question

What does the author suggest about the inadequacies of our imagination in predicting future events?

Answer:Imagination is prone to illusions; it tends to produce overly optimistic or simplistic views of the future, making it difficult for us to accurately foresee the complexities and changes that actual future events may present.

10.Question

What does the author intend to demonstrate in the future sections of the book?

Answer:The author plans to explore the illusions of foresight, discussing how our imagination works, the limitations of our predictability, and ultimately how we navigate life towards



our assumed futures that may not align with reality.

Chapter 2 | The View from in Here| Q&A

1.Question

What does happiness mean, and how is it subjective?

Answer:Happiness is a complex term that refers to an array of subjective feelings and experiences, making it difficult to define universally. It can be categorized as emotional happiness, moral happiness, and judgmental happiness, where emotional happiness pertains to personal feelings of joy or pleasure that cannot be objectively quantified. This subjectivity means that different individuals might interpret their experiences of happiness differently.

2.Question

How do the experiences of Lori and Reba challenge our understanding of happiness?

Answer:Lori and Reba, conjoined twins who have lived their entire lives together, claim to be happy despite their unique



circumstances, which challenges conventional beliefs about happiness being tied to independence and 'normal' life experiences. Their perspective forces us to reconsider our assumptions about what constitutes a valuable life experience and the basis of happiness.

3.Question

Why do some people doubt the happiness of conjoined twins?

Answer: People may dismiss Lori and Reba's happiness because they lack experiences typically associated with happiness—like independence and a range of life experiences. This perspective reflects a bias that assumes one must have certain 'normal' life experiences to genuinely feel happy, which illustrates how societal views can color individual perceptions.

4.Question

What is the 'language-squishing hypothesis' regarding happiness?

Answer: The language-squishing hypothesis suggests that



individuals with limited life experiences may express their happiness differently than those with richer experiences, potentially leading to misunderstandings about the degree of their happiness. It implies that if someone has not experienced a wide range of emotions or situations, their capacity to articulate their happiness is limited, which can distort communication about their feelings.

5.Question

Why is it important to differentiate between emotional happiness and moral or judgmental happiness?

Answer: Differentiating between these types of happiness is crucial because it helps clarify discussions about what people truly feel versus what they 'should' feel based on societal norms or moral standards. Emotional happiness relates to personal feelings, while moral and judgmental happiness often refer to beliefs about the appropriateness or value of those feelings, thus leading to potential misconceptions or biases.

6.Question

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How does the author illustrate the challenge of accurately comparing happiness between people?

Answer: The author highlights that true comparison of happiness across different individuals is nearly impossible because personal experiences shape each person's understanding and expression of happiness. Using analogies like color perception or taste, it becomes clear that without direct, comparable experiences, subjective feelings cannot be universally measured or understood.

7.Question

What key message can be taken from Shackleton's experience about happiness in extreme situations?

Answer: Shackleton's experience suggests that happiness can exist even in dire circumstances. His ability to feel happiness amidst perilous conditions exemplifies that happiness is not solely about favorable circumstances but can arise from camaraderie, resilience, and a focus on the present moment, showcasing the diverse ways happiness can manifest.

8.Question

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What is the overarching theme of the chapter regarding happiness?

Answer: The overarching theme underscores that happiness is deeply subjective, shaped by individual experiences and perspectives. The chapter encourages a more nuanced understanding of happiness that goes beyond conventional metrics, recognizing that people can find joy in different circumstances and that happiness can be experienced in many forms.

Chapter 3 | Outside Looking In| Q&A

1.Question

Can we be mistaken about our own emotional experiences?

Answer: Yes, research indicates that individuals can misinterpret their emotional responses. For example, physical arousal from fear can be mistaken for sexual attraction, suggesting that our understanding of feelings is complex and often prone to error.



2.Question

How do our brains process frightening situations?

Answer:Our brains prioritize immediate reactions over the identification of objects. In a threatening situation, like encountering a rabid wolverine, our brains quickly assess whether a response is needed, heightening physiological arousal before we fully identify what we're dealing with.

3.Question

What does the experience of crossing a shaky bridge illustrate about emotions?

Answer:The study of young men crossing a swaying bridge shows that physiological arousal can be misattributed. Men interviewed during the crossing felt heightened arousal from fear and misidentified it as attraction when responding to an attractive woman, highlighting how context influences emotional interpretation.

