

Peggy: No, you have other members.

Good evening, everyone.

Female: Woo-hoo, Peggy.

Peggy: Hello. So we are here at another here at another *Happiness* session. Is everyone feeling happy?

Audience: Yes.

Peggy: Great. Wonderful. Wonderful. Well, we have been doing a whole series of *Happiness* sessions that have been moderated by Daniel Gilbert, and I think we've created a little happiness tribe that's been moving about the festival, and there's a number of you that have been here through all of them, so it's been a real pleasure. And it's my delight to introduce our session this evening, which is the "Psychology of Happiness."

And for those of you who've already heard me give my introduction to Daniel Gilbert, I'll just say, briefly, he put together that whole Happiness sessions here at the **Ideas track**. He's a professor of psychology at Harvard University. He wrote *The New York Times'* bestselling, *Stumbling on to Happiness*. He's done a number of PBS series on emotional intelligence and other issues, and he, by happenstance, took a psychology course, which led him into this great passion of his. So we certainly enjoyed having you moderate, and we're looking forward to this evening's session. Thank you so much.

Daniel Gilbert: Thank you, Peggy. Thank you, Peggy. Well, I'm starting to see faces I recognize, so I think I've moderated too many panels today, but this one's a special pleasure for me because as interested as I am in economics and geography and neuroscience and political science, I'm a psychologist. And so finally, I get to introduce and listen to a fellow psychologist. It's hard to introduce **Jon**. When we were setting up, somebody said, "Which guy is the speaker?"

And I said, "It's the gray-haired man over there," and I realized I first met John when he was a graduate student, and I was desperately trying to hire him as a faculty member – that didn't succeed. How he became gray and I became bald in the interim, I'm not quite sure, but it is such a delight.

Jon is just one of the most Catholic, broad-minded, interesting thinkers in psychology today. He began his training as an

anthropologist, moved easily into psychology – these days, could be taken for a political scientist – and he moves between these areas because he has both the curiosity in the intellectual equipment to master them quickly. Jon's latest book – I hope most of you got to hear him speak earlier today on his latest book *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*.

If by chance you missed it, you're lucky because he's going to talk about the book that he wrote before that called *The Happiness Hypothesis*. Without further ado, I'll turn the stage over to you, Jon. Thanks for being here.

Jonathan Haidt:

Oh, thanks. Thanks so much, Dan. I'll just do a little sound check – sound. Okay, the sound sounds good. So as Dan mentioned, my interests are broad, but they're really focused on morality from many different angles. But once I got to the University of Virginia, I was told, "Well, you'll teach the introductory psychology class. That will be your service class."

So I started teaching it, and I tried to explain all of psychology in 24 lectures, and I found myself picking quotes from the ancients or from Thomas Jefferson, who you have to refer to once a year. It's part of your contract at UVA, and I found myself referring to all these quotes from the ancients, and I thought, "Wow, the ancients actually knew a lot of psychology." For a while, when I thought, "Well, if I don't get tenured and I have to leave UVA, what will I do?" and I thought, "I know. I'll write a popular book, and I'll just collect all these aphorisms, and we'll put 'em together and we'll see, 'Are they true?'"

And fortunately, I did get tenured, but I decided to write the book anyway, and – let's see, is that – okay, now the side screens should show the computer. There we are, okay. So I put together all of these quotes, and I wrote a proposal to try to get the book published, and I picked this title – boring but descriptive – *Twelve Great Truths: Insights into Mind and Heart from Ancient Cultures and Modern Psychology*.

I got a contract. I started writing the book. I ran out of time. I had to change the title to *Ten Great Truths: Insights into Mind and Heart*, and for those of you who especially are laughing, I hope you know the Mel Brooks line: "I bring these 15 – these 10 Commandments." Okay, the publishers, then, changed the title – 'cause they get to pick the title – to *The Happiness Hypothesis*.

I said, "Well, what's that? I don't know what the 'happiness hypothesis' is. I'm writing a book on a bunch of ideas, and some of 'em have to do with happiness, but others don't."

But by the time that the book came out, I realized, actually, the book really is about a happiness hypothesis, and that's gonna be the point to my talk today. When I put the book together, I expected certain things to happen. I expected that ideas about human flourishing that were developed in many cultures and many eras were likely to be true. So I expected that they were gonna be true with some conditions and modifications, but what I didn't expect is that these ten, unrelated chapters actually would be tied together by a common theme, and the theme was "relatedness."

So without further ado, let's begin. I'm gonna tell you about three of these ten truths today, and I'll try to put them together into a way which I hope will be useful and will contribute to the happiness track and all the different perspectives that you've gotten in all the sessions that Dan put together for us. So here's the first idea, this is the first chapter in the book. This is probably the most important, single idea in all of psychology. It's the idea that the idea that the mind is divided into parts that sometimes conflict.

So here's one quote illustrating that. In Ovid's "Metamorphoses," Medea is torn between her love for a man and for her father. She says, "I am dragged along by a strange, new force. Desire and reason are pulling in different directions. I see the right way and approve it but follow the wrong." Well, how could that be? If you see the right way and you approve it, why wouldn't you do it?

St. Paul has a similar lament: "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh, so that ye cannot do the things ye would." Well, why not? Why don't ye just do it? Why don't ye just do it? And the answer is because you – or ye – are not really in charge. That is, the "you" that is thinking and seeing and resolving is not really in charge of your behavior. An important idea in psychology is that to think about anything complicated, we tend to take a metaphor from something we know well, and then we apply it to the thing we want to understand.

