

So let us finish here. Why be happy when you can be real?

Shall we try something together right now? Put your hand on your heart, feel that living breathing body under your hand. Just notice it. It chases happiness but at what cost. Putting so much pressure on yourself. In this moment you can just be. Look through your eyes around you and see things with clarity, not just the automatic lens of the Secret Director. I am enough, I have enough.

In this podcast, we have walked through the Ashmolean of our lives and minds, looking at different items and pondering their interconnectedness and meaning, life is full of different experiences and emotions. Our life is full of emotional colour and yet focussing on happiness simply might feel like seeing in black and white, a narrow bandwidth. Life is a banquet of emotions, but all we see is that one tantalising delicious meaning that is just out of reach.

I don't have a problem with happiness, it's an experience like any other, but I'm more interested in our relationship with it and how we chase and control happiness to our detriment and increasing unhappiness. It can have a seductive mirage vibe about it, it's just beyond our grasp.

Is happiness is overrated? Probably not. But try not to simply focus on achieving happiness at the cost of other experiences. If we spend too much energy focussed on one thing, our gaze becomes too micro and we lose the bigger focus, the macro.

I feel what really matters is our values and our actions towards others, ourselves, our communities and the world more generally. The movements we start can create wonderful ripples effects outwards. Where we are going. How we are living our lives. Who we are connecting with. Connecting with something bigger. Hope is a vital guiding star in changing what we can change and making some gentle room for things beyond our control.

Is happiness overrated?

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David Whyte writes in his Poem Sometimes:

questions
that have patiently
waited for you,

questions
that have no right
to go away.

Part of our questions could include what we value in terms of wealth and abundance. What is wealth? Not just money. But also, time, social connections and meaning, freedoms, good health, knowledge, mental processing, you name it.

Life is a tension of fluid opposites. Check-in with this balance, this sense of agency and reasonable agency. When can I be more social, and when do I need to withdraw a bit for example. The balance will often fluctuate, as we constantly tune-up this balance, life is the balancing act, not the fixed state of finality. This dovetails into the good-old work life balance, how we look after ourselves during our time at Oxford. Sleep isn't just for the vac. Look after your body, and it will look after your mind too. Your body is more than a vehicle for your brain, so be kind to it.

What makes your time at Oxford meaningful?

As you progress through your studies, your moods will change as life changes around you. Find your own Oxford and engage with it as you wish. Your degree can't give you everything, so try to temper your expectations of yourself and the degree. Oxford is a place of transition, onboarding, staying the course, and then potentially off boarding, enlist support if you wish in managing these different series of transitions.

Be changed by Oxford and make changes to it. You are part of its story.

Happiness will find you. Just don't let it see you looking, be purposeful and focussed on living as fully as you can.