4.Question

Is it possible to feel an emotion and not be aware of it?

Answer:Yes, it's possible to experience emotions without conscious awareness. People with conditions like alexithymia



may feel emotions but lack the language or awareness to identify them accurately.

5.Question

What does 'numbfeel' imply regarding emotional awareness?

Answer: Numbfeel refers to a state where individuals may experience emotions like happiness or sadness without being aware of those feelings. It's a disconnection between emotional experience and self-awareness.

6.Question

Why is measuring happiness so challenging?

Answer: Measuring subjective experiences like happiness is complicated because individuals can have differing interpretations of their feelings, and their self-reports may not align with physiological indicators. This makes it difficult to ascertain a universally applicable measure of happiness.

7.Question

How can large sample sizes help in understanding subjective experiences?

Answer: Using large sample sizes allows researchers to



average responses, which helps mitigate individual biases and inaccuracies. This collective data can reveal trends that may not be visible when examining individuals alone.

8.Question

What philosophical way can we define 'good'?

Answer:Philosopher Plato suggested that things are considered good primarily because they lead to pleasure or help avoid pain. Therefore, understanding human feelings and experiences is essential when assessing what is deemed valuable or meaningful.

9.Question

How does awareness affect our experiences?

Answer:Awareness and experience are processed in different parts of the brain. A person can have an experience without being aware of it, as demonstrated by conditions like blindsight, where individuals can respond to stimuli without conscious recognition.

10.Question

What foundational principles must we accept to measure subjective experiences effectively?



Answer:First, we must accept that all measuring tools will have imperfections. Secondly, the real-time report of an individual is our best measure of subjective experience. Lastly, recognizing imperfections in measurement allows for better interpretation of findings and often requires large sample sizes to account for variability in responses.

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Chapter 4 | In the Blind Spot of the Mind's Eye| Q&A

1.Question

Why did Adolph Fischer claim to be happy on the day he was executed?

Answer:Adolph Fischer, despite facing death, expressed that it was the happiest moment of his life because he felt that his sacrifice would lead to justice and equity in the workplace. This suggests that the meaning he found in standing for his beliefs outweighed the fear of death.

2.Question

What can we learn from the contrasting lives of Adolph Fischer and George Eastman?

Answer:The contrast highlights how subjective perceptions of happiness can differ greatly, demonstrating that outward success does not equate to inner fulfillment. Fischer found joy in his convictions even at the end of a tragic life, whereas Eastman, despite his achievements, succumbed to despair, suggesting that true fulfillment comes from internal states



rather than external achievements.

3.Question

How does imagination influence our predictions about future happiness?

Answer:Imagination can create detailed scenarios that feel real and influence our expectations about future experiences. However, we often neglect to realize that these imaginings may not accurately represent reality, leading us to make poor predictions about what will truly make us happy.

4.Question

What is the 'filling-in trick' and how does it affect our perceptions of the future?

Answer:The 'filling-in trick' refers to the brain's tendency to automatically fill in gaps in our memories and perceptions, making experiences seem complete. When we imagine the future, we often readily accept these fictionalized scenarios as accurate, which can skew our understanding of potential happiness.

5.Question

What mistake do we often make when considering how

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we would feel in someone else's situation?

Answer: We tend to project our own biases and imagined details into their circumstances without recognizing that their experiences are unique. This misjudgment can lead us to dismiss the complexity of their emotions and situations based solely on our preconceived notions of happiness.

6.Question

Why is it important to recognize the limitations of our imagination?

Answer: Recognizing the limitations of our imagination is essential because it allows us to approach decision-making with humility and caution. Acknowledging that our imagined scenarios may not fully capture reality can help us avoid pitfalls in predicting our emotional responses to future events.

7.Question

How does the human brain's tendency to 'make stuff up' play a role in our everyday lives?

Answer: This tendency can lead to inaccuracies in our beliefs



and memories, influencing everything from personal relationships to life choices, as we often act based on a constructed reality rather than the actual details of our experiences.

Chapter 5 | The Hound of Silence| Q&A

1.Question

What important lesson did Sherlock Holmes teach us through the curious incident of the dog that didn't bark?

Answer:Holmes illustrated that inattention to absences can lead to missed insights. The dog's silence indicated familiarity, suggesting the thief was known. This teaches us to consider not just what happens, but what doesn't happen to understand the full picture.