So if you wanna understand – it's very complicated – you think about it in terms of something you know well. Nowadays, we're all very familiar with machines. We drive cars. If you turn the wheel on the car to the left, it goes to the left. There's no problem, but the ancients didn't have cars. They had animals, and if you tell an animal to go to the left, it may or may not go to the left.

Nowadays, we know that our current metaphor of thinking of our self or a driver in a car – the body is the car. The mind tells the car to go left. It goes left. That actually is not nearly as good as the way the ancients thought about the mind. The ancients had long, long associations with animals. As anybody knows who's watched daytime TV, animals have minds of their own. They do all sorts of things, and you have to try to work with them to try get them to do the things you want them to do. And this, I think, is why animals – in particular elephants – show up quite a lot Buddhist scripture.

I could've certainly taken the metaphor of a man on a horse, but I wanted a metaphor that conveyed an animal that was much larger and much smarter. An elephant is much larger and much smarter than a horse. Here's the way the division works: Our minds are divided into – in many ways – but one of the most divisions is that we have automatic cognitions and controlled cognitions. "Automatic cognition" is all the stuff that neural networks do on their own without any conscious direction.

Our brains are basically animal brains. They've been in development for 400 million years – a lot of product cycles. The automatic processes work extremely efficiently. Our perceptual software, for example, is brilliant. It rarely mistakes. And then sometime – we don't know when – certainly in the last 500,000 years, not before that, I think – we got language, and when we got language, we got these additional abilities to represent things, to see into the future. We got this new ability to do controlled, conscious reasoning processes.

But when that ability came along – some slight tweaks to the brain – did evolution suddenly say, "Oh, we've got this brand new, untested, not-very-reliable ability. Let's hand over control of behavior to that"? No, evolution doesn't work that way. It just makes little tweaks and tinkers to a complex system, and you can get new behaviors out of it.

So most of our mind is automatic. You would call it "intuition" – I think is the best word. It's fast. It's easy. It doesn't really get tired. It's hot. That is, automatic cognition is connected to the parts of the brain that organize behavior. So our automatic processes control our behavior. Even as my hand is moving right now, it's just happening – now it's getting all screwed up because I'm thinking about it, but it was working fine before I started thinking about it, and it's almost all of what goes on.

The controlled processes – so in this metaphor, the rider on the elephant – is our reasoning and language. It's slow. It's cool. It's not connected to motivation, and that's why you can see the right way and approve it, but it doesn't do anything. You still go the wrong way.

Here's an example of automatic vs. controlled perception. This was a photo taken by the 1976 Viking mission to Mars, and as you can see, it shows that there was once a race of giants on Mars, and they got buried under the dust. I mean you see it, right? I mean what else could that be? It's completely compelling.

Here's another photo of the same formation taken by a later mission, and now, I hope you can either see a face or not. Now it's ambiguous. So if you try to see a face, you can, and if you don't, you don't. And here's a more recent mission – a more recent photo from a more recent mission – and now it's very hard to see it. But if you make your eyes go blurry, your perceptual software is guessing. It's always guessing, and you can try to get it to put a reading on, but it's the difference between automatic in the first picture – totally compelling – and control.

Here's another example. If you look at this figure – raise your hand if you see a triangle on three circles. And raise your hand if you see three, sort of, PAC-MEN sitting around talking to each other. Okay. Now, how many of you can see the line; you can just see the faint bit of the line on the triangle where it's not against the black? Raise your hand if you can see that edge.

Okay. There is no edge there, but your brain is guessing. Automatically, your brain is saying, "Well, it looks kinda like a – yeah, it must be a triangle – yeah, yeah." So your brain fills it in automatically. You can't make that go away. Now that you know it's not there, you can't make it go away. It's automatic.

Here's another: We are, as the behaviorist told us, stimulus-response machines. Here's a mother and her child in an art museum, and predictably, in the next scene, the child likes the – anyway, all right. So – and here's another one a little closer to home in terms of the sorts of things we wanna change about ourselves. Raise your hand if you ever exercise in order to make yourself either thinner or healthier. Please raise your hand. Okay, just about everybody.

You can do it the hard way, in which it's almost all dependent on controlled processes where you have to make yourself get on the

thing and stay on the thing, or you can do it the easy way, which is you make a weekly date or a daily date with a friend to show up at a certain point. You're sort of offloading the control of your behavior into your social world. You gotta meet here. You can't just stand her up, so you gotta go.

And once you're there, she's running next to you, and you're influencing her, and she's influencing you, and it's much, much easier and more fun. You're exercising, but now you're relying on controlled processes much less, automatic processes much more.

So the take-home lesson from this first part, this first truth is this: If you want to change yourself, if you want to improve yourself in any way, you gotta think of it as elephant training. Don't just pass a resolution. How many of you make New Year's resolutions? Raise your hand if you've ever made a New Year's resolution, and raise your hand if you've ever made the same resolution two years in a row or more.

You can't just make a resolution. That's just the rider. It's like the U.N. saying, "How many vote to abolish poverty?"

"Yes."

It doesn't do anything. What you have to do is change the elephant, and that is a gradual process of training. Most of you have trained a dog at some point – or a child. You have to develop new habits. Research shows it takes about 12 weeks before a habit becomes much, much easier, before it sticks. Use small but immediate rewards. If you're trying to train a dog, is it better to say, "Here, sit," and if you sit, then you give him a little bit of a dog biscuit, or to say, "If you sit, I'm going to make you a steak, and you're gonna get a steak"?

