

*****BOOK REVIEW*****

THE ETHICS OF HAPPINESS: AN EXISTENTIAL ANALYSIS

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Reviewer: Marshall H. Lewis

Once in awhile, a book comes along with a thesis that makes such good sense that the reader wonders why the idea was never thought of before. Such is the case with Dr. Stephen J. Costello's *The Ethics of Happiness: An Existential Analysis*. Costello applies Viktor Frankl's three dimensions of the human person – body, mind, and spirit – to states of happiness. The result is that he identifies a state of bodily or somatic happiness that he terms "pleasure," a mental or psychological state of happiness that he simply calls "happiness," and a noetic or spiritual state of happiness that he refers to as "joy." Consequently, a clear voice grounded in Logotherapy and Existential Analysis is heard at a time when there is an explosion of books on the topic of personal happiness.

And yet, Costello's book offers even more. A moderately slim volume with 177 pages of text, it is divided into 15 chapters that make for short, easy-to-digest, and quick-to-read sections. Following an introduction on philosophy and happiness, the first chapter tackles the issue of a science of happiness from a philosophical and ethical perspective. Costello examines trends and concepts in happiness research that are relevant to logotherapy such as neuroscience, positive psychology, and reductionism through the lens of philosophical ethics. In this chapter, Costello also introduces a number of ideas and thinkers that are treated in more depth in the remainder of the book.

The next eight chapters each take a major thinker and provide a brief yet thorough summary of that thinker's contribution to our understanding of the nature of happiness. This is done in a more or less chronological way, beginning with Aristotle and the Aristotelian notion of happiness as a virtue. Other thinkers treated by Costello include Epicurus, Boethius, Aquinas, Pascal, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Freud.

The five chapters that then follow sometimes combine major thinkers depending upon their views on happiness. There is a chapter on Unamuno and Lacan, and another on Lacan and Ricoeur. There is a summary on

Wittgenstein, an additional chapter on Aquinas from a different perspective, and a chapter on Taylor and Lonergan. At this point in the book, the reader has the sense of having received a very good understanding of the major themes, ideas, and philosophical viewpoints related to the nature of human happiness and related ethics.

It is the final chapter on Frankl, however, where this understanding comes to a climax. The final chapter reviews Frankl's position that happiness cannot be pursued, but ensues. Frankl's dialectic between meaning and happiness is fruitfully compared to the work of other contemporary thinkers including Ricoeur, Nietzsche, Lonergan, and, of course, Freud. This dialectic includes, as logotherapists well understand, that the search for meaning is superordinate to the search for happiness. This primacy of meaning to happiness is tied together with an ethical dimension in Costello's presentation. Following a review of key points in Frankl's thought related to the issue, Costello concludes by explicitly formulating an understanding of happiness based on Frankl's dimensional ontology, namely, the triad of pleasure, happiness, and joy introduced above.

Logotherapists will find this book useful in two ways. First, it provides a wider survey of philosophical thought and its relation to logotherapy than is usually found in presentations of logotherapy. The standard texts, as our readers know, often focus on Heidegger and Husserl, and on Freud and Adler. Costello expands this discussion considerably with the inclusion of thinkers both ancient and modern who continue to inform our field, though perhaps not explicitly. Second, by offering a model of happiness based on Frankl's dimensional ontology, it gives logotherapists a point of entry into the current, popular discussion of happiness and positive psychology that is highly consistent and compatible with Frankl's approach. Costello's *The Ethics of Happiness* represents an authentic logotherapeutic voice in the ongoing dialogue.