2.Question

How does the behavior of pigeons help us understand human thinking regarding absence?

Answer:Pigeons can easily notice the presence of food but struggle to learn from the absence of cues. Similarly, humans



often find it easier to focus on what is present than what is missing, leading to biased judgments in decision making.

3.Question

Why is understanding absence crucial for making accurate predictions in our lives?

Answer: Ignoring what is absent can lead to incorrect conclusions. For example, when evaluating risks, like getting hit by pigeons, we must consider both the instances of being hit and not being hit to accurately assess the situation.

4.Question

In what way does our imagination fail when predicting future feelings or events?

Answer: We tend to visualize future events with vivid details but overlook aspects we can't imagine, leading us to misestimate the emotional impact of those events. We often imagine the significant negative aspects but forget everyday life will continue with both positive and mundane experiences.

5.Question

How does this chapter highlight the shortcomings of

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human imagination?

Answer:It shows that while imagination can fill in details, it also leaves out critical information. This results in a misunderstanding of the future, leading to inaccurate predictions about happiness and emotional responses.

6.Question

What does the example of Californians vs. Ohioans reveal about our biases in perception?

Answer:People believe Californians must be happier due to idealized mental images of California. However, they often ignore negative details such as cost of living and traffic, which can counterbalance the perceived advantages.

7.Question

How does the perspective of a Pygmy highlight the importance of understanding context in perception?

Answer:The Pygmy's mix-up of buffalo for insects exemplifies how lack of exposure to diverse contexts can warp perception. It emphasizes that a limited view restricts understanding, whether spatially or temporally.



8.Question

What emotional implications can arise from our tendency to overlook future details?

Answer:When predicting emotional responses, like after a tragic event, failing to consider the ongoing life experiences can lead to an exaggerated expectation of one's grief, neglecting the natural resilience and continued enjoyment of life.

9.Question

How can understanding 'presentism' help in our decision-making processes?

Answer:Recognizing that current experiences shape our views of the past and future can prevent us from being overly influenced by present emotions, allowing for more rational thinking about both historical events and future possibilities.

Chapter 6 | The Future Is Now| Q&A

1.Question

How do our perceptions of the present influence our predictions about the future?

Answer:Our perceptions of the present can heavily



bias our predictions about the future, leading us to fill in gaps in our memories and imaginations with current feelings and experiences. This phenomenon, known as presentism, makes it challenging to detach our current state from our imagined future, such as feeling full after a big meal and predicting that we won't want to eat again for a while. Our emotional reactions to current events can distort our ability to forecast how we will feel in different circumstances.

2.Question

Why is it difficult for people to accurately predict their future desires or feelings?

Answer: People struggle to accurately predict future desires or feelings due to the 'Reality First' policy of the brain, where real-time experiences take precedence over imagined scenarios. For example, if someone is currently hungry, they might assume that hunger will always dominate their feelings, which can lead them to underestimate future appetites. This leads to a disconnect when trying to envision



how they might feel in future situations versus how they feel in the present.

3.Question

What role does imagination play in our emotional responses to future events?

Answer:Imagination plays a crucial role in forming our emotional responses to future events by simulating experiences in our minds. These thought simulations trigger emotional reactions similar to those we would have in real-life situations, providing a way to forecast our feelings. However, because our current emotional state influences these simulations, they often lead to misconceptions about how we will truly feel when the event occurs.

4.Question

How can the misunderstanding of presentism impact decision-making?

Answer:Misunderstandings stemming from presentism can lead to poor decision-making, as individuals may ignore their prefeelings—emotional reactions to imagined future



events—in favor of logical reasoning. For instance, when choosing between options (like art pieces), nonthinkers who trust their gut feelings typically make choices that result in greater satisfaction compared to thinkers who rely solely on logic and analysis.

5.Question

What is the significance of the 'Reality First' policy in our cognitive processing?

Answer:The 'Reality First' policy emphasizes that our brain prioritizes real experiences over imagined ones, which significantly influences how we feel about future events. This policy leads us to confuse our present feelings with our imagined future scenarios, making it challenging to envision how we might react differently under new circumstances, potentially limiting our capacity for optimistic or effective forecasting.

6.Question

Can you provide an example of how our current emotional state affects our future predictions?