Okay. If it's a delay of more than five or ten seconds, it's not gonna teach the dog. Rewards work when they happen immediately. So what I would suggest to you, if you wanna start an exercise program and you're having trouble, run to the ice cream store. Jog to an ice cream store and have ice cream. Do that every day for 12 weeks, and by then, it'll be easy, and you won't have to have the ice cream anymore. But that's the way to make a habit stick: reward yourself.

Some of the ways that change our mental habits rather effectively are cognitive therapy, meditation, and self-hypnosis. All of them

are ways of changing the elephant. That's the most effective way to change habits and behaviors of yourself.

Secondly, you don't have to just change the elephant itself inside the elephant. You can change the path. You can get different behavior from a child, from an elephant, or from a coworker by changing the environment. And then without even changing the person, the person will behave differently.

So here, for example, is an amazing finding. Most of you have heard about this book *Connected* by Christakis and Fowler, showing that, of course, happiness is contagious – all sorts of things are contagious – but what they showed, which is so surprising, is that your friends' friends influence you – even people you've never met. Things travel along social circuits.

So what this is, this is a plot of nodes. Each circle is a person, and the lines connect people who know each other. The blue dots are happy people. The – I'm sorry – the yellow dots are happy people. The blue dots are sad people – people who are depressed or depressive, and the green dots are people in the middle. And as you see, the dots are not distributed randomly.

Happy people tend to go together, and a lot of that is a causal effect. If you hang out with happy people, they make you happier, but a lot of that is because they also hang out with other happy people, and the influence skips one or even two steps. So be careful who you hang around with because you are affecting others, and they are affecting you. Right, that's all I'll say about the first truth.

Now let's go on to the second truth, the second great truth that I cover in the book. This is "the" foundation of pop psychology. Right now, I'm going to eliminate the need for you to ever buy a pop psychology book because this is pretty much all the say: "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." That, of course, many of you recognize is from Shakespeare, from *Hamlet*. It was said, a very similar statement from Marcus Aurelius, "The whole universe is change, and life itself is but what you deem it."

A third statement, "We are what we think. All that we are arises with our thoughts. With our thoughts, we make the world," Buddha, and last and most concise of all, "There is no reality, only perception," and that's Dr. Phil. To be a great truth, it has to arise on multiple continents and multiple eras, but what we tend to find

is that these truths occur to everybody who thinks about the human condition.

So what does this mean? When we think about happiness, I think it's really helpful to start with this passage from the Bible, from the Old Testament, from the book of Ecclesiastes, a man who introduces himself as a king in Jerusalem, Koheleth, which I think means teacher. He says, "I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I also had great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who'd been before me in Jerusalem. I gathered for myself silver and gold, the treasures of kings. So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Whatever my eyes desired, I did not keep from them."

Well, that sounds pretty good, but then in the next passage he says, "Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and again, all was vanity and a chasing after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun," the refrain, of course, throughout the text. And we all recognize that, that your objective circumstances can be great, but yet everything can seem empty.

So we could state happiness hypothesis number one is that happiness comes from outside. It comes from getting what you want, and if you're the king in Jerusalem, and you have the dancing women and the gold, and all the things he talks about, well, that's pretty good, but we know that that is far from sufficient. That is not the secret to happiness. So as the first naïve hypothesis, we can eliminate that one fairly quickly, and I'll show you more evidence of that right here.

Many of you have heard this example, so I'll go over it just very briefly: If you were to rate how happy you are, overall, how would you say your life is going these days. On a scale of 1 to 7, pick a number. Go ahead. Think of it, now. What's your number? For most people, it's between 4 and 6. Some people 7. It's usually 5 or 6 or maybe 7.

But suppose you're at a 5, let's say, and now imagine two things that might happen to you. Suppose, first, that you were to win the lottery, and you would be wealthy for the rest of your life. You would never have to worry about how much things cost in the future. Would that change you? Well, look, for the audience I'm talking to, what a silly example. It's not gonna have any effect on you guys, but suppose – suppose that this was some other more representative audience.

Winning the lottery, or conversely, instead of winning the lottery, suppose you fell down the stairs, broke your neck. You're paralyzed for life. You will never feel your lower body. You will never walk. You will never have children – let's say if you haven't had them already – how would this change your happiness over the next five years?

And when I do this with my Psych 101 students, and I ask them to graph out what they think will happen, this is what we generally get: People think that they will be much happier if they win the lottery. Although yeah, you'll come back a little, and you'll be devastated if you're paralyzed. You might come back a little, but five years from now, it'll be extremely different, which of these two events happens to you.

While we don't actually have data on what happens minute by minute or even month by month. Thank God, nobody's ever gone up to somebody, "So you just broke your neck. On a scale of 1 to 7, how do you feel?" But what we can reconstruct from the way people talk about it is that when you win the lottery, yes, you're very happy, but amazingly quickly, you come back down because of adaptation.

So at first, everything is new. You have all these new possibilities. You start going to Whole Foods and spending whatever you want, but after a while, you get used to it. You get used to the fresh squeezed papaya, orange – whatever – squeezed right there for you by massage therapists, and the other thing that happens, though, is that – if you win the lottery, especially – you lose a lot friends and relatives 'cause everybody has a reason to think that you owe them. You lose friends and family. You get divorced. Your relationships really suffer in a lot of cases.

That's not true for earned income, but for the lottery in particular, a lot of bad things happen to you. So five years from now, some people have spent the money wisely, so the line doesn't come back to zero, but for most people, it comes right back to zero – to the baseline, I should say.

Conversely, if you break your neck, it's the mirror-image story. When you wake up in the hospital, you might well say, "Why did you save me? Why did you pull me from the wreckage? Why didn't you let me die? My life is over." But what you discover is that with physical therapy, you can actually not just take in food through a tube. You can actually have a sip of orange juice.

And even that horrible hospital orange juice, with the little foil cover on it, that would be the most delicious thing you've ever tasted because you haven't tasted anything in weeks, and now you can taste again. So you reset your expectations so low, every bit of progress is thrilling. Also, your relationships deepen. You do lose some friends. That's true, but the ones that you keep are really there for you, and those relationships are really much more important than your other objective circumstances.

So just an illustration, Stephen Hawking, interviewed in *The New York Times* by Deborah Solomon, "How do you keep your spirits up?" His answer: My expectations were reduced to 0 when I was 21. Everything since then has been a bonus. So the point here is that major life events matter much less than we expect.

We think, "If I break my neck, if I get into medical school," whatever, "these big things are gonna change my life," but they don't. And this is the important work done by Dan Gilbert and by Tim Wilson on affective forecasting. We're correct about the direction. We know that we'll like it or dislike it, but we're really inaccurate about how long it's gonna affect us.

So Ben Franklin really got it right when he said, "Happiness is produced not so much by great pieces of good fortune that seldom happen as by little advantages that occur every day." All right, let's look at those little advantages. Positive psychology, in a sense, was born in the 1980s with some early work by Ed Diener and who's happy. What are the conditions that cause happiness?

And the first finding from this work was that all the things that you think are gonna matter, don't. So you'd think that young people who are extremely healthy and almost protected from diseases would be happy, whereas when you're in your 60s, your health starts going, friends start dying. By the time you're in your 70s, most people are living with some sort of chronic discomfort.

You'd think that people in their 70s should be less happy than people in their teens and 20s, but it's the exact opposite. The effects are pretty small. Age differences are not very large, but to the extent that there are any, people in their 60s and 70s are the happiest and teenagers are the least happy.

What about men vs. women? Women have higher rates of depression. Women feel more sadness, but they also feel more happiness. Women tend to be more connected. They tend to have

more relationships. Men are more focused on achievement. Relationships are, as I'm saying, the main thing that you need to keep your eye on here. So overall, men and women are about equally happy.

What about race? Black and white and Asian and Hispanic, people inhabit different life spaces. They have different opportunities, but by and large, even though people's lives are different – have different levels openness, threat, opportunity, and health – race differences are tiny.

Well, what about money? This is where most of the research has been, and here, the story's complicated, and it's changing a little bit. What is well known is that in poor countries, rich people are much happier than poor, and also people in rich countries are happier than people in poor countries. So when you look across countries, you find that, but when you focus just on western, industrialized, relatively wealthy countries, what you find is that the correlation between income and happiness is fairly small.

Now Ed Diener found that it was correlation coefficient of .12, which is not 0, but it's not big, and so it was reported in the '90s, especially, money doesn't buy happiness. Once you're over \$30,000.00 – \$40,000.00, additional money doesn't matter. That's an exaggeration. That's not quite true because even though the correlation is not big, you can be 5 or 10 or 20 standard deviations about the mean in wealth. So if the standard is \$10,000.00, well, you can be way, way above, and so it is true that the rich are happier than the middle class, and the middle class are happier than the working class.

The effect is not huge, but it is bigger than was widely reported by the press. My theory is that because journalists tend to make very little money. They jumped all over this finding, and they reported it. They exaggerated it. Also, there is some evidence that maybe the correlation's actually a little bigger than .12.

Importantly, as countries get richer, they do not get happier. Objective circumstances matter very, very little, but relative circumstances do, and that's quite important. We are designed to gain esteem. We want others to think well of us. So succeeding, and money is a measure of success in our society, so people who are higher than others are happier – you know, if everybody moves up, everybody moves down, there's no change in happiness. But relative position does matter.

All right, so as I said, life itself is but what you deem it. Here are two ways to express it that I've shown you. This is one I particularly like from *Auntie Mame*: "Life is a banquet, and some poor sons of bitches are starving to death. Okay, why? What are some people starving to death? Why? Why are some people starving to death?"

Well, most of the answer comes from studies of heritability, studies of twins, which find that even when identical twins are separated at birth, if you measure them in adulthood, they tend to have fairly similar levels of happiness. Everything is heritable to some degree. Happiness is one of the more – or most – heritable personality traits, so heritable, yes.

Because your genes make your brain, your brain is set with a certain balance of approach of motivations or avoidance motivations. Some people threat more often. Some people feel drawn to things. They see more opportunity. So that's a function of your brain. Your brain is made by your genes, and people who have more approach, people who seize opportunities, these people tend to be happier.

And in the '90s, it was reported that it's as though we all have a thermostat setting, and no matter what you do, you can go up or down, but you're gonna come right back to that thermostat setting. And it was even claimed that trying to make yourself lastingly happier is like trying to make yourself lastingly taller, but that turns out to be an exaggeration. It's not really true.

I'll get to that in a moment. I just wanna first just finish this point here that the people who are really high on the distribution, on the normal distribution, it's as though they won a lottery, their – a cortical lottery, a frontal, cortical lottery. They inherited brains that are going to do them very, very well in a modern, open society such as ours. So yes, as I said, happiness is stable and highly heritable.

When I say, "Happy people won the lottery," what I mean is this: Research shows that people who are high on average happiness level have more friends. They get married earlier. They are less like to get divorced. They live longer. If something bad happens to them, they recover faster. Not only do they recover, they grow from it. They come out better on the other side, and they're more successful in most lines of work.