Answer: Certainly! If someone is feeling upset after a confrontation, they might predict that spending time with friends the next day will be unenjoyable because their current mood casts a shadow on their expectations. They are unable to separate their current negative feelings from what might actually be a fun and enjoyable gathering, showcasing how present emotions can cloud future perceptions.

7. Question

What insight can we gain about imagination and emotional forecasting from Gilbert's discussion?

Answer: Gilbert's discussion reveals that while our imagination is a powerful tool for visualizing and predicting future events and emotions, it is often hampered by our current emotional states and the difficulty of detaching from the present moment. This insight encourages us to be aware of how our feelings may influence our perceptions of the future and to question whether our current experiences are genuinely reflective of future possibilities.





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Chapter 7 | Time Bombs| Q&A

1.Question

How do we perceive time, and what challenges does this pose for predicting future feelings?

Answer: We perceive time abstractly, often

imagining it as a spatial dimension. This challenges

our ability to accurately predict future feelings

because we can easily visualize concrete experiences

but struggle with the abstract concept of time.

Consequently, we may overestimate how current

emotions will translate to future experiences.

2.Question

Why is variety considered the spice of life in some contexts but detrimental in others?

Answer: Variety enhances pleasure when experiences occur in close succession (like a meal), as it prevents habituation.

However, when similar experiences are spaced out in time,

seeking variety can diminish satisfaction because the joy of

newness diminishes when we wait long enough between



repetitions.

3.Question

What is 'presentism' and how does it affect our predictions about future happiness?

Answer:Presentism is the tendency to evaluate past events through the lens of current standards or feelings, leading us to incorrectly project our present feelings into the future.

This can cause us to underestimate how different we may feel at a later date, impacting our decision-making and happiness.

4.Question

How can we improve our ability to imagine future experiences?

Answer:To enhance our capacity to predict future experiences accurately, we should consciously consider how our current feelings, expectations, and comparisons will change over time. By recognizing that our future selves will view the world differently than we do now, we can make better-informed decisions.

5.Question

What is the 'flip-then-flop' method, and how does it

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influence our ability to judge future experiences?

Answer: The 'flip-then-flop' method refers to a cognitive process where we first generate an impression based on current feelings (the flip) before adjusting that impression for future considerations (the flop). This can lead us to make poor predictions about how enjoyable future experiences will be because we might not effectively account for changing circumstances.

6.Question

Why do people often prefer a stable income trajectory over a higher initial salary followed by cuts?

Answer: People tend to favor a steady increase in income because they are more sensitive to losses than gains, a phenomenon rooted in our psychological tendency to feel the impact of negative changes more profoundly than positive ones, regardless of the overall amounts involved.

7.Question

What role does comparison play in determining value and satisfaction?



Answer: Comparison influences our subjective valuation of experiences or items significantly. When we evaluate something based on relative changes rather than absolute qualities, such as comparing a current experience to past ones rather than potential future ones, we can make unwise choices and miss out on greater satisfaction.

8.Question

How does time separation affect our perception of experiences, such as food or relationships?

Answer: When experiences are appropriately spaced in time, they retain their desirability and avoid the diminishing returns associated with habituation. For example, savoring a dish once a year versus every day preserves its perceived pleasure and novelty.

9.Question

What can we learn about making better decisions for future happiness from understanding time and variety?

Answer: Understanding the importance of time and how our anticipation of variety might mislead us helps us make more



satisfying choices. We should aim to maximize the time between similar experiences and be cautious about judgement based solely on present feelings.

Chapter 8 | Paradise Glossed| Q&A

1.Question

How do people tend to evaluate their happiness and well-being after experiencing trauma?

Answer:Most people underestimate their resilience and overestimate the negative impact of traumatic events on their happiness. Research shows that while negative events do affect us, the impact isn't as severe or long-lasting as we expect. Many individuals claim that their lives were enhanced after going through significant hardships.

2.Question

What does recent research suggest about our ability to cope with grief and trauma?

Answer:Contrary to past beliefs, many people show high resilience following traumatic events, experiencing relatively



low levels of distress for short durations. Most bereaved individuals feel sad but do not develop chronic depression.

3.Question

Why is it difficult for people to believe that someone can feel enriched after a serious misfortune?

Answer: The human mind finds it challenging to accept that negative events can lead to positive outcomes because we tend to project our own fears and discomfort onto those experiences. Our imaginations lead us to estimate greater unhappiness than those who actually experience the trauma.

4.Question

What role does the human mind play in interpreting experiences?