Why? Well, who would you rather buy from, a happy salesman or a sour one? Who does the boss wanna promote, the happy person or the sad one? Happy people throw themselves into projects more fully. They live in what has been called the realm of possibility.

The one exception that's been found is lawyers. You don't wanna go to lawyer who says, "Oh, don't worry about it. Everything's gonna be – nah, they're not gonna sue us for that. Don't worry." Pessimistic lawyers, there's some research by Marty Seligman and others showing that pessimistic lawyers do better, but in most fields, optimists, happy people, do better.

All right, so this leads us to happiness hypothesis number two: Happiness doesn't come from outside. It comes from inside, and that sounds much more profound, doesn't it? Well, Buddha said, "Good men at all times surrender all attachments. The holy spend not idol words on things of desire. When pleasure or pain comes to them, the wise feel above pleasure or pain," detachment. Don't look for happiness outside. Work inside.

The stoic said the same thing: "Do not seek to have events happen as you want them to, but instead want them to happen as they do happen, and your life will go well." Once again, insulate yourself from the ups and downs. Work on yourself. Isn't that profound? I think that's not quite right. I think that undersells the value of engaging passionately with the world and suffering when you lose and rejoicing when you win.

It is true that there's a biological set point, but it's really more of a kind of a range. Rather I should put it this way: There's a biological set point. That's "S" in this equation. But "H," the happiness that you feel every day, is a function not just of your set point. "H," your happiness, is a function of your set point, plus certain conditions of your life, plus certain voluntary activities, certain things that you can do, which will raise your "H," your average happiness level, substantially.

So "S" is the set point. You can change that. Prozac, Zoloft, Lexapro, the SSRIs, make it as though you were born with a higher set point. So you take those. There's no work required, and four to six weeks later, you're happier.

There are a few conditions that matter, not the ones that I talked about before, such as age and sex and race, but your relatedness, the degree to which you spend time with others that care about you, the degree to which you have control over details of in your

life, events in your work, and lastly, the volunteer activities that you do. This is the one I wanna focus on because this is where I think the contribution of positive psychology has been greatest. Raise your hand if you went to the talk by Marty Seligman.

Seligman talked about some of those, the "Three Blessings" exercise. This has been the great discovery, that there's some very simple things you can do that are as effective at raising your happiness as taking Prozac. So I'll tell you four things that you could do. You could start 'em today. They're very easy.

The first is "diagnose yourself." You just need to know, on that normal distribution I showed you of happiness levels, are you in the top third? The middle third? The bottom third? Where you are is gonna determine what sorts of things you should do to make yourself happier. So you can go to the website that Seligman talked about: <http://www.authentic happiness.org>, take a few surveys there, and you can find out, but most of you know. You know where you are on that distribution.

A real useful thing to know is your "signature strengths." Is your strength curiosity and love of learning? Is it gratitude? Is it humor? Know your strengths. Don't try to fix your weaknesses. That's very difficult to do, but if you can rearrange your lives that you get to use your strengths, that's much more rewarding. So that's a very simple first step, and you can start on that tonight.

Secondly, if you are on the bottom third, especially – or let's say the bottom half – there's some simple things you can do to change your thinking habits. So change the "elephant," the habitual thinking habits. There are some simple books. One is *Mind Over Mood*. Another is *Feeling Good*.

Research using – *Feeling Good* – show that if you tell 50 people to read the book, you give 50 people Prozac, at the end of the time, they're equally happy because just reading the book – not even doing the exercises – just reading the book changes the way you think of it. And if you do the exercises, you get even more benefit. So cognitive therapy, meditation, and self-hypnosis, these are all ways of changing your automatic thought processes.

Third, some simple, physical interventions. The most important one is stop dieting. Don't go on a diet, especially those of you who heard Gary Taubes talk. You know, it was a big hoax, the whole idea, "Oh, it's carbs. Carbs –" I mean – I'm sorry – "Oh, fat, fat is

so terrible. You gotta stop eating fat." No, it's carbs, and especially fructose we now hear.

But if you diet, you're not just picking a fight with all of your evolved system to maintain your weight, you're also pushing yourself down on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. You're pushing yourself down, where you think about food all the time, and you talk to your friends about your diet. You become really boring and cranky, and nobody wants to hang out with you. So stop dieting.

If you exercise more or if you change the foods you eat, but don't try to restrain – you know, restrict calories. That generally is more effective, and it has the benefit of actually improving your mood. So exercise is more effective, especially if you can fly like that. That's a lot of calories there.

The fourth, "Improve your relatedness." Now everybody thinks, "Oh, 'relatedness,' well, that means marriage and love and that one special partner," and sure, that's helpful. Marty Seligman talked about working on existing relationships, like using a gratitude visit. Because I think it's important to look beyond marriage and romantic relationships and realize we evolve to hang out in groups, and gangs, and especially in single-sex groups and gangs.

I think there's a tremendous joy to getting together. It can be mixed sexes – on the TV show *Friends* – but there's a special joy in just hanging out with a group of people. And people always used to do that, but nowadays, we spend more time with our married partner and socializing in mixed-sex groups. So think about ways you can hang out with a gang that has common interests, so that's all I'll say about the second truth. That is, there's nothing good or bad, but thinking makes it so.

Now, in our remaining time, I'll tell you about the last one, which is the one I'm most excited about, and I think the one which will be most helpful, and it'll fit in with so many things that you've been hearing here at Aspen, that happiness comes from between. This is a quote from Willa Cather: "I was entirely happy. Perhaps we feel like that when we die and become a part of something entire, whether it is sun and air or goodness and knowledge. At any rate, that is happiness, to be dissolved into something complete and great."

That sounds very inspiring. It's almost a cheap trick you can do – just work into anything you're talking about. You can be giving a sales report, and just throw in the phrase, "Something greater than

ourselves." Just throw that in, and **everybody, they'll** say, "Oh, wow, yeah." There's something about self-loss that's deeply moving to us. This is what got me interested in this topic of self-loss.

We are so good at coming together in groups and losing ourselves. It's led me to formulate an idea, which I can't go into, into great detail today, but the idea is this: That we humans, we're used to hearing that we've evolved from chimpanzee-like ancestor, and we are brutes with all this selfish programming. And when we appear to be nice, it's really just strategic self-interest.

And while that's all true, I think we also are products of some other evolutionary processes, particularly group-level selection – or I should say multilevel selection – including group selection, groups competing with groups, which makes us really cooperative within our groups. We cooperate in order to compete.

So what I believe is true about human nature is this: That we are conditional hive creatures. We're not just chimps. We're also part bee. We are conditional hive creatures. We have the ability, under special circumstances, to forget our self-interest and lose ourselves in something larger than ourselves. Did I just push that little button? You should all have felt something open inside you.

We're good at, "Every man for himself." This is a photo of a tomato fight in Spain – every man for himself. We're good at that, but we're also really good at, "One for all, and all for one," and we love that. We love being in circumstances where we can give our all for team effort.

I first got interested in this kind of phenomena because I study morality, and I was coming across all these reports of people who had life-changing experiences that made them commit themselves to working for some cause or to helping people. So I read things like William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* – "the" classic work in religious studies – and William James has a chapter on religious conversion experiences, all these passages from people who had encounters with God, and it changed their lives.

And he summarizes it by saying people experience a kind of a joy, a higher happiness, different from just normal happiness when you succeed at something. And most importantly, it lasts for months. Normal emotions last for minutes, sometimes hours – never days. But these conversion experiences made people joyous for months. There's something important going on there.

When this happens, the world looks new and beautiful. And most importantly, they come back from it with a moral commitment to serve. Nobody comes back from an encounter with God saying, "I want to make as much money as I can, as quickly as I can." People become much more selfless after these experiences.

Well, that's very interesting, but religious experiences, maybe it's a brain tumor. Who knows? But there's so many ways to get to the same mental state – awe in nature. I mean we have events in beautiful places like Aspen because it affects us. It opens us. It makes us want to lower our carbon footprint and things like that.

Here's a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson: "Standing on the bare ground, my head bathed by the blithe air, uplifted into infinite space, all mean egotism vanishes. I am nothing. I see all." And we all recognize this: "Oh, isn't that terrible? You lose yourself." No, just the opposite. And again, for those of you who were at David Brooks' talk, this was the uplifting theme at the end. Self-loss is something we're all seeking even if we don't know it. When we achieve it, it's transformative.

Meditation is another path to the same end state. The "state of **somati**" is defined as a state where the subject-object distinction and one's sense of an individual self disappear. And many devotees of psychedelic drugs found the same thing. Timothy Leary and Walter Pahnke did an experiment. They gave psilocybin or a placebo to people, and again, they were able to produce these self-loss, transcend experiences within 30 minutes – 40 minutes.

So the point is that we have these incredible, transformative, gorgeous moments in our lives, and they tend to be moments of self-loss and merging with something beyond the self. So if we take the big picture and we ask, "What is the meaning of life?" – this is the question that haunted me when I was a senior in high school, and I became an atheist. And I started thinking, "Well, if there's not God, then there could be no purpose to life."

And I watched all these Woody Allen films, and I thought, "Oh, the universe is shrinking," whatever. And what I realized in working through this sort of existential, quasi depression was that if you ask, "What is the purpose for which I was put here? What is the purpose of life?" there's no real answer to that. If you have a religious answer, that's your answer, but it's not an empirical question. It's more of a theological question, let's say.

And if you're an atheist, there's no purpose. Evolution has no purpose, but there's a different question. This is the one that we're really asking, I think, and this is the one that we really can answer: How can I live a full, rich, satisfying life? How can I find purpose and meaning in life? How can I avoid the state of Koheleth in Ecclesiastes, in which all was vanity and a chasing after wind?"

And this is the concluding idea – happiness hypothesis number three. Remember one was "happiness comes from outside," from getting what you want; two was, no, "happiness comes from within." Happiness hypothesis number three, which I believe is the correct, is that "happiness comes from between," and I can get more specific.

What I mean, it becomes – from getting the right relationships "between" your rider and your elephant. That's mental health. Mental health isn't dominating the elephant and beating into submission. It's understanding that the parts of your mind, each have their own strengths and getting them to work together well. That's mental health.

Then get in the right relationship between yourself and others. Relationships are what are most important for happiness, but also getting relationships right between yourself and your work, getting work that allows you to use your signature strengths so that you feel energized every day. You feel as though you've been at your best.

And lastly, getting the right relationship between yourself and something larger than yourself. So to illustrate those, the rider and the elephant, relationships with others, relationships with your work, and lastly relationships with something larger than yourself, more of a group project or perhaps a religious project. Then just wait. Purpose and meaning will grow. Thank you.

Daniel Gilbert: Jon, thank you. You appear to be larger than myself, so I'll work on my relationship with you.