Answer: The human mind actively disambiguates experiences. Just as context matters for understanding words, it also influences how we perceive life events. Our individual desires and needs can shift our interpretations toward more positive outcomes.

5.Question

How do people maintain a positive view of themselves

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despite failures or setbacks?

Answer: People selectively seek and interpret information that supports a positive self-image. They often ignore or reinterpret negative feedback and experiences to align with their desired self-perception.

6.Question

What does the author mean by saying we have a 'psychological immune system'?

Answer: The psychological immune system helps us defend against unhappiness by balancing our perceptions of reality and illusion. It allows us to feel good enough to cope while ensuring we remain grounded in reality.

7.Question

Why do people often latch onto positive interpretations of their circumstances?

Answer: Experiences are inherently ambiguous, and people tend to find a positive view of things that affect them personally, as this enhances their coping mechanisms and overall happiness.



8.Question

How does the act of cooking facts contribute to our self-perception?

Answer: We often filter information through our preferences. For instance, when evaluating our abilities or experiences, we selectively focus on facts that bolster our self-esteem and overlook those that don't.

9.Question

In what ways do context, frequency, and recency matter in how we interpret experience?

Answer: Context provides surrounding information to inform interpretation, frequency shapes our expectations based on past experiences, and recency influences which meanings are active in our minds at the moment.

10.Question

What is the significance of how we see our past decisions or experiences?

Answer: Once we have made decisions, we tend to evaluate those decisions more positively than we might have done before. This applies to everything from product purchases to



relationships, reinforcing our self-esteem.

Chapter 9 | Immune to Reality| Q&A

1.Question

How does the experience of Clever Hans illustrate the limits of our understanding of reality?

Answer:Clever Hans seemed to perform remarkable feats, but his abilities were rooted in his owner's unconscious signals, not in genuine intelligence. This illustrates how we may mistaken correlations for causations, often unaware of the underlying influences shaping our judgments. Just as Clever Hans read his owner's body language, we may unconsciously interpret our experiences through biases and misperceptions, limiting our grasp of reality.

2.Question

What does the author mean by the term 'psychological immune system'?

Answer:The psychological immune system refers to our



cognitive processes that help us cope with psychological pain and adversity. It operates largely unconsciously, helping us find silver linings during bad experiences and allowing us to rationalize our choices to maintain a positive self-image.

3.Question

Why might people derive more satisfaction from inescapable circumstances compared to escapable ones?

Answer:When circumstances are inescapable, our psychological immune system is triggered to generate positive interpretations and rationalizations about the experience. Conversely, when we have the option to escape a situation, we are more critical and less satisfied because we tend to focus on the possibility of alternatives and what we might have done differently.

4.Question

How does the distinction between actions and inactions impact our feelings of regret?

Answer:Studies show that people generally regret inactions more than actions. This is primarily because it's easier for



our psychological immune system to rationalize decisions made (even if they end poorly) than to find consolation for opportunities passed by, leading to a deeper, lingering regret over things left undone.

5.Question

What role does explanation play in shaping our emotional responses?

Answer:Explanations help us create narratives around our experiences that allow us to process them emotionally. When we can explain an event or circumstance, we feel a sense of closure and are able to move on more easily; unexplained events, however, leave us in a state of mystery and continued contemplation which can prolong happiness or distress.

6.Question

In what ways do we mispredict our emotional reactions to future events?

Answer:We often overestimate the intensity and duration of our future distress because we cannot foresee how effectively our psychological immune systems will work to generate a



positive outlook. Additionally, we fail to recognize how some circumstances will allow our defenses to trigger optimistically and help mitigate our suffering.

7.Question

What is the significance of the horse Clever Hans in the context of human self-deception?

Answer:Clever Hans's story reveals how easily humans can deceive themselves and others about their own capabilities. It shows that while we think we perceive and assess reality accurately, many factors—like subconscious cues—can distort our understanding, leading to unwarranted confidence in our judgments.

8.Question

What does the author imply about our perception of choices and opportunities?

Answer:The author suggests that while we frequently crave freedom and options, the act of having the ability to change decisions can lead to dissatisfaction. This is due to the fact that uncertainty can dilute our satisfaction with whatever



choice we ultimately make, due to an ongoing comparison with the potential of other choices.

9.Question

How does the text connect the ideas of regret with our decision-making processes?