Jonathan Haidt: I'll give you a hug, Dan.

Daniel Gilbert: No, I wasn't going that far. No, it was a great talk. Thank you very much, and I know everyone here wants to ask you questions. Can I ask you the first? Thank you. I will. So you're right. There's these two ways of thinking about the world. Happiness

comes from within, external circumstances don't matter, and it's opposite.

And both of those seem like great truths, and you brought them together and reconciled them, so why do I feel like all you did was average them? Why do I feel like, "Yeah, it's a little of both"? In some sense, that's almost not as satisfying as either. I guess what I wanna know is, "Okay, both matter, but which really matters?"

Is it the case that, by and large, our happiness is in our hands except one circumstances are extreme, or is it, by and large, we're pretty much affected by the world, and we can kinda spin it a little bit – make ourselves go from miserable to not-so miserable, but never to fantastic? Where do you see the power of – the balance between these two things?

Jonathan Haidt:

Well, I think of it in terms of, "Where do you get the most bang for the buck?" And if you've ever been in psychotherapy and you've worked on a problem, and then you're asked later, "Did it get better?" You say, "You know, yeah, yeah, I think made progress," and weeks and weeks or months and months, and you can make a little bit of progress.

So it is in your hands to some extent, and there are things you can do that will improve it. I think cognitive therapy, it turns out, for most problems, most purposes, cognitive therapy is probably the most focused, direct way to change yourself by changing the elephant. So yeah, that would count as "happiness comes from within."

But suddenly, getting a new group of friends that you really click with, that's a lot more bang for a lot less buck. So an audience like this, I think people already know about all the things they should do, and we had the discussion, in the first session that you organized, there are all these easy things to do. I just showed you a bunch of things you can do, and was it you who said, "And none of you –" or well, " – three of you are gonna actually go do it."

So if you think about it as "training the elephant," that's kinda hard to do, but it can be done. If you think about it as changing the path, changing the environment so that you'll just end up doing different stuff, I think there's more bang for the buck there.

Daniel Gilbert:

Fair Enough. I could sit and talk to Jon all day, and I probably will on another day. Let me open it up to you. We have microphones on both sides. If you'll just queue, I will be glad to – I see a hand

raised. Oh, don't raise your hands. Just come to the mikes that are in the two aisles, and we'll just call on you and alternate between mikes. Sir?

Male: Hi, great talk. Thank you so much. The law of attraction in *The Secret* was like a huge movement, so I have to ask you about that. Some people prescribe to it almost like a religion, and some people think it's a science. Is there actually science to the law of attraction, or is it kind of just –

Jonathan Haidt: No.

Male: – is there any –

Jonathan Haidt: No, no.

Male: – is there any value in the power of positive thinking?

Jonathan Haidt: No, no, no, no, no – oh, that's different. That's different. It's different. Oh, is there value in the power of positive thinking? Yes. Is it the case that thinking makes things happen by some sort of cosmic weird thing? No, absolutely not, and it's an awful, awful doctrine that if you got cancer, well, you must've willed it.

But you say it's like a religion. Well, yeah, we have these minds evolved to perceive sacredness, the clouds opening up, sacred truths revealed, and then we get together with others and circle around those, and there, we got ourselves a nice religion. So you get fads like this. You get quacks like that. You get medical quacks. You get nutrition quacks, and you get psychology quacks, like *The Secret*.

Daniel Gilbert: But what do you really think? Sir?

Male: Well, Dan, I've just gotta say that was an amazing explanation at the beginning. And I was thinking about it a little differently, and I wanna pose this question to you: Is it possible that maybe – I mean the Greeks had many different words for happiness, so that on the one hand, maybe what you're talking about is peace and serenity, perhaps, that comes with acceptance. And on the other hand, maybe what Jonathan is talking about are more proactive forms of stimulation, which lead to a different kind of happiness. So I wanted to hear you talk on that a little bit.

Jonathan Haidt: Yeah, that's a great point, and this is one of the difficulties in studying happiness – has been the words we use, the concepts we

use. Americans tend to have, perhaps, the most shallow conception anywhere because we tend to think of happiness as a lot of moments of that feeling where you're really joyous and, "How can I have more moments where I'm feeling happy?"

And the Greeks, as you point out, the main word that they use was "eudaimonia," which is more well being, and it wasn't a feeling. It was more of a life that you could be proud of, and they said you couldn't know if a person had eudaimonia until he was dead, until you could look at his whole life. That's a much deeper conception of happiness.

So the first thing I'll say is that most of us, upon reflection, would choose to change our lives to get more of the eudaimonia, but I'll also point out, I think we don't appreciate enough the degree to which there are different ways of being or different kinds of happiness at different stages of life. And many people know the story of the life of the Buddha. He goes out. He has these women and power, and he rejects it all. He goes off in the woods, and finally, he attains enlightenment, and it's detachment, separation, calmness. It's a joy, but it's a calmness.

I think that actually contains in it a really nice metaphor for development and aging, and I think it would be a terrible mistake for a teenager to pursue meditation, detachment, and to skip all the falling in love and getting your heart broken, the fantastic successes and humiliations, the things that deepen your experience of life. So I think that the sort of ultimate – to reach what we would consider a life worth living, you gotta go through all of the other stuff to get there.

So I think they're all important, but I think it's most important for us to think about eudaimonia because that's the one that doesn't come as naturally to us.

Male: Thank you.

Daniel Gilbert: Great. Madam?