Answer:Regret influences our decision-making as we often avoid choices that could lead to regretful outcomes, such as declining marriage proposals. Our theories about when and why we feel regret guide us, but they can also mislead us, as we tend to underestimate the ability of our psychological immune system to cope with bad decisions.

10.Question

In what ways do humans react differently to interpersonal rejection depending on the context?

Answer:Humans perceive rejection from a single judge as more palatable because it offers a human scapegoat, allowing for self-rationalization. In contrast, collective rejection from a jury feels more personal and devastating, as it lacks an identifiable scapegoat and provokes a stronger emotional



response, thus demonstrating how context influences our emotional resilience.

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Alex Walk

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Chapter 10 | Once Bitten| Q&A

1.Question

Why do we not learn from our mistakes, especially when it comes to predicting happiness?

Answer:Despite having firsthand experiences and advice from others, we continue to make errors in predicting what will make us happy because our memories often misrepresent past experiences. We tend to remember only the most vivid or unusual moments rather than the typical outcomes, leading us to make poor predictions about future happiness. For instance, recalling that one perfect moment on a vacation can overshadow a series of disappointing experiences.

2.Question

How does memory influence our perception of events?

Answer:Memory acts like an editor, favoring certain elements and often distorting our true feelings about past events. We might remember a movie we partially enjoyed



negatively due to a bad ending, even if the majority of the film was good. This bias leads us to form opinions about experiences based on the most intense moments rather than on a balanced view of the whole.

3.Question

What is the 'peak-end rule' and how does it impact our decisions?

Answer:The 'peak-end rule' suggests that we evaluate experiences largely based on the most intense moment (the peak) and the final event (the end). For example, a painful experience may be remembered as less painful if it ended positively, influencing our future choices. This could explain why we might choose to repeat a more painful experience with a positive ending, rather than opting for a shorter, more painful experience.

4.Question

How do our beliefs and social theories shape our memories?

Answer:Our beliefs about how people of different genders or



cultures experience emotions can bias our memory of our own feelings. For instance, men may underestimate their emotional responses while women may overestimate them due to societal stereotypes, altering how they recall their past emotions.

5.Question

Why do people fail to accurately predict their emotional responses to significant events, such as elections?

Answer:People often overestimate how happy or sad events will make them feel due to preconceived notions and theories about expected happiness. After the event, they may also misremember their actual emotional responses, reinforcing those inaccurate beliefs.

6.Question

How can we improve our understanding of our emotional experiences?

Answer:Awareness of the biases in our memory and predictions can help. Seeking out diverse perspectives and reflecting on a broader range of experiences—not just the



highs and lows—can lead to a more accurate understanding of what brings us happiness.

Chapter 11 | Reporting Live from Tomorrow| Q&A

1.Question

How can we accurately predict our future happiness according to the chapter?

Answer:Instead of relying on our imagination, we can ask others who are currently experiencing what we are contemplating about their feelings. This method, referred to as surrogation, allows us to gather accurate predictions of our future emotional states based on their experiences.

2.Question

Why do people often make poor life decisions despite having access to the collective knowledge of others?

Answer:People make poor life decisions because they either accept bad advice or reject good advice. Additionally, many individuals have an inflated sense of their uniqueness, believing their experiences and feelings will differ from



those of others, which leads them to ignore valuable insights.

3.Question

What role does society play in shaping beliefs about happiness?

Answer:Society perpetuates certain beliefs about happiness, such as the idea that money or having children will bring joy, even if those beliefs are not entirely accurate. This propagation occurs because these beliefs often support social structures and expectations, encouraging behaviors that may not lead to individual happiness.

4.Question

What is a key finding from research that challenges the assumption that individual experiences are unique and different?

Answer:Research shows that despite a tendency to view ourselves as unique, emotional reactions among people are often quite similar. This suggests that using others' reports to gauge our future feelings can be more reliable than relying solely on our imagination.

5.Question

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How has the concept of 'economies' been linked to our beliefs about wealth and happiness?

Answer: The chapter argues that while wealth does provide happiness to a point (like lifting someone out of poverty), it does not guarantee happiness beyond a certain level. People's belief that pursuing wealth will lead to happiness motivates them to work, thus sustaining the economy, even when their personal happiness does not increase with greater wealth.

6.Question

Why is imagination considered a flawed tool for predicting future happiness?