Female: Hi, how do you deal with resentment, disappointment, conflict? How do you – not lessen those because that's part of growth – but when that becomes overwhelming, do you think positively? Do you do mind trickery? You know, how do you deal with that?

Jonathan Haidt: So there's a lot of research in positive psychology on "forgiveness," and I'll just make a couple of points. One is that

people are high on that overall happiness distribution. Those people tend to find it easier to forgive. They're just happier, more optimistic. People who are more anxious tend to find more threats and problems. Those people tend to have more issues of conflict and find it harder to forgive, so there are individual differences.

Taking Prozac, things that raise your set point, that's one of the things, when Larry Kramer wrote the book *Listen to Prozac*, one of the surprises was that Prozac didn't just make people happier. It changed their relationships. So all the things that make you happy, it can also make it easier for you to deal with those things.

But aside from changing your set point or those things, I think the most the powerful technique is cognitive therapy, and if you have habitual thoughts, it – and we all do this. You know, if somebody crosses, it's like you're always building a case against them, and that's what I think a lot of our moral reasoning is for – is to build a case. And you tell yourself, as Homer Simpson famously said, "Shut up, brain, or I'll stab you with a Q-tip," but it doesn't shut up.

So cognitive therapy, get that book, *Feeling Good* by David Burns. He's got a chapter on exactly that, and it works like magic. So there are techniques you can do to "retrain the elephant" so that it's not so focused, and you'll feel released, freed, from a lot of that bitterness.

Female: Thank you.

Daniel Gilbert: Sir?

Male: So kinda following up on that book in cognitive therapy, one of the other things you had up there as a technique was self-hypnosis as something. How do you self-hypnosis, and what can I expect to hypnotize and accomplish?

Jonathan Haidt: Yeah, so first, look deeply into my eyes. Clear your mind. Make out a check to – no. So for a while, it was thought that hypnosis was a fraud, and when you see a stage hypnotist, a lot of what's happening is exhibitionists going up and sort of – you know. So some of it is fake, but it's had a comeback.

Research shows that hypnosis really – you know, if you hypnotize people to be colorblind and you put 'em an FMRI scanner, and you show 'em colored images, the color-processing centers are quiet. So it is a real state. The way I understand it is you can make a

New Year's resolution, which is your rider just making a declaration.

Or you can put yourself in a state of deep relaxation, then you can press "play" on a tape recorder – or **you're gonna** do that, first – and you can hear a hypnotist or yourself giving you suggestions that you are loving and forgiving and sunshine and flowers – whatever. You can have whatever post-hypnotic suggestion you want put into you, and it's like the rider is now whispering into the ear of the elephant. Hypnosis is just a state of deep relaxation in which we are more open to suggestion, and if it's us who is giving the suggestion, it's just much more effective than making a New Year's resolution.

Male: Go to a hypnotist or do I have to do it that way?

Jonathan Haidt: It's very easy to do on your own. So my website for my book, <http://www.happinesshypothesis.com>, I've got a whole page on what you can do to make yourself happier. So I didn't intend the book to be a self-help book, but there's a lot of very specific advice that flows from understanding these ten great truths.

And after I wrote the book, I was contacted by a hypnotist who said, "You forgot about hypnosis. That changes the elephant." I said, "Oh, my god, you're right." So if you go to my web page there, you'll see a link to self-hypnosis resources. You can definitely try it yourself.

Only five percent of people are deeply hypnotizable, meaning you can hypnotize them to pretend they're a chicken if they hear lightning. Most of us can't do that. But the great majority of us can take suggestion from ourselves or someone else, and there's a measurable change in behavior. It's very effective.

Daniel Gilbert: I think we have time for one more. Sir?

Male: Great.

Male: Gentlemen, again, thanks for your contribution over these last couple of days. It's been amazing. The whole nature of language, could you talk a little bit about just the uses of a language in terms of kind of creating a world that we can step into?

Now as I look at my calendar and it's never someday. You know, it's Thursday, or it's Monday, but it's never someday. So it's like really that future I never get to, and yet that one that I create in

language somehow gives me who I'm being, right now. Can you talk a little bit about the uses of language?

Jonathan Haidt: Sure. First, I suggest you watch the movie *Groundhog Day* 'cause there is a cure for your problem.

[Laughter]

Language – so I go back and forth on language. Because I study morality and moral intuition, I tend to think that our moral reasoning is post hoc. Our moral reasoning isn't where the action is. I tend to think language isn't nearly as important as people think. Academics in particular are generally very verbal, cerebral people. They put a lot of emphasis on language, so I tend to downplay it.

But sometimes I think I grossly underestimate it, and the context is this: We didn't evolve language to figure things out for ourselves. We evolved language to communicate and to influence other people. Language is supremely important in forging relationships, in co-constructing solutions, communities, moral matrices. So language is – we wouldn't be who we are without language. Language allowed us to do all the things that we're doing. Language obviously is one of the most important things in our evolutionary history.

But you can so easily get lost in language, and that's just the rider spinning its wheel, playing games. I think it's often helpful if you are futurizing too much. Change the channel. Do things to distract yourself. Just engage with the world, and it'll shut your brain up so that you're not so lost in language. Those are some scattered thoughts.

Male: Great, thanks.

Daniel Gilbert: I'm sorry that we're out of time. We're not quite done with the *Happiness* track. There is still one train on it, and that's tomorrow morning, where we'll be talking about happiness across the world and in different countries. That'll be exciting. I hope to see you there. In the meantime, please join me in thanking Jon Haidt for a fantastic talk.

Jonathan Haidt: Thank you.

[End of Audio]