Answer: Imagination often fails to consider all aspects of a future event, leads to present biases, and may overlook how our perceptions change after experiences. Therefore, it tends to result in inaccurate predictions about how we will feel.

7.Question

What does the chapter suggest about the impact of cultural wisdom on individual happiness?

Answer: Cultural wisdom can be misleading as it often



promotes beliefs that support societal norms rather than reflecting true sources of happiness. For example, the belief that children inherently bring joy can overshadow the challenges of parenthood, thereby distorting individual experiences.

8.Question

What is the 'belief transmission game' described in the chapter?

Answer:The belief transmission game illustrates how beliefs are passed from one person to another and how some beliefs, even if inaccurate, can thrive if they promote social stability or cohesion. This is why incorrect beliefs can spread widely despite lacking factual support.

9.Question

How does the chapter address the misconception that our thoughts alone can predict future emotional states?

Answer:It highlights that thoughts can be filled with biases and inaccuracies, indicating that relying solely on our imagination is often less effective than seeking the emotional



insights of others who have experienced similar situations.

10.Question

What is the overarching message regarding the pursuit of happiness presented in this chapter?

Answer: The chapter emphasizes that understanding the experiences of others and using their insights can significantly enhance our capacity to make informed decisions about our own paths toward happiness, countering the limitations of our imagination.

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Stumbling on Happiness Quiz and Test

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Chapter 1 | Journey to Elsewhen| Quiz and Test

1. Humans are the only animals that can think about the future.
2. The frontal lobe is unrelated to a person's ability to plan for the future.
3. Envisioning the future can lead to realistic expectations and satisfaction with life.

Chapter 2 | The View from in Here| Quiz and Test

1. Conjoined twins Lori and Reba Schappell lead a joyful life despite societal beliefs that separation would enhance their happiness.
2. Happiness can be universally defined through tangible metrics that apply to everyone without personal context.
3. The language we use can help clarify the emotional state associated with happiness, ensuring accurate communication of how one feels.

Chapter 3 | Outside Looking In| Quiz and Test

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1. People are generally better at recognizing their own emotions than understanding others' emotions.
2. Alexithymia is a condition where individuals find it easy to articulate their feelings.
3. The chapter suggests that subjective self-reports are valuable despite being imperfect tools for measuring emotions.



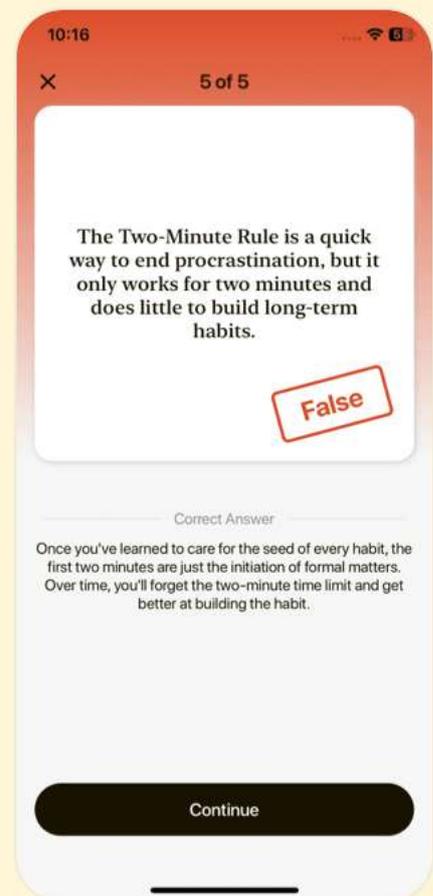


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Chapter 4 | In the Blind Spot of the Mind's Eye| Quiz and Test

1. Adolph Fischer's experience shows that a person can be completely happy even in dire circumstances, such as facing execution.
2. The brain accurately stores all experiences without alteration, preserving them as they happened.
3. Imagination does not play a role in how we perceive happiness based on future scenarios.

Chapter 5 | The Hound of Silence| Quiz and Test

1. Gilbert likens the tendency to overlook absence in decision-making to a dog that fails to bark during a theft.
2. Humans tend to focus on absences in their experiences more than their presences when making judgments.
3. The concept of 'presentism' explains how current experiences influence our perception of both the past and future.

Chapter 6 | The Future Is Now| Quiz and Test



1. Futurist predictions often reflect the author's time rather than actual predictions of the future.
2. Scientists and inventors have consistently made accurate predictions about future advancements throughout history.
3. People often struggle to imagine the future differently from their present circumstances, leading to impulsive choices and distorted recollections.

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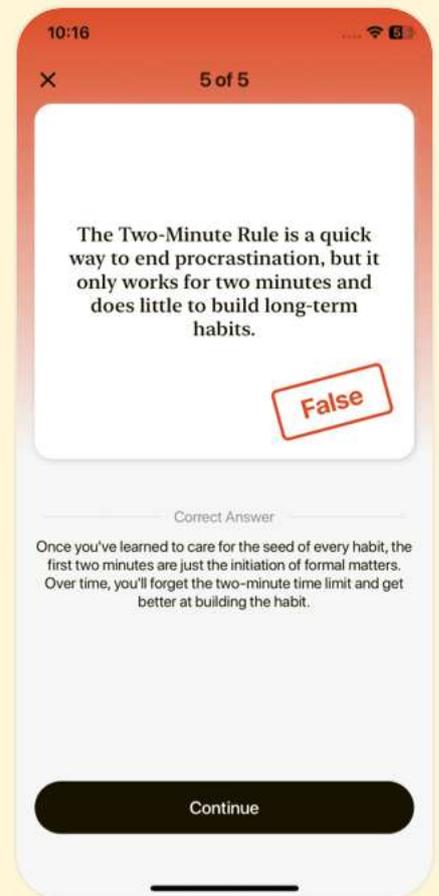


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Chapter 7 | Time Bombs| Quiz and Test

1. Most individuals visualize time as something concrete and straightforward.
2. Experiencing the same enjoyable event repeatedly can enhance satisfaction due to the novelty it brings.
3. Presentism influences how people predict their future happiness by applying current emotions to future experiences.

Chapter 8 | Paradise Glossed| Quiz and Test

1. According to Chapter 8 of 'Stumbling on Happiness', traumatic events always lead to long-term unhappiness.
2. The book suggests that personal interpretations of experiences can lead to a more favorable assessment of those situations.
3. Cognitive bias leads individuals to objectively evaluate all evidence regarding their abilities and experiences.

Chapter 9 | Immune to Reality| Quiz and Test

1. Clever Hans was able to answer questions because



he understood mathematics and current events.

2. People tend to mispredict their emotional responses to future events due to their psychological immune system.

3. Attempts to force positive feelings always lead individuals to feel happier in the moment.

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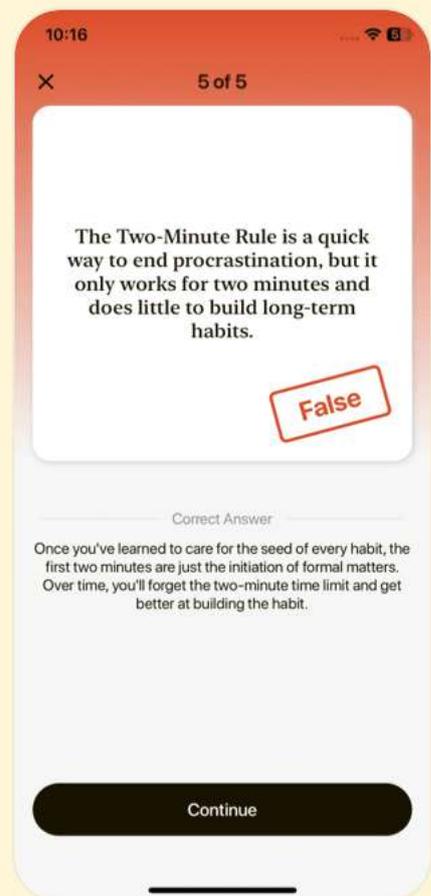


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Chapter 10 | Once Bitten| Quiz and Test

1. Adults learn from their experiences effectively without any mistakes.
2. Memory is a perfect record of our past experiences and helps us accurately assess what will make us happy in the future.
3. The way an experience concludes significantly influences how we remember it.

Chapter 11 | Reporting Live from Tomorrow| Quiz and Test

1. Imagination is a reliable tool for predicting future happiness according to Chapter 11 of 'Stumbling on Happiness'.
2. Seeking information from others who have experienced similar situations can improve our predictions about future emotions.
3. People who rely on their own experiences for happiness predictions are more accurate than those who learn from others' experiences.





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